



Recommendations to Support Competency Education in Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)

Competency education provides a framework for learning with the goal of mastery of academic standards through personalized learning and differentiated supports for every student. Federal policies should focus on enabling competency by removing barriers for those states and districts that are ready to do it, and by creating the right incentives in the accountability system to focus on student growth to mastery.

We define competency education with the following five elements:

1. Students advance upon mastery.
2. Competencies include explicit, measurable, transferable learning objectives that empower students.
3. Assessment is meaningful and a positive learning experience for students.
4. Students receive timely, 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.¹

Federal policymakers can support the growth of competency education in K-12 education by adopting the following recommendations in the next ESEA reauthorization.

Recommendation 1: Pilot Competency-Based Accountability and Systems of Assessments in up to Five States

Establish a set of state level pilots that will allow up to five states the flexibility to test, refine, and scale statewide accountability and assessments systems that enable promising competency-based school and district models. States should build a system that assesses students throughout their educational experience and addresses the following elements:

1. Focus on high quality implementation of competency-based approaches that emphasize mastery while closing achievement gaps between subpopulations of students.

¹ Sturgis, C., Patrick, S., & Pittenger, L. (July 2011). It's Not a Matter of Time: Highlights from the 2011 Competency Based Learning Summit. iNACOL and the Council of Chief State School Officers.
http://www.competencyworks.org/wpcontent/uploads/2012/04/iNACOL_Its_Not_A_Matter_of_Time_full_report.pdf

2. Create a shared accountability structure where each level of the system – state and local – has ownership in student success.
3. Establish a system of assessments that includes the following characteristics:
 - A. Emphasizes mastery of standards, aligned competencies, and social and emotional skills based on evidence-based learning progressions toward college and career readiness.
 - B. Provides annual summative student performance data gathered in one of the following ways:
 - i. A statewide summative assessment administered at least once annually in each of grades 3-8 and once in high school;
 - ii. A statewide summative instrument administered at least once annually in each of grades 3-8 and once in high school administered as multiple assessments throughout the year;
 - iii. A combination of a statewide summative assessment and or local summative assessment administered at least once annually in each of grades 3-8 and once in high school, so long as:
 - I. The assessments provide, at a minimum, annual information about student performance to inform determinations about accountability and supports and interventions;
 - II. The statewide assessment occurs at a minimum of once in elementary, once in middle, and once in high school;
 - III. The assessment items are aligned to college- and career-ready state academic standards;
 - IV. The local assessment instruments produce comparable results across the state that are of high technical quality and validity; and
 - V. The system of assessments incorporates multiples sources of evidence of student learning, including performance-based tasks.
 - C. Provides districts with the flexibility to administer the summative assessment(s) when students are ready.
 - D. Includes real-time information about student growth to help stakeholders determine whether students are progressing at a sufficient pace to remain on-track to graduation.
 - E. Aligns to the state’s accountability and supports and interventions systems to drive continuous improvement of student learning, as well as state, district, and educator performance.
4. Implement a statewide personalized and adaptive system of learning and supports to close achievement gaps and ensure all students get back on track or remain on-track to graduation.
5. Identify what works and continuously improve competency-based approaches to maximize success.

Recommendation 2: Support Systems of Assessments That Align to Competency-Based Approaches

In Section 1111, permit states to use multiple statewide assessments during the course of the year that can provide a summative score of individual student academic growth.

Permit states to use funds reserved in Title VI, Part A, Subpart 1 for the development and implementation of competency-based assessment systems.

Recommendation 3: Include System of Supports and Interventions in State Title I Plans

In Section 1111, ensure that state Title I plans include a framework for a robust state and local system of supports and interventions that incorporates personalized learning strategies to ensure all students are able to reach mastery with targeted support to get on-track or remain on-track to graduation. The state should ensure that its statewide system of supports and interventions provides all Title I schools with real-time data and diagnostic support to help schools improve academic outcomes throughout the school year.

Recommendation 4: Support Learning Infrastructure to Enable Competency Education

Help states and districts build the aligned learning infrastructure necessary to support competency based instruction including integrated student information systems, learning management systems, and assessment functions to support student learning. This should be done in two ways:

- 1) Provide states and districts with flexibility to use state and district activities funds in applicable formula and discretionary programs to establish or improve learning infrastructure and;
- 2) Provide funding to help states and districts with the start-up costs of building an aligned learning infrastructure.

Recommendation 5: Support Educators and Leaders to Build Capacity for Competency Education

Reform Title II-A to ensure that states establish a robust professional development system that strengthens the ability of educators and leaders to provide instruction in personalized learning environments. States should ensure that professional development opportunities are aligned to statewide instructional competencies (which build capacity for K-12 competency-based, personalized learning environments). Professional development for educators and leaders should be customized so educators and principals can fill in learning gaps and advance at their own pace.

Ensure that States have the flexibility to dedicate Title II Part A funds to prepare the state's education workforce to implement a competency-based accountability and assessment system.

Incorporate a program in the National Activities section of Title II Part A that would enable states and/or districts to test, replicate, and scale strategies that will help districts and external partners support teachers and principals in the implementation of school-wide competency-based models. The program should emphasize, at a minimum, the following strategies:

- 1) Empower teachers and principals to translate real-time instructional feedback into improvements in student learning.
- 2) Enable teachers to deepen and accelerate mastery of statewide instructional competencies.