

How can CBE support learners moving at different speeds?

A major question for many educators is: how can we support learners who need different amounts of time for mastery? Competency-based education (CBE) schools will commonly say that for them, learning is the constant and time the variable. Some ways schools approach the issue of time and support in CBE include:

- **Differentiated instruction.** Teachers find ways to give different kinds of support to different students, all of whom are pursuing the same learning objective. For example, one teacher may split a heterogeneous science class into ability-based groups, which allowed her to vary the level of support each group received in performing the communal task. Another teacher may use a rubric as a teaching tool to help students understand what proficiency looks like and provide the necessary feedback for them to meet or exceed proficiency.
- **Formative assessment.** Teachers use low- or no-stakes formative assessments to learn about student progress. This allows them to offer, or require, more support for students who needed it.
- **Retakes.** One way schools make sure that learning is the constant is through retakes. Students are given more than one opportunity to demonstrate mastery, whether through revising or retaking summative assessments. Retake policies can vary from teacher to teacher, or be the same throughout a school. Though CBE schools approach retakes differently, they share a belief that mastery is not a one-shot deal.
- **Flex Block.** A final, and crucial piece of the puzzle for many schools is the use of a daily flex block. This block became more than an open-ended study hall, but rather a chance for teachers to schedule students for extra instruction, retakes, or advanced work. Instead of having these activities take place at the edges of the school day, they now take place in the center of the day.

Keep in mind: Although they are sometimes confused, CBE does not always mean self-pacing. As CBE researcher Chris Sturgis says, “self-pacing is a misnomer. Time is a resource. Time means more support and instruction for students.”

Learn more:

- Video Resources: Noble High School [CBE classroom video](#) and [Spotlight on flex-block](#).
- [Noble Grading System Document](#): this document describes how Noble High School handles retakes and grading in ways that account for variability in learner needs.
- Merrill, Stephen. 2019. [“Allowing Test Retakes—Without Getting Game.”](#) Edutopia, April 25.

