
State Strategies to Develop Teacher Capacity for Personalized, Competency-Based Learning

Issue

Identifying Policies to Support Developing Teacher Capacity for Personalized, Competency-Based Education. Transforming K-12 education systems to student-centered learning requires teacher capacity for personalized, competency-based education. State policymakers need to consider whether policies are supporting or hindering modernizing systems of teacher and school leader development. There is a need for state educational leaders and stakeholders to revisit the policies and structures of accreditation for teacher preparation programs, educator licensure and certification standards, teacher professional development and educator quality or effectiveness metrics in state accountability systems.

This issue brief will highlight and explain four strategies for states and school districts to transform educator workforce systems to prepare teachers with the skills they need for student-centered learning:

1. Identifying clear, specific educator competencies for personalized, competency-based learning environments;
2. Creating multiple, high-quality pathways to educator credentials and development;
3. Developing educator professional judgment for student-centered learning; and
4. Building assessment literacy.

Background

Developing educator capacity is critical to transforming the education system to student-centered learning.

Educators in the United States can learn from numerous examples across the globe of best practices in contemporary theories of learning, evidence-based approaches, competency-based models, balanced systems of assessments and innovative instructional approaches for increasing learner agency and personalizing learning.

Educator preparation and development systems should prepare educators with the specific knowledge and skills they need to design and implement student-centered learning environments that meet the needs of every student, including a deep understanding of performance assessments and assessment literacy. By transforming educator preparation and development systems to become personalized, competency-based, and focused on the skills educators need to create student-centered learning environments, policymakers will support transformation at scale toward education systems that prepare every student for success in higher education, the modern workforce and as citizens.

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IDENTIFYING CLEAR, SPECIFIC EDUCATOR COMPETENCIES FOR PERSONALIZED, COMPETENCY-BASED LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

A competency-based system of educator preparation and development would provide a seamless continuum in which aspiring educators:

- » Build and master instructional competencies through pre-service preparation;
- » Earn credentials and licensure upon demonstrated mastery of these competencies; and
- » Access customized professional development and evaluation opportunities to ensure continuous improvement throughout their careers.

Clear, specific educator competencies, developed collaboratively with stakeholders, can be a powerful tool to drive coherence in pre-service training, credentialing requirements, recruitment, induction, professional development, evaluation and career pathways along a continuum of professional growth. States could build coherent and aligned systems around what educators need to know and be able to do to succeed in student-centered learning environments.

State policymakers could host a task force or commission to collaborate with educators, school and local leaders, institutions of higher education and experts in the field of competency-based education to identify educator competencies for student-centered learning to drive coherence and alignment in their state's educator preparation and development systems. Designating an appropriate group of educators to identify the educator competencies needed for modern learning environments is crucial and an important first step.

CREATING MULTIPLE, HIGH-QUALITY PATHWAYS TO EDUCATOR CREDENTIALS AND DEVELOPMENT

In a competency-based system, students have multiple, high-quality pathways to high school graduation, higher education and the workplace. In the same way, educators could have multiple, high-quality competency-based pathways throughout their careers to access programs to earn credentials and micro-credentials to support building capacity, career advancement and professional development.

For pre-service training, teaching candidates can experience personalized learning opportunities to build self-regulation and efficacy skills, moving ahead through competency-based progressions with evidence of their learning. They may engage in work-based learning, internships and community-based experiences to gain the range of competencies and skills they need to meet the needs of all students. These pathways would focus on the skills required for student-centered learning models.

Teacher professional development should also be personalized and job-embedded, leveraging mentorships and positive relationships with other educators. Just like students, educators need an array of high-quality pathways to meet their unique professional learning needs.

Personalized learning approaches often catalyze new staffing models and educator roles which empower creativity in the way teachers teach, and learners can learn. Educators are taking on new roles in the design and management of student-centered learning. These new roles are emerging, which create expanded professional opportunities and career pathways including personalized learning coaches, learning sciences researchers, specialized learning designers (such as makerspace and STEM roles), community-connected learning coordinators and other leadership roles. Policymakers and district, network and school leaders should keep these opportunities in mind as they design and implement multiple, high-quality pathways for educators.

DEVELOPING EDUCATOR PROFESSIONAL JUDGMENT FOR STUDENT-CENTERED LEARNING

In competency-based education, it is crucial that educators are empowered and have the professional expertise with systemic supports to make valid and reliable determinations of student mastery. These determinations need to be consistent across classrooms, moderated across schools and evaluated across districts, requiring policymakers to build educator capacity and transform antiquated educator development models, structures and processes.

For students to experience powerful, personalized learning, competency-based systems are structured so that learning can occur at any time, anywhere, at a variable pace and through multiple pathways. These systems depend on valid and reliable professional judgements in assessing a range of evidence to measure deeper learning using performance assessments. Clear and meaningful learning targets with rubrics on what students should know and be able to do with exemplars of evidence are crucial. Effective educator professional judgement is not optional. It is central for change and transformation across the education system.

State and local education leaders need to invest in building educator capacity for assessments for learning and to exercise professional judgement in assessing student learning, effective use of data and the ability to assess a variety of evidence from learner-centered experiences in diverse environments. Building capacity for teacher professional judgment should be a non-negotiable requirement throughout pre-service and professional development to ensure educators can support success for every student.

BUILDING ASSESSMENT LITERACY

In the United States, there is also a dearth of training in assessment literacy. Professional learning to build capacity for calibration and moderation to improve reliability and consistency in grading performance assessments — central to competency-based education — is limited or non-existent. Educator capacity is critical and professional learning on contemporary learning theory must be addressed in educator preparation and ongoing professional learning.

Assessment literacy, defined as “the possession of knowledge about the basic principles of sound assessment practice, including its terminology, the development and use of assessment methodologies and techniques, and familiarity with standards of quality in assessment,”¹ is essential to advancing personalized, competency-based learning. It is critical for educators to develop the professional judgment to reliably and accurately evaluate and determine student mastery in student-centered learning environments.

There is a need to rethink the purpose and role of assessment in education systems. Assessment literacy becomes essential as systems move away from singular, overly-narrow measures of proficiency, to assessing mastery based on multiple forms of evidence using student work. Increased assessment literacy throughout the system will increase trust, improve system quality and support new learning models that help all students succeed.

Practitioners working deeply in competency-based education quickly realize how traditional K-12 education systems lack mechanisms for calibrating the quality of judgements on proficiency levels of student work to ensure consistency across schools and systems. In competency-based education systems, calibration involves groups of educators collaborating to develop consensus around rubrics for scoring student work. The calibration process makes scoring consistent and more aligned to standards.

Professional development of educators to assess evidence of student learning, consistency developed using moderation processes, and calibrated rubrics to evaluate performance tasks are central to transformation at scale with new systems of assessments that support personalized, competency-based education.

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¹ Assessment Literacy. New Zealand Ministry of Education. Retrieved from <http://assessment.tki.org.nz/Assessment-in-the-classroom/Assessment-for-learning-in-practice/Assessment-literacy>.

Recommendations for State Policymakers to Support Developing Educator Capacity for Personalized, Competency-Based Education

The following are action steps for state policymakers to consider to begin the transformation of educator workforce systems:

- » **Action Step #1:** Support and engage with a working group composed of a diverse cross-section of educators, school leaders, district leaders, students, state leaders and experts working across the field of competency-based education to “define the space” for the capacity and supports needed for a next generation educator workforce that is designed to advance equity and competency-based learning.
- » **Action Step #2:** Learn about promising practices, programs and policies to transform the educator workforce in the state and around the country by engaging with experts, researchers and practitioners.
- » **Action Step #3:** Learn how high-performing countries have incorporated the core concept of assessment literacy into their education systems by engaging with experts, researchers and practitioners, and/or through an international study tour.
- » **Action Step #4:** Enumerate assessment literacy as a core principle to transform education to personalized, competency-based learning in certification, licensure and accreditation standards.
- » **Action Step #5:** Engage with diverse stakeholders to identify challenges and opportunities, and to define the goals for an effort to redesign the systems that build and certify educator capacity, including:
 - Defining and understanding the competencies educators need to design, implement and lead new personalized, competency-based learning models;
 - Addressing barriers to creating, scaling and accrediting innovative leadership and educator preparation models; and
 - Assessing implications for accreditation, licensure and certification standards and teacher quality or effectiveness metrics in state accountability systems.



Conclusion

To support transformation at scale to personalized, competency-based learning for students, there is an urgent need to modernize and align educator preparation and development systems. It is time to take action to move beyond outdated systems of educator pre-service preparation, certification, professional development and evaluation to transition to a coherent, competency-based educator professional learning system.

The vision is for competency-based pathways for educators through coherent and aligned preparation and development systems designed to enable educators to build and master the skills, competencies and knowledge needed to thrive in modern, student-centered learning environments.

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