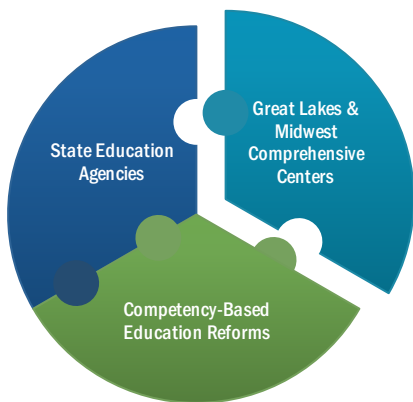




Partners in Crafting Competency-Based Pathways to College and Career Readiness

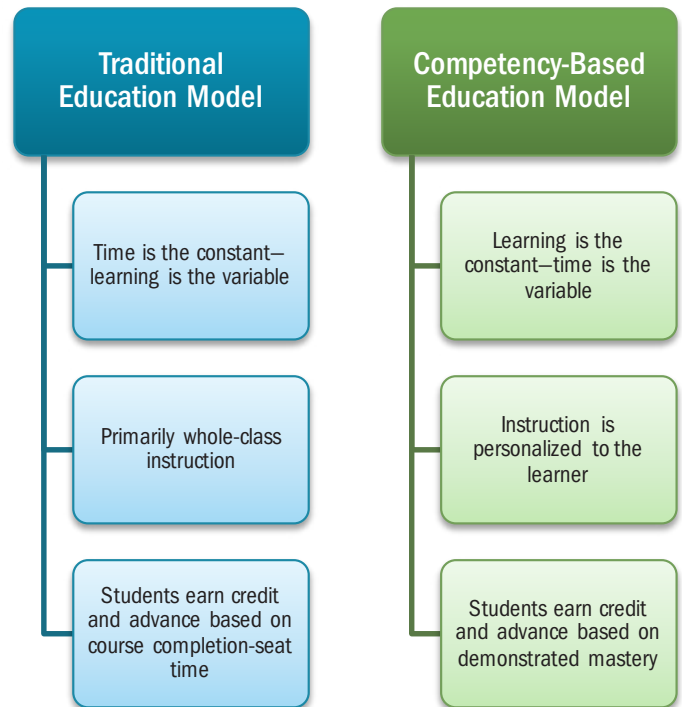
WHAT IS COMPETENCY-BASED EDUCATION?



A growing number of states and districts are turning to competency-based education (CBE) as a strategy for enabling students to become college and career ready. CBE is an approach that removes time as the measure of learning, replacing it with credit awarded based on students' demonstrated mastery of competencies—regardless of the time learning takes (Le, Wolfe, & Steinberg, 2014). CBE is often referred to as proficiency-based, or mastery learning, and can be associated with standards-based education, which defines the skills and knowledge students are expected to achieve.

Traditionally, schools have used the Carnegie unit, a time-based system that uses “seat time” as a measure of student learning (Patrick & Sturgis, 2011). In the traditional schooling model, students learn and progress together by class and by grade. In this model, students who master course content more quickly must wait for their peers—while those who are struggling

are left to fail, repeat, or simply progress without ever fully mastering the course content. In contrast, in a competency-based model, the level of expectation for student learning is high for all students—with each student responsible for meeting established learning goals. A growing number of states and districts are using their CBE reforms as an opportunity to ensure that students not only gain academic content knowledge but also develop the capacity to promote deeper learning competencies, applying their learning to new problems, contexts, and disciplines, and adopting the required skills and dispositions to become adaptive, lifelong learners.

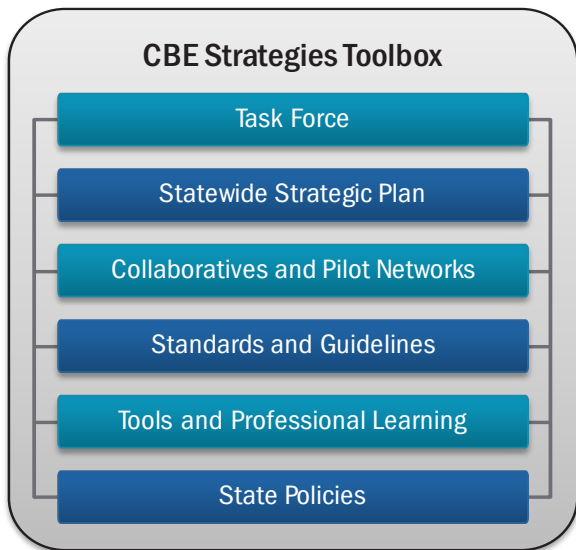


The **Great Lakes and Midwest Regional Deeper Learning Initiative** is a collaboration between the Great Lakes and Midwest Comprehensive Centers to help states identify, explore, and advance state-level policy, guidance, and supports that drive deeper learning practices. The Deeper Learning Initiative offers resources and support for CBE—one strategy state and local education agencies can use to promote deeper learning by students. For more information, visit <http://www.deeperlearning-cc.org/>.



PARTNERS IN BUILDING A STATE TOOLBOX OF CBE STRATEGIES

The Great Lakes Comprehensive Center (GLCC) and Midwest Comprehensive Center (MWCC) are partnering with states to explore, pilot, and shape CBE systems. The types of strategies, paths, and timelines states use depend upon each state’s goals, contexts, resources, and phases of CBE implementation.



GLCC and MWCC are key partners in supporting state efforts to advance and strengthen CBE reforms through helping to build a state toolbox of CBE Strategies. To maximize state access to research, content expertise, and resources, regional comprehensive centers act in concert with other federal technical assistance providers such as the national content centers and regional educational laboratories, as well as external partners such as the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) Innovation Lab Network and Jobs for the Future. The two state spotlights included in this brief (see pages 5 and 6) illustrate how GLCC and MWCC are working with state education agencies and other partners to advance state-level CBE reforms. These two states, Iowa and Ohio, are members of the CCSSO Innovation Lab Network.

STATE AREAS OF ACTION IN ADVANCING CBE REFORMS

In the Great Lakes and Midwest regions, several states are using their toolbox of strategies to move toward a more competency-based system. For example, six of the seven states have already adopted flexible credit policies that enable districts to recognize student learning using proficiency-based credit in lieu of, or in addition to, time-based credit (Table 1). Although flexible credit policies represent a critical component to any competency-based system, and are often the first step, constructing an effective competency-based system typically includes shifts in policy and practice in multiple areas. These changes are often implemented in phases during a multiyear period. The following graphic outlines key focal areas for state action related to building CBE systems.





Learning Goals

As part of building their CBE systems, several states are engaged in efforts to define learner competencies—that is, what students should know and be able to do to receive credit and graduate. Some states are expanding their definitions of what it means to be “college and career ready” by establishing learning goals and standards that encompass a broader set of skills than those typically included in traditional academic domains—such as critical thinking, social-emotional learning (SEL), and the ability to successfully transfer and apply learning to real-life problems and contexts.

STATE EXAMPLE

IOWA: The Iowa CBE Collaborative is developing a set of model competencies in academic content areas, as well as five universal constructs: critical thinking, complex communication, creativity, collaboration, and flexibility and adaptability. <https://www.educateiowa.gov/pk-12/standards-and-curriculum/competency-based-pathways/iowa-cbe-collaborative>

Learning Strategies and Supports

In a competency-based system, the focus and pace of learning is individualized to each learner, with students typically working on differing learning goals and activities at the same time. To enable this level of individualization, educators must enhance the flexibility and personalization of learning for all students—that is, the how, where, and when students learn. Some states are exploring uses of technology to offer flexibility and personalization (e.g., blended and distance learning) while others are focusing on pedagogical approaches and the use of other supports such as learning plans.

STATE EXAMPLES

WISCONSIN: To promote student engagement and partner with students to reach college and career competencies, the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction is implementing a new policy requiring that all students have an Academic and Career Plan. <http://dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/imce/acp/pdf/acpfaqv2.pdf>

MICHIGAN: The Michigan Department of Education supports personalized learning through offering flexible learning, including expanded digital and blended learning options. http://www.michigan.gov/documents/mde/Flexible_Learning_Document_3_458395_7.pdf

ILLINOIS: The Illinois State Board of Education recently established the Virtual School Task Force to review virtual education and course choice, including student enrollment in online coursework and access to technology for enhancing course completion. The task force will be making recommendations on changes, improvements, and best practices for virtual education and course choice in Illinois. <http://www.ilga.gov/legislation/publicacts/99/PDF/099-0442.pdf>



Measurement of Learning

This work typically focuses on determining how (and when) student competencies will be measured. With a growing interest in building students' capacity to apply their learning across subjects, problems, and contexts, some states are moving toward performance-based and other alternative assessment systems. At the district level, some educators are expanding the use of alternative assessments such as expeditions and portfolios, formative assessment that allows students to demonstrate their learning in real time, or policies that allow students to re-take assessments until they achieve mastery.

STATE EXAMPLE

OHIO: The Ohio Department of Education's Performance Assessment Pilot Project is exploring the role of performance-based assessments and is piloting the use of validated learning tasks for Grades 3–12 as statewide test instruments in core subject areas. <http://education.ohio.gov/Topics/Testing/Ohio-s-State-Tests/Ohio-Performance-Assessment-Pilot-Project-OPAPP>

Learning Recognition, Progression, and Pathways

This work typically focuses on determining how student learning will be recognized, how progress will be tracked and monitored, and how this learning will translate to grade promotion and graduation. Several states have already adopted seat-time waivers and other flexible credit policies that enable districts to recognize student learning using proficiency-based credit in lieu of, or in addition to, time-based credit (see Table 1). Some states also are implementing dual enrollment options that allow students to receive high school and college credit.

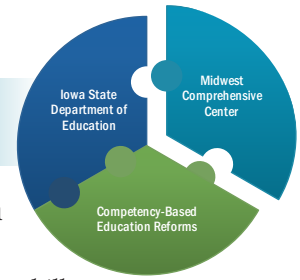
Table 1. State Examples of Flexible Credit Policies and Seat-Time Waivers

State	Policy Description
Iowa	Districts may award competency-based or time-based credit.
Indiana	A blanket seat-time waiver offered to all districts allows the flexibility to award proficiency-based credit instead of time-based credit.
Michigan	Districts can apply for waivers to award credit for nontraditional learning like online courses and internships.
Minnesota	A student can earn course credit through mastering the subject matter as determined by the local district.
Ohio	Waivers are available to exempt districts from state seat-time requirements.
Wisconsin	Districts may use proficiency-based or time-based credits.

Source: Carnegie Foundation, 2014.

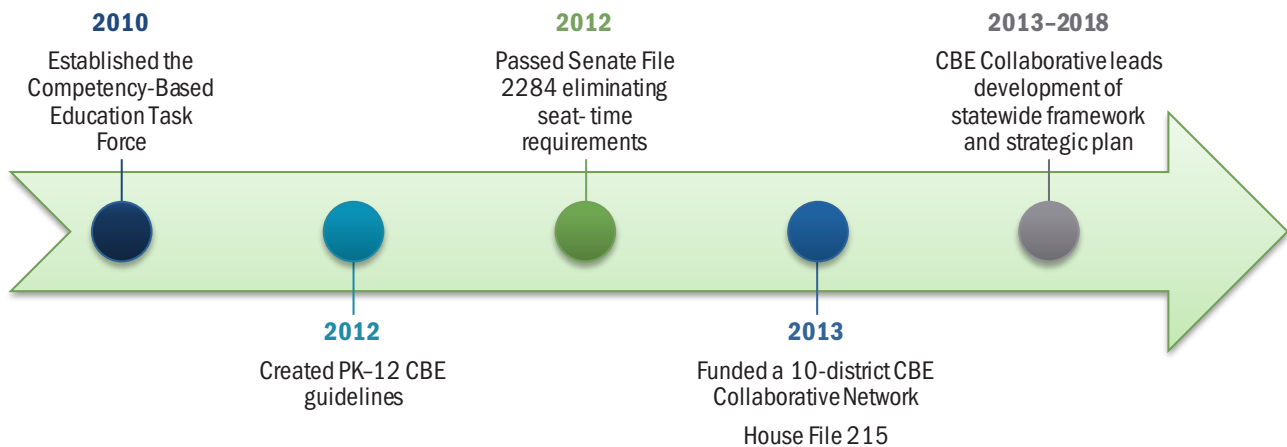


SPOTLIGHT IOWA: Comprehensive CBE Initiative



The Iowa CBE Task Force was established in 2010 to study competency-based instruction standards, curriculum, assessment, and professional development (Iowa S. F. 2284, 2012). Acting on recommendations from the task force, the Iowa legislature passed a 2012 bill eliminating seat-time requirements for high school credit and funded a network of 10 districts (known as the Iowa CBE Collaborative) to work together to support statewide scale-up of CBE (Iowa H. F. 215, 2013). The purpose of this network is to develop a statewide CBE framework and establish district demonstration sites to serve as models to support statewide scale-up. MWCC, in collaboration with other federal centers and external partners, has provided intensive technical assistance to the Iowa Department of Education (IDE) in the past three years to support IDE’s CBE efforts. For more information on CBE in Iowa, visit the [IDE website](#) or contact Tori Cirks, the MWCC Iowa state manager, at vcirks@air.org.

Key Iowa CBE Milestones

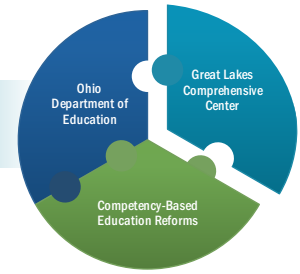


MWCC ROLE

- Partnered with Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Midwest and the College and Career Readiness and Success Center (CCRS Center) to provide content expertise for the CBE Task Force and the Iowa CBE Collaborative.
- Cofacilitated CBE Task Force meetings and Iowa CBE Collaborative meetings.
- Documented activities and progress of CBE Task Force and Iowa CBE Collaborative.
- Served as a key thought partner to IDE in the development and facilitation of the Iowa CBE Collaborative.
- Led strategic planning process to support IDE in the ongoing management of the Collaborative, including revisions to PK-12 CBE guidelines.
- Cofacilitated the Iowa CBE Collaborative’s design team and coordinated council, which provided guidance on the work of the districts within the collaborative.
- Codeveloped the framework structure, criteria for inclusion, and quality assurance process.
- Brokered relationships for IDE and other partners and technical assistance providers to support the Iowa CBE collaborative.



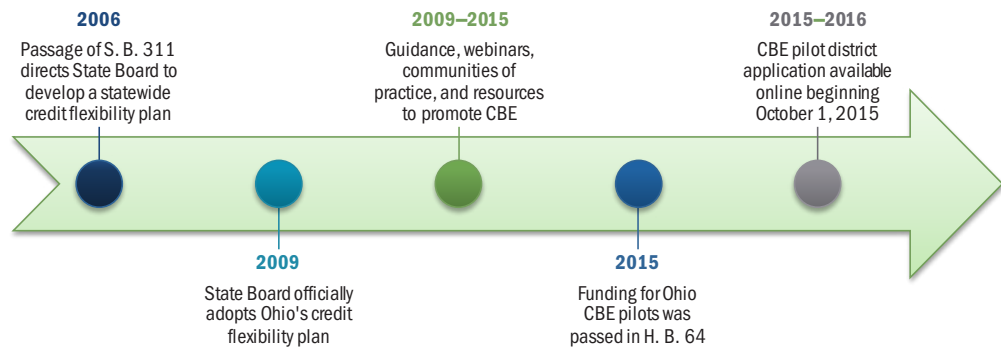
SPOTLIGHT OHIO: Launching of a CBE Pilot



Ohio has a history of promoting initiatives that challenge traditional educational structures and policies—including the Carnegie unit—the century-old time-based system used to award academic credit. With help from GLCC and other stakeholders, the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) designed a credit flexibility policy that was adopted by the State Board of Education (Ohio S. B. 311, 2006). This credit flexibility policy recognizes the importance of student engagement through supporting flexible schedules and a range of modalities, such as online learning and community-based projects, and has now been implemented across the state. It also has served as a foundational platform from which additional CBE reforms are now being built. For example, in summer 2015, the 131st Ohio General Assembly established a Competency-Based Education Pilot that will provide three-year grants to five districts, schools, or consortia to design and implement competency-based models of education for their students (Ohio H. B. 64, 2015). During 2014–15, GLCC, in partnership with the Center on Innovation in Learning, took a lead role in the design of the CBE pilot district application process.

During the upcoming 2015–16 academic year, GLCC will continue to partner with ODE to provide technical support for the five pilot CBE districts. For more information on the Ohio CBE initiative, visit the [ODE website](#) or contact Mark Mitchell, the CLCC Ohio state manager, at mmitchell@air.org.

Key Ohio CBE Milestones



GLCC ROLE

- Acted as a thought partner with ODE in developing guidance, webinar series, and other supports.
- Helped facilitate the creation of multipartner-sponsored credit flexibility communities of practice.
- Supported the development of an ODE credit flexibility website.
- Accessed national models of CBE from REL Midwest and the CCRS Center.
- Worked with the Center on Innovation in Learning to support the design of a CBE pilot program district application.
- Helped define essential features of CBE for Ohio as a part of the CBE pilot district application.

PLANNED ROLE FOR 2015–16

- Act as a codesigner and cofacilitator of meetings with the ODE core team and cross-collaborative teams composed of representatives from each of the five CBE pilot sites.
- Codesign a professional development plan for the five sites.
- Serve as a content expert for the design and implementation of an iterative development process, which will allow pilot sites to document and make continuous improvements to CBE tools and processes.
- Serve as a thought partner and technical assistance broker between ODE and the CCRS Center to support the framing of an accountability and performance review of CBE pilot sites.
- Serve as a thought partner in the design of state guidance to CBE pilot sites and to other districts that voluntarily implement a CBE program.
- Help ODE use lessons learned from the CBE pilot to inform the future development of statewide competency-based policies and programs.



REFERENCES

- Carnegie Foundation. (2014). *50-state scan of course credit policies*. Stanford, CA: Author. Retrieved from http://cdn.carnegiefoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/CUP_Policy_MayUpdate1.pdf
- Iowa H. F. 215 (2013). *School district funding*. Retrieved from http://coolice.legis.iowa.gov/linc/85/external/HF215_Enrolled.html
- Iowa S. F. 2284 (2012). *Competency-based instruction*. Retrieved from <http://coolice.legis.iowa.gov/Cool-ICE/default.asp?Category=billinfo&Service=Billbook&frame=1&GA=84&hbill=SF2284>
- Le, C., Wolfe, R., & Steinberg, A. (2014). *The past and the promise: Today's competency education movement*. Boston, MA: Jobs for the Future. Retrieved from <http://www.jff.org/sites/default/files/publications/materials/The-Past-The-Promise-091514.pdf>
- Ohio Department of Education. (n.d.). *New emphasis on learning: Ohio's credit flexibility plan shifts the focus from "seat time" to performance*. Columbus, OH: Author. Retrieved from <http://education.ohio.gov/getattachment/State-Board/State-Board-Reports-and-Policies/Ohio-s-Credit-Flexibility-Plan/FINAL-CreditFlex-8-4-ExSummary.pdf.aspx>
- Ohio H. B. 64 (2015). *Main operating budget FY2016–FY2017*. Retrieved from http://www.epa.state.oh.us/Portals/35/documents/CWQP_ORC6111.30_jul15.pdf
- Ohio S. B. 311 (2006).
- Ohio S. F. 2284, 84th Gen. Assembly (2012). Retrieved from <http://coolice.legis.iowa.gov/Cool-ICE/default.asp?Category=billinfo&Service=Billbook&frame=1&GA=84&hbill=SF2284>
- Patrick, S., & Sturgis, C. (n.d.). *Cracking the code: Synchronizing policy and practice for performance-based learning*. Vienna, VA: International Association for K–12 Online Learning. Retrieved from <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED537322.pdf>

CBE RESOURCES FROM THE COMPREHENSIVE CENTER NETWORK AND THE REGIONAL EDUCATIONAL LABORATORIES

The U.S. Department of Education has established a network of centers to provide resources and other support to state and local decision makers. The network includes the comprehensive center system made up of seven national content centers and 15 regional comprehensive centers, the regional educational laboratories (RELs), and other specialized centers. The centers work together to help policymakers and practitioners make evidence-based decisions at all levels of the system, with the goal of improving student outcomes. Many centers provide an array of competency-based education resources, including the following:

- Blumenthal, D., & Rasmussen, J. (2015). *State approaches to competency-based education to support college and career readiness for all students*. Washington, DC: College and Career Readiness and Success Center. Retrieved from http://www.ccrscenter.org/sites/default/files/AsktheTeam_CBEbrief.pdf



- Regional Education Laboratory Midwest. (2013). *Implementing competency-based education practices in the Midwest* [Public television event]. Naperville, IL: Author. Retrieved from <http://www.relmidwest.org/events/implementing-competency-based-education-practices-midwest>
- Torres, T. A., Brett, J., & Cox, J. (2015). *Competency-based learning: Definitions, policies and implementation*. Waltham, MA: REL Northeast and Islands. Retrieved from <http://www.relnei.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/4.1.5.3-NCCRA-CBL.pdf>
- Twyman, J. S. (2014). *Competency-based education: Supporting personalized learning*. Philadelphia, PA: Center on Innovations in Learning. Retrieved from http://www.centeril.org/connect/resources/Connect_CB_Education_Twyman-2014_11.12.pdf

OTHER CBE RESOURCES

- Achieve. (2015). *The role of learning progressions in competency-based pathways*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from <http://www.achieve.org/files/Achieve-LearningProgressionsinCBP.pdf>
- Council of Chief State School Officers & 2Revolutions. (2014). *Roadmap for competency-based systems*. Retrieved from <http://www.nxgentechroadmap.com/>
- Patrick, S., & Sturgis, C. (2013). *Necessary for success: Building mastery of world-class skills*. Vienna, VA: iNACOL. Retrieved from http://www.competencyworks.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/inacol_cw_issuebrief_building_mastery_final.pdf
- Priest, N., Rudenstine, A., Weisstein, E., & Gerwin, C. (2012). *Making mastery work: A close-up view of competency education*. Quincy, MA: Nellie Mae Education Foundation. Retrieved from <http://competencyworks.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Making-Mastery-Work-NMEF-2012-Inline.pdf>
- Silva, E., White, T., & Toch, T. (2015). *The Carnegie unit: A century-old standard in a changing education landscape*. Stanford, CA: Carnegie Foundation. Retrieved from http://cdn.carnegiefoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Carnegie_Unit_Report.pdf
- Sturgis, C. (2015). *Implementing competency education in K–12 systems: Insights from local leaders*. Vienna, VA: International Association for K–12 Online Learning. Retrieved from http://www.competencyworks.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/iNCL_CWIssueBrief_Implementing_v5_web.pdf
- U.S. Department of Education. (n.d.). *Competency-based learning or personalized learning*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from <http://www.ed.gov/oii-news/competency-based-learning-or-personalized-learning>
- Worthen, M., & Pace, L. (2014). *A K–12 federal policy framework for competency education: Building capacity for systems change*. Vienna, VA: International Association for K–12 Online Learning. Retrieved from http://www.competencyworks.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/CompetencyWorks_A_K-12_Federal_Policy_Framework_for_Competency_Education_February_2014.pdf