

Aligned Issue Brief

Competency-based education emphasizes material mastery over seat time



Making the Case for Competency-Based Education (CBE)

HB 1956 (Richey) & SB 660 (Arthur)

Missouri has an opportunity to take a significant step forward in education by supporting student-centered, competency-based education (CBE). We know students learn at different rates and in different ways, but our education system is designed for learning to happen within a rigid timeframe and through uniform instruction.

Students who master content quickly lose learning time that could be used to move forward and learn new content. Students who need additional time to reach proficiency must adhere to the pace of instruction determined for students as a whole. In addition to learning at different rates, students learn and demonstrate knowledge in different ways, and a competency-based education system can adapt to those differences.

In 2013, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education convened a task force to study CBE and to identify barriers to implementation. The task force presented policy recommendations, but Missouri has not yet implemented a comprehensive statewide policy. Examples of CBE exist in a few districts and charter schools within Missouri, but those innovations remain isolated examples.

Why Implement CBE?

Students often have only one option by which to demonstrate mastery when there are numerous settings in which a student can learn and numerous ways to evaluate learning. With CBE, educators facilitate learning based on students' needs. The knowledge and skills to be achieved remain constant, but the time and methods by which the knowledge and skills are achieved are flexible. Implementing CBE and maintaining high academic standards are complementary efforts.

Missouri 2021-22 Quick Facts

518 school districts

37 charter schools

Largest enrollment = 24,357 (PK-12)

Smallest enrollment = 23 (PK-12)

Largest district in square miles = 507

Smallest district in square miles = 2

Source: Missouri Department of
Elementary and Secondary Education

State CBE Policy Examples

Kentucky and **Colorado** CBE policies require demonstration of meeting or exceeding state standards.

Source: KRS 156.108, section 2(2)(c) and (2)(d)); CRS 22-11-703, 22-11-704

In **Oregon** and **Washington**, students can demonstrate proficiency and earn credit for courses as alternatives to regular classroom work including career-related learning experiences, successfully passing an appropriate exam, providing a portfolio of work, or providing documentation of prior learning experiences.

Source: OAC 581-022-1131; WAC 392-121-182, 392-410-300, 392-410-315, 392-410-340

South Carolina and **Virginia** have state “Profiles of a Graduate.” In **South Carolina** that includes real-world learning, flexibility on time and method of learning, continuous feedback, and progression based on competency. **Virginia** identifies the knowledge and skills graduates need and pairs those with opportunities for career exploration.

Source: <https://sccompetes.org/transformsc/>; VA HB 895 (2016)

Washington funds CBE “attendance hours” based on satisfactory progress on student’s individual learning plan.

Source: Competency-Based Crediting Handbook 1.0: An Implementation Guide for School Districts, July 2016

What Does CBE look like in practice?

The pandemic opened a window on the state of education in our country. As a result, educators have an opportunity to reexamine how students learn, and schools conduct assessments. Just as a one-size-fits-all approach is insufficient in traditional educational settings, components of CBE models can vary across schools. While Missouri holds the same high standards and expectations for all students, Missouri schools look vastly different throughout the state. The flexibility afforded by CBE can serve all students well.

How do we address logistics?

The logistics of implementing CBE may seem daunting but can be accomplished, beginning with reexamination of how Missouri’s state funding is determined. Per state statute, state funding is based on in-seat hours attended. While this might seem to be an insurmountable hurdle to CBE, there are precedents for receiving state aid under alternative criteria including for virtual education and flexibilities given to school districts and charter schools for reporting attendance during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Further, CBE may require consideration of flexibilities on statutory requirements for the school calendar, length of a school day, and teacher contracts.

Finally, to ensure students a smooth transition to a postsecondary program or career, competencies must be transcribed in a way that is meaningful and aligns with the requirements of institutions of higher education and employers.

Missouri can and should move forward with CBE in order to provide maximum flexibility that gives all students the opportunity to attain and demonstrate proficiency.

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