Written Testimony to the Ohio House Finance Committee
In Support of H.B. 64, Competency-Based Education Pilot Program
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Chairman Smith and members of the House Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of the competency-based education pilot program found in H.B. 64.

For the record, my name is Susan Patrick, President of iNACOL, a non-profit organization with the mission to ensure all students have access to a world-class education and quality blended and online learning opportunities that prepare them for a lifetime of success.

If passed, H.B. 64 would be an important step for Ohio to begin to provide competency-based learning environments to all Ohio students. The bill would appropriate $2.5 million for grants to implement competency-based learning in 10 school districts, community schools, or STEM schools. These grants would provide the seed money needed for districts to build human capital systems that can support a shift to new learning models. These funds are critical to developing capacity within school districts to drive change and to support educators doing the difficult work of redesigning schooling.

We have seen across the country that as districts progress in this transformative work, they begin to identify the policy and regulatory barriers to their continued success and progress. When this occurs, states can take the opportunity to transition from providing start-up funds, to supporting the removal of those barriers.

What is Competency Education?

Competency education centers on the idea of moving to a system built on demonstration of mastery, rather than simply a fixed amount of time in a classroom. It is drawing interest from educators and policymakers alike.

Competency education is rooted in the notion that education is about mastering a set of skills and knowledge, not just moving through a grade level with varying gaps in knowledge.

The five-part working definition of competency education states that:
- Students advance upon mastery;
- Competencies include explicit, measurable, transferable learning objectives that empower students;
- Assessment is meaningful and a positive learning experience for students;
- Students receive timely, differentiated support based on their individual learning needs; and

- Learning outcomes emphasize competencies that include application and creation of knowledge, along with the development of important skills and dispositions.

High-quality competency-based education systems are necessary for personalizing learning at scale. Too many schools still advance students based on the passage of time rather than learning mastery.

Many states have advanced policies to provide room for competency-based pathways – and there is a growing movement to ensure all students demonstrate the skills, knowledge, and deeper learning to be successful in a global economy. A number of these states have implemented similar programs with levels of authorized funding that are in line with those in H.B. 64, and we are seeing promising results from those schools and districts of innovation.

Education leaders across major world economies share the same goals: to improve student performance and increase equitable outcomes. High-performing countries are investing in a shift towards personalization and competency education. We published an international report on competency education in 2014 – *Postcards from Abroad: An International Scan of Competency Education* – which highlights global trends.

State Policymakers are Advancing Competency Education

Competency education is being advanced in 40 states across the country, but is best described as a locally-driven and an educator-led reform. School leaders are designing innovative new models all over the United States, contributing to our knowledge of new ways to organize teaching and learning in competency-based systems and to empower teachers to personalize learning in ways never before possible.

State approaches to scaling competency education vary from credit flexibility to implementing "move on when ready" policies and proficiency-based diplomas to developing innovation zones and pilot programs. For a few examples, New Hampshire has moved entirely away from seat time, basing progression, credits, and diplomas on student mastery of competencies. They are piloting a competency-aligned system of assessments and accountability that was recently approved by the US Department of Education. Kentucky and Arkansas are providing flexibility around certain rules and regulations to enable the implementation of competency-based, personalized learning environments.

The map below shows where states are around the country on implementing policies that enable competency education.

Competency-based Education State Policy 2015
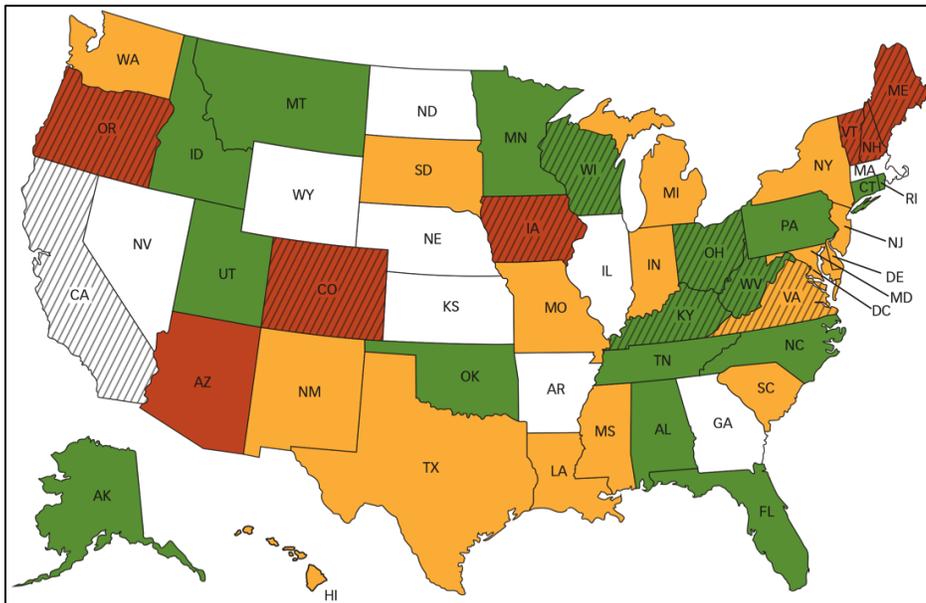
Advanced States
Those states with clear policies that are moving towards proficiency-based; more than just an option.

Developing States
Those states with pilots of competency education, credit flexibility policies, or advanced next gen policies for equivalents to seat-time.

Emerging States
Those states with waivers, task forces.

ILN States
Since its inception, the Innovation Lab Network (ILN) engaged schools, districts, and state education agencies working to identify through local efforts new designs for public education that empower each student to thrive as a productive learner, worker, and citizen. The state's responsibility is to establish conditions in which innovation can flourish and to develop capacity to sustain and scale what works through policy. The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) facilitates this network of states to support programmatic, policy, and structure design work within each participating states and across the network.

No Policies in Competency Education

State leadership is critical to effectively scaling competency education. State policymakers can support this shift by:

1. Removing barriers based on seat-time;
2. Realigning accountability and systems of assessments; and
3. Providing support to districts and schools as they transition to competency education.

District Leadership is the Driving Force

Across the country, districts have been the driving force behind the shift to personalized learning. Superintendents and principals who have converted districts and schools to competency-based education all refer to the growing realization that, the practice of advancing students to the next grade level regardless of whether they have demonstrated mastery of the skills undermines programs, initiatives, or policy reforms designed to improve student achievement. By contrast, in a system that is designed to ensure all students are successful in school, students can learn at any time and in any place, have extended and varied learning opportunities, and experience truly personalized learning.

For example, Pittsfield School District in New Hampshire has created a dynamic extended learning program that enables students to build skills, demonstrate competencies, earn credit from experiences gained outside of the school environment, and gain college credits through partner higher education institutions. These Extended Learning Opportunities (ELOs) integrate with the competency-based structure by

connecting the learning experiences to core content areas. Each student's ELOs may be different based on the student's interests and mastery of content; however, most ELOs are based on research, require student reflection, and require demonstrations of mastery, often through presentations or projects linked to state academic standards.

What Does Competency Education Look Like for Students?

In a competency-based learning environment, students know exactly what they are learning and what proficiency looks like. Rubrics for measuring and calibrating proficiency and mastery are readily available, and there are examples of student exemplary work. Students can see where they are on their learning progressions and what they will need to show to demonstrate mastery. Students should be able to tell you what they are working on, how they will be assessed, how to get extra support if they need it, and what they will learn next.

Why is Competency Education Important?

Our knowledge-based economy is becoming increasingly complex. Students, more than ever, need to graduate prepared for tomorrow's economy. They must be able to continually learn, think critically, solve complex problems, and communicate effectively.

Unfortunately, our current assembly-line education model—based on fixed time, place, curriculum, and pace—was not designed to get all students to this high bar. In competency-based education, before students move on, they must demonstrate that they have mastered every competency, especially those requiring higher-level thinking and the application of knowledge in different situations.

Conclusion

H.B. 64 provides the needed flexibility and funding to give districts and schools the ability to design school models based on competency-based learning models to ensure every student is successful.

iNACOL has published various reports over the past five years on competency-based education and would be pleased to provide any technical assistance to support your forward-thinking efforts in Ohio. For instance, we have developed a brief called, "Necessary for Success: A State Policymaker's Guide to Competency Education."

About iNACOL
The mission of the International Association for K-12 Online Learning (iNACOL) is to ensure all students have access to a world-class education and quality blended and online learning opportunities that prepare them for a lifetime of success. iNACOL is a non-profit organization focused on research; developing policy for student-centered education to ensure equity and access; developing quality standards for emerging learning models using online, blended, and competency-based education; and supporting the ongoing professional development of classroom, school, district and

state leaders for new learning models. You can learn more about our work and our mission at www.inacol.org and you can access all of iNACOL's resources regarding competency education at http://www.inacol.org/resources/publications/competency-education.