



Outcomes of Personalized, Competency-based Learning in North Dakota

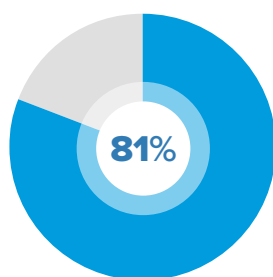
Three districts transformed their education system by designing and implementing a personalized, competency-based learning approach.¹ This transformation, driven by a commitment to deeper, more flexible learning experiences, has led to measurable progress across key indicators, as confirmed through survey data and administrative records. The infographic highlights some of the positive shifts in teaching and learning, school culture, attendance and postsecondary enrollment after six years of implementation.²

1. This infographic is based on a larger evaluation report: Ahigian, R., & Lacireno-Paquet, N. (with Lolashvili, G.). (2024). *The North Dakota personalized, competency-based learning initiative: Progress and outcomes after 5 years*. WestEd. <https://www.wested.org/resource/north-dakota-personalized-competency-based-learning-initiative/>

2. While there was interest in understanding whether outcomes differed for learners from historically marginalized populations, small numbers in two districts with personalized, competency-based learning prevented us from doing so. However, exploratory analyses revealed meaningful positive results on the state test for 8th graders in both English language arts and math outcomes for learners who participate in the free or reduced-price meals (FRPM) program and positive effects in math for learners with individualized Education Program (IEP) status.

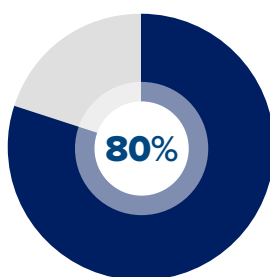
Learners have the agency to show their learning in different ways

Educators are offering students more ways to demonstrate their learning, and students are noticing.



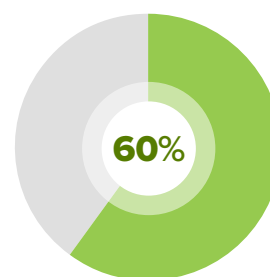
EDUCATORS

agree or strongly agree that they offer learners different ways to demonstrate mastery of a learning target



ELEMENTARY LEARNERS

agree or strongly agree that they can show their learning in different ways

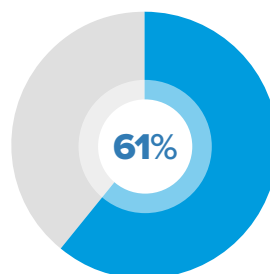


SECONDARY LEARNERS

agree or strongly agree that they can show their learning in different ways

Improved district culture

The shift toward a more positive school culture suggests greater alignment, engagement and shared ownership across schools.



EDUCATORS AGREE

that working toward personalized learning has improved their district's culture

Higher Attendance

Since these districts implemented personalized, competency-based learning, learners in these districts consistently have slightly higher attendance than those in other districts. This remained true over the past two years. Research shows that each day of attendance matters for achievement.³ Consider these results from the 2023–24 school year:

- Attendance in districts with personalized, competency-based learning was one percentage point higher, equal to almost **two extra days of school per year** for learners in **grades 4-5 and 6-8**
- Attendance was two percentage points higher in districts with personalized, competency-based learning, or nearly **four extra days of school per year** for learners

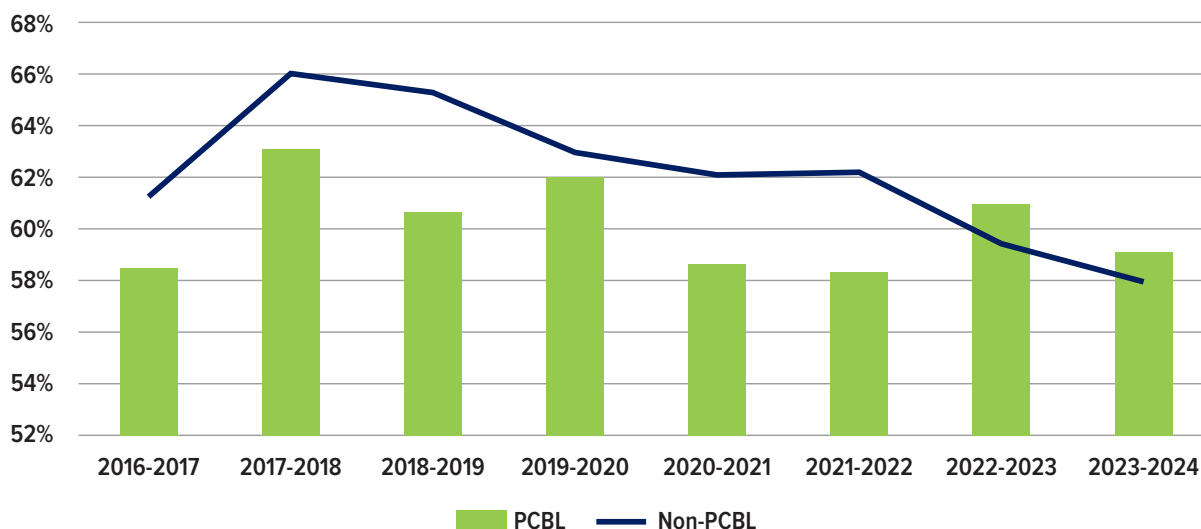
Closing the Gap in Postsecondary Enrollment

Despite national trends of decreasing postsecondary enrollment since COVID-19, learners in districts with personalized, competency-based learning are now enrolling in any postsecondary institution within 12 months of graduation at higher rates than those in districts without personalized, competency-based learning. This continuing trend of higher rates of postsecondary enrollment is more notable given so many years of the gap with other districts.

3. Goodman, J. (2014). *Flaking out: Student absences and snow days as disruptions of instructional time* (NBER Working Paper 20221). Available: <http://www.nber.org/papers/w20221> Gottfried, M. A. (2010). Evaluating the Relationship Between Student Attendance and Achievement in Urban Elementary and Middle Schools: An Instrumental Variables Approach. *American Educational Research Journal*, 47(2), 434-465.

- In **2018-19**, learners in districts with personalized, competency-based learning were **three percentage points less likely** to enroll in postsecondary education within 12 months of graduation compared to those in other districts
- By **2023-24**, that gap had closed—and reversed. Learners in districts with personalized, competency-based learning were **one percentage point more likely** to enroll than peers in other districts

Rates of Postsecondary Enrollment



Where to Learn More

If you're interested in learning more about personalized, competency-based learning in North Dakota, read [Key Findings from the First Five Years of Personalized, Competency-Based Learning in North Dakota](#). Visit KnowledgeWorks.org to learn more about bringing personalized, competency-based learning to your district.



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