

Q: What is competency-based education?

A: Competency-based learning is personalized with respect to pacing, support, and determination of mastery. More specifically, according to iNACOL, it has five components:

- Students advance upon demonstrated mastery: Students don't move onto another topic until they have demonstrated mastery on a set of competencies that are aligned to state standards and other knowledge and skills deemed important by the district and/or school. Some students will move through the content more quickly, while others will receive the additional support and time they need. The result is differentiated, equitable learning that meets the individual needs of each student.
- Competencies include explicit, measurable, transferable learning objectives: Clear, transparent learning objectives provide students with greater agency and ownership over their education.
- Students receive timely, differentiated support based on their individual learning needs: Students receive the supports and flexibility they need and when they need them so they can learn, thrive, and master the standards-aligned competencies.
- Assessment is meaningful and a positive learning experience for students: In a competency-based environment, assessments give students real-time information on their progress and provide them with the opportunity to show evidence of higher order skills when they are ready, instead of at predetermined times during the school year.
- Learning outcomes emphasize competencies that include application of knowledge, and the development of important skills and dispositions: Competency-based learning models meet each student where so they can build the knowledge and skills they will need to succeed in college, career, civic participation, and life (in addition to academics).



Q: Why is competency-based education legislation needed—and what does it do?

A: From speaking with more than 100 teachers and administrators throughout Minnesota, we heard that it was important for statute to be amended to make it explicit that public schools can certify standards and award credit to students who demonstrate mastery of competencies that are aligned to state standards, regardless of their time in classroom instruction. Our legislation does not mandate districts or public schools to implement competency-based education, but rather legitimizes it and creates the opportunity for those who are ready.

Q: What are the advantages of competency-based education over traditional approaches?

A: Most traditional, time-based education systems move students through lessons and grade levels even if they only understand some of the material. Year after year, this creates more gaps in knowledge, which can lead to real life challenges. Relatedly, grades on report cards are a summative score for a class and do not indicate to students and families what skills and standards the student did or did not master.

(Continued from page 1) On the other hand, competency-based education flips the traditional school by putting each student at the center and emphasizing outcomes—i.e. student mastery of competencies that are aligned to state standards. In a competency-based environment, students, families, and educators have a shared understanding of the knowledge and skills each student is expected to learn. Importantly, in this model, students understand and are able to articulate the competencies they have mastered, as well as their plan and goals for how they are going to master the remaining competencies.

Q: How do you measure if competency-based education is working?

A: In a competency-based setting, teachers frequently use embedded, standards-aligned assessments so the results can be quickly translated into support for students. Importantly, these assessments are integrated into the classroom experience, rather than being a separate event or being used for punitive reasons. Embedded assessments also become a regular checkpoint for both teachers and students to get a pulse on what the students know. After an assessment, students examine and interpret their own growth, set learning goals, as well as determine what they need to do to reach their goal and what they need from their teacher.

Q: What is the role of the teacher in competency-based education?

A: Teachers are incredibly important in competency-based environments. Rather than spending a lot of time lecturing, teachers move between groups of students, facilitate discussions, collaborate with students to set goals, and (when needed) engage students in more direct instruction. Teachers also support students in taking risks and trying new things without fear of failure.

Q: Which other states have competency-based education legislation?

A: In May 2018, iNACOL published a [State Policy Map](#) of where Competency-Based Education policies are across the country. According to the Map, there are currently 17 states that “have comprehensive policy alignment and/or have established an active state role to build educator capacity in local school systems for competency education.” A few of those states are Virginia, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Illinois, Utah, Arizona, and Tennessee. Let’s make Minnesota one of them.

Q: How does competency-based education fit into the larger concept of student-centered learning?

A: Education Evolving contends that learning must be designed with students at the center. That is, learning must be personalized to students’ unique needs, interests, identities, and aspirations—and designed with their ideas and voices at the table. Throughout 2017, we identified and formalized our seven principles of student-centered learning by doing extensive research and speaking with teachers, administrators, students, different organizations, and other stakeholders. “Competency-Based Education” was identified as one of those principles.

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