Competency Education:
Capitalizing the Promise of Student Centered Learning

Matt Williams, Vice President of Policy and Advocacy, KnowledgeWorks
Our Education System
What is Competency Education?
“A system of education, often referred to as proficiency or mastery based, in which students advance upon mastery. Competencies include explicit, measureable, transferable learning objectives that empower students. Assessment is meaningful and serves as a positive learning experience for students. Students receive timely, differentiated support tailored to their individual learning needs. Learning outcomes include the application and creation of knowledge, along with the development of important skills and dispositions.”

- CompetencyWorks
## Elements of Traditional Education vs. Key Elements of Competency Based Learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traditional Education</th>
<th>Competency Based Learning</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students advance based on time and age</td>
<td>Students advance on mastery</td>
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<td>Student expectations communicated through quarterly grades</td>
<td>Clear, measurable learning objectives</td>
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<td>Assessment comes in the form of end-of-course exams</td>
<td>Assessment is ongoing and meaningful for students</td>
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<td>All students receive the same instruction</td>
<td>Students receive differentiated support</td>
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<td>Focus is on student’s rote learning and performance</td>
<td>Focus is on a student’s ability to transfer content and skills</td>
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<td>on summative assessments</td>
<td>to a setting</td>
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<td>Stagnant, unresponsive system</td>
<td>Adaptive to changing needs of students, teachers, and community</td>
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“Competency implies much more than content and skills. By its very definition, competency requires that a student be able to transfer content and skills in a particular setting.”

- Rose Colby
Benefits of Competency Education

- System is redesigned around the student
- Emphasis is on knowledge & skills – not time spent in class
- Intensive and targeted supports ensure all students succeed
- Educators become powerful learning agents through collaboration and personalization
Emerging Best Practices
A Movement in Progress

- 39 states currently have seat time waivers and/or competency based laws.
- The Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium has developed a task force to study competency based education.
- A wide range of formative and summative assessments are being developed and piloted to support competency based learning.
- The Bill & Melinda Gates, Stupski, KnowledgeWorks, and Nellie Mae Education Foundations have invested in competency education.
A Snapshot of Competency Education State Policy Across the United States

**Advanced States**
Those states with clear policies that are moving towards proficiency-based; more than just an option.

**Developing States**
Those states with pilots of competency education, credit flexibility policies, or advanced next gen policies for equivalents to seat-time.

**Emerging States**
Those states with waivers, task forces.

**ILN States**
Since its inception, the Innovation Lab Network (ILN) engaged schools, districts, and state education agencies working to identify through local efforts new designs for public education that empower each student to thrive as a productive learner, worker, and citizen. The state’s responsibility is to establish conditions in which innovation can flourish and to develop capacity to sustain and scale what works through policy. The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) facilitates this network of states to support programmatic, policy, and structure design work within each participating states and across the network.

**No Policies in Competency Education**
States with seat-time and no competency education policies.
Leading States

NEW HAMPSHIRE
www.50states.com

OREGON
www.50states.com

KENTUCKY
www.50states.com

MAINE
www.50states.com

IOWA
www.50states.com
Key Policy Levers and Questions
Key Policy Levers

- Accountability
- Assessment
- Use of Time
- Capacity and Instruction
- Equity
- Use of Data/Data Systems
• How do we change funding systems to support this model so we don’t rely on antiquated calculations based on average daily attendance?
• How do we balance local control vs. uniformity in the writing of competencies?
• How do we develop authentic assessments aligned to the common core that measure knowledge and skills?
• As communities become classrooms, how do we recognize credit bearing opportunities outside of the traditional classroom?
• Given the critical role of data in designing personalized learning environments, how can states support the development and alignment of data systems with learning management systems?
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Emerging Federal Policies
Short Term: How can the federal government enable innovation?

Long Term: What kind of federal accountability and assessment framework would support competency education at scale?
• Federal Law Requires States to Implement a Time-Based Accountability System

Federal law requires states to establish Annual Measurable Objectives (AMOs) for each school and district based in large part on student achievement on the annual summative assessments. States are also required to use this information to make annual determinations regarding the classification of schools and districts for interventions and supports. This structure does not lend itself toward demonstration of competency.

• The Metrics of the Federal Accountability System Do Not Align With a Competency-Based System

The Federal accountability system takes into account annual student achievement in math and English language arts for all students and subgroups and annual graduation rates. The ESEA waiver flexibility extended this to include student growth in the above subjects as well as student achievement in other subjects. None of these metrics take into account mastery of competencies or other measures that states find important to the implementation of a competency-based system.

• The Federal Accountability System is Designed to Classify Schools and Districts for Improvement

Federal law requires states to use annual accountability data to rank schools and districts for improvement. This conflicts with the purpose of a competency-based system which aims for continuous improvement of all students, schools, and districts. An accountability system in a competency environment would use real-time instead of annual data to drive improvement.

• Federal Law Does not Account for Student Growth, only Achievement

While the ESEA waiver flexibility process does permit states to incorporate student growth into their accountability calculations, this provision is not codified by federal law. States moving to a competency-based system must have a way to track student progression on college and career ready standards and aligned competencies for accountability purposes.
• **Federal Law Requires States to Implement a Time-Based Assessment System**

Federal law requires states to verify academic performance through annual assessments in grades 3 through 8 and once in grades 10 through 12 for math, reading/English language arts, and science. These assessments shape, in a significant way, the education system’s instructional focus and time.

• **Federally Required Assessments Were Not Designed to Measure Mastery of Competencies**

Federal law requires states to administer high quality assessments aligned to academic achievement standards but does not require or incentivize alignment of those assessments to competencies. As a result, states interested in a competency-based system must either develop an expensive new summative assessment that measures mastery of standards and competencies or supplement their current assessment system with performance-based or local assessments. Federal law requiring standardization of any system of assessments makes the latter equally costly and time consuming.

• **Federal Resources Are Inadequate to Develop a Robust Competency Assessment System**

Federal resources are not intended to develop assessment systems that would do the following:

- Enable states to administer the summative assessment multiple times in a given year to ensure students are assessed when ready and have multiple opportunities to demonstrate mastery.
- Enable states to use a series of through course assessments for summative purposes.
- Help districts develop a performance tracking system to better understand the likelihood of student mastery of summative assessments throughout the year instead of on an annual basis.
Innovation Funds
Race to the Top, i3, RTT-District
Strong demand for competency education: 75% of the winning RTT-D applicants included competency-based elements

White House Proposal for High School Redesign
“Redesigned high schools will move away from the traditional notion of seat time and focus instead on the knowledge and skills needed to successfully transition from high school to college and careers.”
- Fact Sheet: Redesigning America’s High Schools; USED 6/7/13

Senate ESEA Reauthorization
Section 4909: Competency Based Assessment and Accountability Demonstration
- Passed Senate Committee on 6/12/13