



## FACT SHEET

# Update on Competency-Based Systems at the Colorado Department of Education

Over the course of the last several years, districts from all over Colorado have begun to shift toward Competency-Based Systems. As districts and schools make progress toward creating and implementing systems based on ensuring that students demonstrate mastery of content and skills so that every student graduate postsecondary and workforce ready, CDE has worked across the organization to provide support and resources to school and district leaders.

## What are competencies?

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A competency is a demonstration that a student has the ability to transfer learning in and across content areas. All forms of assessment in Competency model are standards-based and criterion-referenced. Formative assessments measure learning progress during the instructional process, and summative assessments are integrated tasks requiring transfer of knowledge and skills, application, and performance in novel settings. One of the key differences in these kinds of systems is that academic grades communicate learning progress and achievement of standards.

In a Competency-Based System, student achievement is evaluated against common learning standards and performance expectations that are consistently applied to all students. In Colorado, we're currently in the process of creating a framework of Competencies aligned to the Colorado Academic Standards, which will be released in summer 2016.

## What are Competency-Based Systems?

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Competency-based systems can help all students reach postsecondary and workforce readiness through the following strategies:

- Students advance upon demonstrated mastery
- Competencies include explicit, measurable, transferable learning objectives that empower students
- Assessment is meaningful and a positive learning experience for students
- Students receive rapid, differentiated support based on their individual learning needs
- Learning outcomes emphasize competencies that include application and creation of knowledge
- The process of reaching learning outcomes encourages students to develop skills and dispositions important for success in college, careers, and citizenship

\*Source: Adapted from Susan Patrick and Chris Sturgis, July 2011, *Cracking the Code: Synchronizing Policy and Practice to Support Personalized Learning*, iNACOL, [http://www.inacol.org/research/docs/iNACOL\\_CrackingCode\\_full\\_report.pdf](http://www.inacol.org/research/docs/iNACOL_CrackingCode_full_report.pdf)

## Next Steps

- Consider sending a representative to meet with K-12 administrators and counselors to discuss and workshop transcripts, and school/district profiles on April 5, 2016



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## What makes a Competency-Based System different?

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- Students matriculate after they have demonstrated mastery of a comprehensive list of competencies
- Learning is designed around a set of competencies aligned with standards
- “Credit” is received once students demonstrate mastery of competencies
- Competency is evaluated on a rating scale, not on an “A” through “F” scale
- Students progress to the next competency when they are ready
- Placement of students is determined by what students know and can do, and what they’re working toward
- Assessments are aligned with competencies, and students may take them whenever they are ready to demonstrate master
- All of this means that students graduate with fewer gaps, and are more prepared for school, work, and life after high school

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## Why are we talking about Competency-Based Systems now?

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- Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness
  - New opportunity with updated Graduation Guidelines and HEA Requirements in Colorado
  - Schools and Districts committed to ensuring students graduate with skills and knowledge necessary for success in Colorado’s economy
- Colorado Academic Standards
  - Increased rigor
  - Application and transferability of skills and knowledge
  - Mastery of Academic and Non-Academic Competencies are necessary for Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness
- Innovation in Teaching and Learning
  - Mastery of Academic and Non-Academic Competencies are necessary for Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness
  - Learning Environment and Systems Characteristics are shifting to focus on learner needs and more personalization
- Schools and Districts from across the country are implementing Competency-Based Systems
  - New Hampshire
  - Maine
  - Nearly 20 districts, including some of the largest in the state, in Colorado in the next few years

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## Opportunities and Questions

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K-12 wants and needs to partner with Higher Education to ensure that all students are well served, and are admissible to Colorado Colleges and Universities upon graduation from a Competency-Based K-12 System.

- **April 5, 2016-** Meeting with Higher Education Representatives and K-12 administrators and Counselors to workshop transcripts, and school and district profiles
- Further conversations as desired to be intentional and aligned with K-12