

**TO:** The Kentucky State Board of Education

**FROM:** KnowledgeWorks Foundation

**DATE:** January, 2023

**RE:** Overview of Personalized, Competency-Based Education Related to Kentucky

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This memo provides a brief overview of the what and the why behind personalized, competency-based education in Kentucky, outlines important policy areas that impact practice, and identifies potential roles for the Kentucky State Board of Education (KBE) in this work.

### What is It?

Personalized, competency-based education represents a systemic approach to K-12 education centered on creating engaging learning experiences customized to each student's strengths, needs, and interests. Students in a personalized, competency-based system collaborate with educators to determine when, how, and at what pace they will master clear and transparent learning objectives to ensure they are supported and challenged as they advance toward mastery. These objectives are grounded in larger competencies articulating what students will have mastered by graduation. [This resource](#) provides a more detailed comparison between traditional and competency-based learning environments.

### Why is KDE supporting this approach?

In 2021, Commissioner of Education Jason Glass led a statewide listening tour that culminated in the [United We Learn report](#). Among its many findings, Kentuckians expressed their desire for a more personalized education system that values each learner as an individual. The Kentucky Coalition for Advancing Education (KCAE) and the more recent Kentucky [United We Learn Council](#) (KUWL) were created to build on and operationalize the report's vision, which includes supporting schools and districts across the state seeking to adopt personalized, competency-based education practices.

### Important policy areas

Creating and sustaining a personalized, competency-based system requires engagement with [almost every aspect of state education policy](#). The KUWL Council's policy work will center on the following subset of these policy areas:

- **Creating a Student-Centered Vision.** Communities need to craft a vision for the skills, knowledge, and dispositions that students should have when they graduate. This should be accompanied by a roadmap and expectations for how students will demonstrate mastery in these areas. This vision is often articulated in a portrait of a graduate, such as was recently adopted by [Kentucky](#), as well as an aligned set of [competencies](#) such as Kentucky's Performance Outcomes or those created locally, that show how students will progress in their mastery. Once created, states may opt to create systems and structures that support implementation of the portrait and aligned competencies. [Utah's](#) State Board of Education developed [a number](#) of support tools including P-20 rubrics and an accompanying grant program. [South Carolina](#) created an [office of personalized learning](#) that has built intentional [professional development](#) for educators focused on implementing their portrait and aligned competencies.

- **Rethinking Assessment Structures.** While federally-mandated state assessment systems drive many local education decisions, states have a range of opportunities to rethink how and what their assessment systems might look like to support the deeper learning sought through personalized, competency-based education. Ideally, states can and should develop more balanced assessment systems that support instruction while still providing the information needed to inform policy and resource decisions. States like [Utah](#) have taken steps to create state-level task forces to explore ways to better align summative assessment systems to their portrait or profile of a graduate, while others like [New Mexico](#) have created innovative assessment communities of practice with a specific focus on more meaningful graduation assessments. [This resource](#) gives more examples of state activity in this area and [this resource](#) offers recommendations to states.
- **Reinventing Accountability.** Similar to assessments, states do have some flexibility to innovate within federally-mandated state accountability systems and structures to support personalized, competency-based learning. While assessment innovation to date is still in its infancy, some states are working to create a possible path forward. [Colorado](#) has established and funded a local accountability pilot program allowing local systems to use additional measures for indicators of student success. [Vermont](#) uses its education quality reviews to provide a more comprehensive snapshot of school quality, considering inputs such as the level of personalization in a school building to determine how well students are being served. [This resource](#) includes additional ideas for accelerating assessment and accountability innovation.
- **Reimagining Graduation Requirements.** While traditional high school graduation requirements can lock students into predetermined pathways, more creative graduation requirements can help foster the growth of personalized, competency-based learning. Focusing on broader learning objectives expands the universe of opportunities where students can earn credit towards graduation, such as through community-based work or college and career experiences. While Kentucky already offers significant flexibility to students [within its existing graduation requirements](#), policymakers could consider examples from other states to build on these policies. [New Mexico](#) has created a community of practice to pilot new approaches that give alternatives to traditional test-based graduation requirements, [Rhode Island](#) is moving away from time-based requirements entirely, and [Vermont](#) has actively integrated flexible pathways to graduation with personalized learning approaches.

### State board next steps

Kentucky's state board has already taken an important step forward by establishing a statewide profile of a graduate. In the coming months, board members will receive bi-monthly updates on the council's work. Members can and should take the opportunity during these updates to both ask questions and identify areas where the board's authority can impact policy. The board can also use these briefings to identify other related areas where action may be required, such as teacher preparation and certification. Lastly, board members can begin to learn more about what this work looks like on the ground by engaging Kentucky's Local Laboratories of Learning cohort of schools, which are leading the way in building the models that will be used to inform the work of the KUWL council.

## Select resources and links from this memo for additional reading

- Traditional versus Personalized, Competency-Based Learning  
<https://knowledgeworks.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/traditional-education-versus-personalized-competency-based-learning.pdf>
- State Policy Framework for Personalized Learning  
<https://knowledgeworks.org/get-empowered/policy-resources/state-policy-framework-personalized-learning/>
- What Are Learning Competencies?  
<https://knowledgeworks.org/get-help/district-partnerships/learning-competencies/>
- Measuring Forward: Emerging Trends in K-12 Assessment Innovation  
<https://knowledgeworks.org/resources/emerging-trends-k12-assessment-innovation/>
- Accelerating Assessment and Accountability Innovation  
<https://knowledgeworks.org/resources/student-centered-assessment-accountability-innovation-state-recommendations/>



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