



Advancing Competency-Based Pathways to College and Career Readiness

Communications Toolkit

Competency-Based Pathways: Definition, Key Messages and Talking Points

Definition

Competency/proficiency-based education helps prepare all K-12 students for college and career by ensuring that they proceed through course material at a pace that is right for them, rather than waiting for their peers to catch up or moving on without having fully mastered the material. Under this model, students learn one set of skills and knowledge within a subject area *before* advancing to the next set – rather than move on as part of a group whether or not they have learned the material.

- For students, competency-based pathways provide flexibility to master each set of skills and knowledge necessary to meet the learning objectives of a course before they face the next set that builds on it.
- For teachers, it creates opportunities for them to tailor their support to the specific, current needs of each student, rather than teach to the middle.
- For administrators, this means building a learning environment that focuses on supporting, evaluating and reporting on students based on their current demonstrated level of mastery of specific learning objectives.

As a result, all students build a stronger academic foundation and are better able to master the knowledge and skills critical to prepare them for college and career.

Note: Except for the first use above, “competency” is used throughout this document, but can be replaced with the word “proficiency” or “mastery” depending on the state and context.

Key Messages

Competency-based pathways better prepare students to graduate from high school ready for college and career because it improves the way elementary and secondary students learn essential knowledge and skills. Rather than advance as a group, students move at their own pace to master the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in both college and the workplace.

- 1) **It is personalized, not “one size fits all”:** In a competency-based system, the student’s individual needs and interests are the focus of all teaching efforts, instead of a cookie-cutter approach that holds back students who are ready to move ahead and advances others before they are ready. Because it’s personalized, it is harder for students to fall through the cracks; teachers and

parents know how a student is doing and can ensure he or she has the support needed to succeed.

- 2) **It better prepares students:** By focusing on the mastery of critical knowledge and skills, competency-based pathways prevent learning gaps from developing and growing over time. As a result, this approach keeps students on the path to graduate from high school ready for college and career.
- 3) **It is transparent:** Diplomas and transcripts from schools that use a competency-based model clearly communicate a student's level of preparation and give parents, college admissions counselors and employers a more complete sense of what a student has in fact learned.

Talking Points

Personalized

- 1) Competency-based pathways allow students to progress at their own pace, allowing students to move ahead as soon as they have demonstrated their proficiency and providing focused, individualized support to those who need more time to master a set of skills and knowledge.
- 2) It puts the focus on each individual student rather than the group, and emphasizes student engagement and ownership of their learning.
- 3) This is a powerful advance in education because it recognizes that students can learn new knowledge and skills in different ways and at different speeds.

Better Prepared

- 4) Competency-based pathways are a very natural way for people to learn. In fact, it is the norm in how we learn in the workplace, especially in highly skilled professions, as well as in the arts and athletics.
- 5) Under this system, teachers are able to tailor their support to meet learners where they are, instead of teaching in one way to all students. This prevents and closes learning gaps, improving educational achievement for all students.
- 6) Schools that adopt competency-based models are able to exercise discretion on a number of issues (including timelines, grading systems and class grouping) as they transition from traditional education systems.

Transparent

- 7) Competency-based pathways provide parents with a deeper level of understanding of how their child is progressing and improves opportunities for collaboration with teachers.

- 8) School systems that have adopted this approach have successfully worked with colleges and university systems to ensure that their admissions departments understand what competency-based diplomas and transcripts communicate about applicants.
- 9) Competency-based transcripts provide greater detail on a student's strengths and how they differ from others, giving college admissions counselors and employers a more complete view of their preparation.