

WHAT IS COMPETENCY-BASED EDUCATION?

Schools across the USA and the world are experimenting with **competency-based education (CBE)**. There is no single, agreed-upon definition, but we see some common elements among competency-based initiatives:



The competencies are fixed and ideally well-defined, but the amount of time allotted to whether or not students can demonstrate competency is somewhat variable. The time invested and the learning pathways will likely vary from student to student.



The competencies are made explicit and efforts are made to help students track their progress. The competencies are used as a map of the content and skills that need to be learned.



Assessment of competencies is an ongoing process, rather than a single summative event. Students are typically given more than one opportunity to demonstrate mastery and extra support as needed.



Students have some choice and agency in how they learn and how they demonstrate their learning.

There are different terms associated with CBE. People referring to proficiency-based learning or mastery-based learning are often talking about similar things.

The term competency can mean different things depending on the context. Some competencies may look similar to learning objectives for an individual subject. Others may be much larger in scope and cross-disciplinary, requiring students to address them across multiple content areas, or over a longer duration. They may be similar to what some schools call “Transferable Skills” or “21st Century Skills.”

Keep in Mind: Implementing CBE can be an opportunity for schools to dramatically rethink the skills graduates need to succeed, the use of time (in and out of the classroom), and assessment strategies. Thoughtful implementations of CBE focus on issues of equity, which means building systems that support struggling students when they are not mastering fundamental skills.

Learn More:

- Vander Ark, Tom. 2018. [“Show What You Know: The Shift to Competency.”](#) Forbes, May 21.
- Wan, Tony. 2017. [“Why There’s Little Consistency in Defining Competency-Based Education.”](#) EdSurge, May 22.

