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Legislative Report Competency-based Education

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HOUSE FILE 215: COMPETENCY-BASED EDUCATION

House File 215 provided for development of Competency-based Education (CBE) in Iowa through a group of districts that will investigate, pilot, and study CBE. The Iowa CBE Collaborative (the Collaborative) was formed to fulfill that legislation.

House File 215 legislation also required a report be filed each year on January 15 until 2019. This report is submitted as the second of those reports and outlines the continuing work of the Iowa CBE Collaborative.

IOWA COMPETENCY BASED-EDUCATION COLLABORATIVE HISTORY

Principles of Competency-based Education: The Iowa CBE Collaborative operates within the Iowa Department of Education (DE) [Guidelines for PK-Competency-based Pathways](#). The *Guidelines* include the principles and definitions established by the 2013-14 Legislative Task Force on Competency-based Education. The Principles of Competency-based Education are:

1. Students advance upon proficiency.
2. Competencies include explicit, measurable, and transferable learning objectives that empower students.
3. Assessment is meaningful and a positive learning experience for students.
4. Students receive rapid, differentiated support based on their individual learning needs.
5. Learning outcomes emphasize competencies that include application and creation of knowledge along with development of important skills and dispositions.

School Year 2013-14: Over the summer of 2013, the DE defined a grant application process for districts, which included the [Statement of the Problem and Rationale](#) and the [Goal, Objectives, and Responsibilities](#) of the Collaborative. Institutions of higher education (IHE) and area education agencies (AEAs) were invited to participate. Collaborative membership includes the following:

Iowa CBE Collaborative Community School Districts (CSD):

Cedar Rapids CSD	Marshalltown CSD	Nevada CSD
Collins-Maxwell CSD	Mason City CSD	Spirit Lake CSD
East Union CSD	Muscatine CSD	Van Meter CSD
Howard-Winneshiek CSD		

Institutions of Higher Education Participating with the Collaborative:

Dordt College	Kirkwood Community College	University of Iowa
Drake University	Iowa State University	University of Northern Iowa
Hawkeye Community College	Simpson College	

Collaborative AEA Partners:

AEA 267	Heartland AEA	Northwest AEA
Grant Wood AEA	Keystone AEA	Prairie Lakes AEA
Great Prairie AEA	Mississippi Bend AEA	

Department of Education and Board of Education Examiners Staff

External Partners (Planning and Facilitation Support):

Midwest Comprehensive Center at American Institutes for Research, Chicago, Illinois
West Wind Education Policy Inc., Iowa City, Iowa

The organizational meeting of the Collaborative was held November 19, 2013. Monthly workdays through May were used for common learning and to establish the type of work process necessary to develop a *Framework for Implementation of Competency-based Education* and to establish Iowa CBE Demonstration Sites.

In June of 2014, Collaborative members shared their learning through a joint conference with Iowa ASCD (formally: Iowa Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development). Over 300 educators from across the state attended. Also in June, interviews were conducted with leadership of each Collaborative district to provide baseline data toward case studies of the transformation to a CBE system.

CURRENT WORK OF THE COLLABORATIVE

School Year 2014-15: The second year of the Collaborative is both a year of collective learning and a year of redefining and developing the work.

Collective Learning: The focus of learning this year is in three main areas.

1. Blended Learning: The Collaborative is studying [*Blended: Disruptive Innovation to Improve Schools*](#) by Michael B. Horn and Heather Staker. Truly personalized opportunities that connect individual student learning goals to personal passions and abilities plus allow for student voice and choice are now within reach for our schools. Students are more motivated when they learn *what* they need, *when* they need it rather than what someone else thinks they should learn, *just in case* they need it. Collaborative members are learning to use available technology to enhance student learning experiences in this way.
2. Community-based Learning: Even updated technology and rigorous classroom experiences cannot provide the breadth of learning opportunities necessary to develop the complex 21st century skills that will be required of our students as they transition to the lifetime of learning and change they will encounter in postsecondary educational and career options.

Schools and communities must partner to provide real world opportunities for use and growth of these essential skills. Following a study of [*Community-Based Learning: Awakening the Mission of Public School*](#) by Holy A. Prast and Donald J. Viegut, Collaborative districts will develop community-based options necessary to enhance student learning in this way.

3. Performance Assessment: As districts move toward these blended and community-based options for students, they must also be intentional about coupling appropriate assessment with the learning. One of the Principles of Competency-based Education (above) is that assessment is meaningful and a positive experience for students. The Collaborative will begin learning about how to develop quality performance tasks and assessments in January. [Stanford Center for Assessment, Learning and Equity \(SCALE\)](#) and the [Center for Collaborative Education \(CCE\)](#), both nationally recognized for their work in performance assessment, will guide that work.

Redefining the Work: During the 2013-14 school year, the Collaborative developed an outline of the work toward two end goals: the *Iowa Framework for Implementing Competency-based Education* and Iowa Demonstration Sites.

As reported in 2014, the Collaborative began with teams focused on each of the 12 elements of change previously outlined for the *Framework for Implementation of Competency-based Education*. Collaborative days in 2013-14 were split between time for district work and time for these teams; however, the work toward the *Framework* seems to develop better if done separately from the Collaborative work days. This year the work was redefined into three categories:

1. The Learning Environment: personalized learning, competencies, performance assessment, and leadership at all levels.
2. Structures and Policies: getting started; community engagement; monitoring, recording and reporting learning and schedules.
3. Postsecondary Implications: transitions to postsecondary opportunities, educator preparation and professional learning for competency-based education, postsecondary competency-based opportunities.

Three Collaborative members have been invited to lead each area of work. They are working with the DE to establish action plans and timelines for the work.

Developing Work: During the first year of the Collaborative, it became apparent that two things would be foundational to the work: 1) a clear picture of what competency-based education looks like so districts can accurately reflect on current status and plan for future change, and 2) a process for writing competencies and some examples.

Characteristics and Indicators: Over the summer of 2013, the DE synthesized learning by the Collaborative to develop a list of Characteristics of a CBE System, each of which includes a list of Indicators of a Healthy System. (See Appendix A for the complete Characteristics and Indicators.) These Characteristics and Indicators describe the essential elements of a CBE system and provide the background for [Action Planning](#) documents for both reflection on current practices and developing plans for change.

The Characteristics and Indicators and Action Planning documents are the first items ready for the “Getting Started” section of the *Framework for Implementing Competency-based Education*.

Model Competencies: This fall a group of Collaborative members began writing model competencies. They started with the process the Collaborative learned in March and April. However, as the work progressed, a more streamlined and purposeful process developed. Careful records were kept of how they used and modified the process so that professional development for writing competencies can be created.

According to the state [Guidelines](#), a competency is:

An enduring understanding that requires the transfer of knowledge, skills, and dispositions to complex situation in and/or across content areas and/or beyond the classroom.

The purposeful mix of knowledge, skills, and dispositions makes the Iowa competencies unique. During the first year, the Collaborative decided that the [Iowa Universal Constructs](#) (creativity, collaboration, complex communication, critical thinking, flexibility and adaptability, and productivity and accountability) were the dispositions that must be coupled with rigorous academic content as competencies are written.

Iowa Universal Constructs: The writing team began with competencies for the Universal Constructs. Each competency provides guidance to help students and teachers on what and how the student and teacher might design the learning and assessment, as well as, why the work toward this competency is important. However, the competencies also allow for both student voice and choice in the demonstration of proficiency. They were also developed so as to allow for demonstration in any content area and to allow students of all ages to demonstrate learning and growth toward proficiency. The Iowa Universal Constructs Model Competencies are:

1. Creativity: Generate ideas by reconfiguring current thinking or by connecting seemingly unrelated ideas for an aesthetic or practical purpose.
2. Collaboration: Negotiate in a respectful team process by contributing personal capacity to share ownership of outcomes that are larger than the individual.
3. Critical Thinking: Create solutions to complex problems through inquiry and investigations to influence internal and/or external conditions.
4. Complex Communication: Exchange complex information and ideas through the use of justifiable modes to effectively meet the needs of diverse individuals and groups.
5. Flexibility and Adaptability: Adjust to novel information or situations with intellectual agility to be successful when facing ambiguity and/or challenges.
6. Productivity and Accountability: Exhibit responsibility through persistence and self-direction to produce quality results that add value in an ever-changing environment.

Content Competencies: A team of math teachers is scheduled to start writing math competencies in January with other content teams starting soon after. Each team will begin with a conversation about how their discipline contributes to students who are proficient and confident in the Universal Construct Model Competencies followed by defining the discipline's enduring understandings or overarching goals for students.

FUTURE WORK OF THE COLLABORATIVE

The DE has developed a five-year plan toward development of the *Framework for Implementing Competency-based Education* and designation of Iowa CBE Demonstration Sites. Immediate next steps include:

1. Action planning for the recently redesigned work groups: Learning Environments, Structures and Policies, and Postsecondary Implications.
2. Development of a process for determining eligibility for inclusion in the *Framework*.
3. Development of the Getting Started and Community Engagement sections of the *Framework*.
4. Writing content competencies.

APPENDIX A: CHARACTERISTICS OF A CBE SYSTEM

Iowa Characteristics of a CBE System: Indicators of a Healthy System

I. District has strong internal and external stakeholder involvement and shared vision.

1. School board endorsed a clear definition of competency-based education and what it means to be proficient aligned to the State Guidelines for PK-12 Competency-based Pathways and postsecondary education requirements and a vision of how proficiency is demonstrated and assessed
2. District/network has developed materials and vehicles for communicating the rationale and process of competency-based pathways to students, parents, teachers, and community members
3. Community members demonstrate understanding of the transformation to a competency based system, exhibited by:
 - a. Granting permission for and providing support of the transition;
 - b. Their ability to
 - i. Identify the inadequacies of the traditional system and, therefore, the reason for change,
 - ii. Articulate what the school is doing to facilitate this transformation, and
 - iii. Articulate their role in a competency-based system;
 - c. Taking responsibility for and paying attention to student learning.
4. Businesses, organizations, industry, etc. partner with the school to create learning environments/opportunities for students such as internships, clubs, and after school programs.
5. Internal and external stakeholders are appropriately involved in decision making.
6. Teachers' association contract allows for flexible scheduling and staffing.

II. District nurtures a culture of continual improvement.

1. Internal and external stakeholders are regularly provided vehicles for input and feedback such as, but not limited to, surveys, questionnaires, and meetings.
2. Key stakeholders (e.g., business and community leaders, parents) are involved in development of a long-term strategic plan.
3. The district engages in
 - a. Continuous collaborative inquiry,
 - b. Ongoing study of content, practice, and student effects, and
 - c. Constant use of data to guide decisions.

III. District policies support a competency-based environment.

1. Key policy issues have been addressed and policy allows for:
 - a. Units/credits that are not exclusively time-based,
 - b. Opportunities to earn credit for learning that occurs outside the school walls but demonstrates proficiency on rigorous competencies, and
 - c. Progression based on demonstration of proficiency.
2. Policies are consistently reviewed in light of changes in the system.
3. District advocates for state policies that promote CBE.

IV. Competencies and scoring guides align with the Iowa Core and other content standards to describe what students need to know and be able to do.

1. The district has declared college and career ready graduate outcomes and written (or adopted state model) competencies that guide student learning experiences toward proficiency in those graduate outcomes.
2. Competencies emphasize transfer of knowledge and skills in the Iowa content standards and the universal constructs.
3. Scoring guides are aligned to learning progressions and clearly articulate what is expected for a demonstration of proficiency.
4. District ensures that competencies, scoring guides, learning progressions, performance tasks, and performance assessment are tightly aligned to the Iowa Core and content standards in other content areas.
5. Proficiency is based on student demonstration of the ability to move to deeper or more advanced work in that content/skill and/or to use it in another context or curricular area.
6. Staff are prepared to facilitate learning in a competency-based environment. They:
 - a. Have deep understanding of the content/learning standards and the universal constructs,
 - b. Are able to select appropriate competencies and scoring guides from the models provided by the state or to develop competencies, scoring guides, and performance tasks that demonstrate student learning of the standards/universal constructs, and
 - c. Have the knowledge and skills to consistently assess student learning performances and monitor progress until standards and competencies are met.
7. Graduate outcomes, competencies, and scoring guides are reviewed on a regular basis and updated as necessary to ensure tight alignment to the Iowa Core and content standards of other content.

V. Assessments are meaningful and positive learning experience for students.

1. Students are evaluated on performance and application.
2. Teachers and students use formative assessment to redirect teaching and learning throughout the learning process.
3. Skills, concepts, and dispositions are assessed in multiple contexts and multiple ways.
4. Examples of student work demonstrate knowledge and skill development and learning progressions to help students understand their own progress.
5. Adequate supports are available for students who do not become proficient.
6. Assessment practices are reviewed on a regular basis and updated as necessary.

VI. Learning environment is student-centered and personalized.

1. Establish and maintain a safe and collaborative culture for students and adults.
2. Students, parents, teachers, and administrators provide feedback on the culture of the school on a regular basis.
3. Students:
 - a. Have voice and choice in when, how, and where they learn and how they demonstrate proficiency,
 - b. Gradually take more responsibility for the design of their learning pathways toward proficiency on competencies, and
 - c. Have clarity about what they need to accomplish and ownership of the learning sequence.
4. Teachers:

- a. Are supported in their own learning as they become more proficient in providing personalized learning experience for students,
 - b. Are developed to be strong facilitators and coaches, skilled in deploying a broad range of instructional practices that engage all learners (project-based learning, collaborative learning, e.g.)
 - c. Collaborate with other adults both in and outside school to provide opportunities for their own growth as well as for their students' learning,
 - d. Partner with students to design learning around each student's needs, life experiences, and the skills needed for them to become college and career ready, and
 - e. Provide high quality resources/interventions to keep each student on track for successful learning and for graduation.
5. Students and families have deep understanding of the standards/constructs/competencies and are partners in determining how students will demonstrate proficiency.
 6. The district and community partner to provide all students with a variety of quality learning opportunities both in and out of the school building (e.g. project-based learning, internships, after school programs, clubs, and organizations).

VII. Shared leadership.

1. Leadership is formalized at all levels of the system. Students, teachers, and administrators, as well as, parents and community members provide leadership for ensuring students learn well.
2. Leaders at all levels are supported in their own learning as they become more proficient at development of personalized learning for everyone in the system.
3. District/network has a leadership development program in place to help school leaders tackle key issues in competency-based pathways including, for example, scheduling, teacher teaming, and coaching.

VIII. Credit/advancement is based upon demonstration of proficiency.

1. Credit is based on demonstration of proficiency on competencies rather than time spent in class or on the work.
2. Students demonstrate proficiency on competencies and earn credit or advance in content at a negotiated pace. They work through some competencies more rapidly while taking more time to ensure proficiency on others.
3. Grading practices emphasize student-generated evidence of proficiency.

IX. District provides technical support for teachers, students, and parents.

1. Database system enables teachers, schools, and district/organization to track and report on student mastery, including credit accumulation and results on the full range of assessments of proficiency.
2. Technology systems enable teachers, students, and their families to access individual student portfolio reports that show student progress at achieving proficiency of identified learning targets.
3. A strategy is in place for teachers and other staff to regularly review performance data and make adjustments to instruction as needed.
4. Teacher and student schedules support anytime/anywhere learning, progression based on proficiency, and other aspects of a CBE system.
5. Teacher teams are organized to support competency-based pathways through for

- example, common planning time and co-teaching models.
6. School calendar enables extended learning opportunities.
 7. Staff are deployed/job descriptions are to support anytime/anywhere learning, progression based on proficiency, and other aspects of competency-based pathways (such as: blending: technology-based and classroom instruction).
 8. Space is allocated to maximize student access to technology and to places for individualized as well as group or project-based work.
 9. Budget is reallocated to address necessary changes in staffing, scheduling, use of space, etc.

X. District provides smooth transitions to post-secondary experiences.

1. Transcripts contain reliable evidence of student learning and information necessary for post-secondary institutions to admit and place students.
2. Open communication exists between the district and post-secondary providers that typically serve district's graduates.