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Legislative Report Competency-based Education

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HOUSE FILE 215: COMPETENCY-BASED EDUCATION

House File 215 provided for development of competency-based education (CBE) in Iowa through a group of districts that will investigate, pilot, and study CBE. The Iowa CBE Collaborative (the Collaborative) was formed to fulfill that legislation.

House File 215 legislation also required a report be filed each year on January 15 until 2019. This report is submitted as the third of those reports and outlines the continuing work of the Iowa CBE Collaborative.

IOWA CBE COLLABORATIVE MEMBERSHIP

Ten Iowa school districts that participate:

Cedar Rapids	Mason City
Collins-Maxwell	Muscatine
East Union	Nevada
Howard-Winneshiek	Spirit Lake
Marshalltown	Van Meter

Area Education Agencies that participate:

Keystone	Mississippi Bend
267	Grant Wood
Prairie Lakes	Northwest
Great Prairie	

Institutions of Higher Education that participate:

Iowa State University	University of Northern Iowa
Drake University	Hawkeye Community College
Simpson College	Kirkwood Community College

External Partners:

West Wind Education Policy, Iowa City
Innovation Lab Networks, Council of Chief State School Officers, Washington, D.C.

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ANALYSIS OF STATUS AND PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

Principles of Competency-based Education: The Iowa CBE Collaborative operates within the Iowa Department of Education (DE) [Guidelines for Competency-based Education](#). The *Guidelines* include the principles, characteristics, and definitions associated with competency-based education. The Principles of Competency-based Education are:

1. Students advance upon proficiency.
2. Competencies are based on enduring understandings and require the transfer of knowledge, skills, and the [Universal Constructs](#) to complex situations in and/or across content areas and/or beyond the classroom.
3. Assessment is meaningful and a positive learning experience for students.
4. Students receive rapid, differentiated support based on their individual learning needs.
5. All learning is validated regardless of when, where, or how students acquired and/or demonstrated the learning.

Characteristics of a Competency-based System: These Characteristics and the indicators under each are included in the [Guidelines for Competency-based Education](#). The purpose of the characteristics is to guide districts toward implementation. Analysis of the status of the project centers on these characteristics:

1. The district has strong internal and external stakeholder commitment to and involvement in district-wide competency-based education.
2. The district nurtures a culture of continuous improvement.
3. The district adopts policies and procedures to support a competency-based system.
4. Competencies and scoring documents align with the Universal Constructs and the appropriate standards (Early Learning Standards, the Iowa Core standards, and other content standards not yet a part of the Iowa Core).
5. Assessments are a meaningful and positive learning experience for students.
6. Learning environment is student-centered and personalized.
7. Leadership is purposefully shared throughout the system.
8. Credit/advancement is based upon demonstration of proficiency.
9. The district provides technical and structural supports for teachers, students, and parents/guardians.
10. The district provides smooth transitions within and beyond the PreK-12 experience.

Analysis of the Status: CBE has proven to be a process that must allow for each district to find its own pathway. Although all districts have done some things similarly such as reviewing and revising policies to remove barriers to CBE, they are all moving forward in different ways as they make connection to other work they are doing and their community resources.

The DE contracted with a third party research organization to collect and analyze data focused on the Characteristics of a Competency-based System (above). Interview teams conducted

focused interviews with each of the ten Collaborative districts. District administrators and teachers were interviewed, and in some cases students were also interviewed. The research company then did a comprehensive analysis of the interview transcripts and created summaries of the data.

The data from those summaries is being used to create the DE action plan for moving forward with the work and to purposefully plan the Collaborative meetings for the next year.

Action Planning: The interview data in Table One and Table Two have been used to guide the DE action planning toward support of the districts. These two tables outline what work each district is currently doing toward becoming a competency-based system.

Table One: District Work toward Becoming a Competency-based System.

Districts:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Getting Started	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Action Planning		X	X							X
Standards Based Grading	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Self-Directed Learning/Preparing Students		X				X	X	X	X	X
Policies and Procedures	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Identified polices to change		X	X		X		X	X	X	
Creating new procedural supports			X							
Continuous Improvement	X		X	X		X				X
Learning Environment	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Anytime-Anywhere	X			X	X					X
Blended Learning	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		
Cross-disciplinary learning	X		X		X	X			X	X
Life Skills				X						X
Personalized Learning		X			X	X				X
Project-Based Learning	X		X	X	X					X

Self-Pacing	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	
Student Voice and Feedback	X		X	X		X				X
Shared Leadership	X		X	X	X	X	X		X	X
Changes in School/District Leadership	X		X	X	X				X	X
Differences between elem & sec team members			X							
Differences between middle & HS team members					X					
Commitment to Shared Leadership	X			X		X	X			
Stakeholders	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
School Board support	X			X				X		X
Parent Support	X					X				X
Business/Community Support				X	X	X	X			X
School Board Resistance			X				X			
Teacher Resistance		X	X	X			X		X	
Resistance: Students who achieve in a traditional system			X						X	
Technical/Structural Support	X	X		X	X			X		X
Facilities										X
Technology challenges	X	X								X
No technology challenges				X	X			X		

Table Two: Specific Work Each District is Currently Doing to Transition.

Districts	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Course/Year Pilot Elem		X								
Course/Year Pilot Sec	X		X			X		X		
Short-term Pilot*							X		X	X
Stakeholder Engagement: School Board	X		X	X	X	X		X		
Parents	X	X	X		X	X	X			X
Community					X	X	X	X		
Professional Development	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X
Visiting Other Districts				X		X		X	X	X
Introducing Standards-based	X	X	X		X	X		X	X	
Using Standards-based	X	X					X	X	X	X
Writing Competencies	X		X	X	X	X	X		X	
Project-based Learning	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X
Blended Learning**	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		

* Short-Term Pilot Programs are primarily a two week or a month long project-based learning opportunity offered to all students in a specific grade or class.

** Blended learning: Any formal education program 1) in which a student learns at least in part through online learning, with some element of student control over time, place, path, and/or pace **and** 2) the student learns at least in part in a supervised brick-and-mortar location away from home **and** 3) the modalities along each student's learning path within a course or subject are connected to provide an integrated learning experience.

Collaborative Meetings: Interview data that is being used to guide planning for the Collaborative meetings is included in Table Three, Table Four, and Table Five. They outline the support districts reported they need to move forward (Table Three), what has been working for them in the Collaborative meetings (Table Four), and what has been not been working for them in the Collaborative meetings (Table Five).

Table Three: District Reported Need of Support

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Diverse Student Population	X	X								
Preparing Students for Self-directed Learning	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Data Systems	X	X	X	X	X				X	
Competencies	X		X	X	X	X		X		
Leadership/Changes in Leadership	X		X	X	X					X
Stakeholder Engagement		X	X		X		X	X	X	
Managing Pushback										
Team Member Differences			X		X					
CBE in Elementary		X	X							X
Pilot/Project Evaluation				X						X
Scaling Up		X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Capacity Building		X				X				

Table Three: What Worked in the Collaborative as a Whole?

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Professional Development, Speakers	X			X			X	X	X	
Networking	X		X		X	X		X	X	X
Team Time	X		X	X		X			X	
State Support	X				X					X

Table Four: What Did Not Work in the Collaborative as a Whole?

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Unclear about individual's Roles at Collaborative Meetings	X	X	X	X						
Time Commitment for Meetings/Finding Substitutes	X	X						X	X	X
Meeting Content		X							X	X
Meeting Structure			X	X	X					X
Collaborative Cohesion		X	X							

Preliminary Findings: Another set of data the DE has been collecting is from the notes of monthly updates and coaching calls between the DE consultant and the district point of contact and the notes of visits to the districts by the DE consultant.

Findings are very preliminary and more qualitative than quantitative at this point. Year 1 (2013-14) was a year of investigating, defining, and learning for the Collaborative as a whole. Although some districts tried a few things that year, they started making changes in Year 2 (2014-15). Since the Collaborative is in the middle of Year 3 (2015-16) now, data have only been analyzed through Year 2.

Most districts started with just a few teachers/classrooms making the transition in Year 2 and have expanded to others in Year 3. None of the districts have full systems or even full buildings or grade levels making the transition at this point. For this reason, although a few quantitative data can be included, “preliminary findings” are more qualitative. Examples of what districts are reporting include:

- Students involved in transformative learning environments for even part of the day are more engaged and excited about learning even in their traditional courses.
- Teachers are more engaged and motivated to experiment and try new things as they learn their students’ needs and passions and how to connect learning to those needs and passions.
- Students outside the “pilots” in the districts speak up about what they see happening and request those things as well:
 - Better relationships with teachers
 - More rigorous ways to engage with content
- Parents move from apprehensive to supportive to advocating for the transitions.
- Community members contact the schools to ask how they can help and become engaged in the new learning environment.

- Administrators report that teachers who are not in the Collaborative work as asking if they can go ahead and get started rather than wait for the projected two or three year roll out.
- Teachers are paying more attention to the Universal Constructs (creativity, critical thinking, collaboration, complex communication, flexibility/adaptability, and productivity/accountability) than they ever have before and are working toward them as an end goal for students.
- District leaders of the transformation report that three things are key in making the transition: 1) learn about what it is, 2) go see it in action, and 3) action planning comes after intense conversations, both the spontaneous conversations that happen after a day of study and site visits and the facilitated purposeful planning conversations.
- In one district, the teacher who started the process of transition reported that the average rate of growth for his students was 2.5 years (2014-15). He reported that one student who entered his sixth grade math classes as an average student showed 3 full years of growth and was being placed in advance math in 7th grade. All but one of his 80 students reached proficiency. Not enough for him—his goal is 100%.