



**Testimony to the Ohio House Finance Subcommittee on Primary and Secondary
Education regarding Competency-Based Education
Susan Patrick, President and Chief Executive Officer, iNACOL
March 18, 2015**

Chairman Cupp and members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to speak 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. iNACOL is 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. I am here to testify in support of the competency-based education pilot program.

The competency-based education pilot program found in H.B. 64 is an important step for Ohio to begin to make this transition towards providing competency-based learning environments to Ohio students.

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

In 2015, forty states have advanced policies to provide room for competency-based pathways – and there is a growing movement to ensure our students demonstrate the skills, knowledge and deeper learning to be successful in a global economy.

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-based education in 2014, called, *Postcards from Abroad: An International Scan of Competency Education* – highlighting global trends in competency-based education.

Competency-based learning 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, and is drawing interest from educators and state policy makers 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-based 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

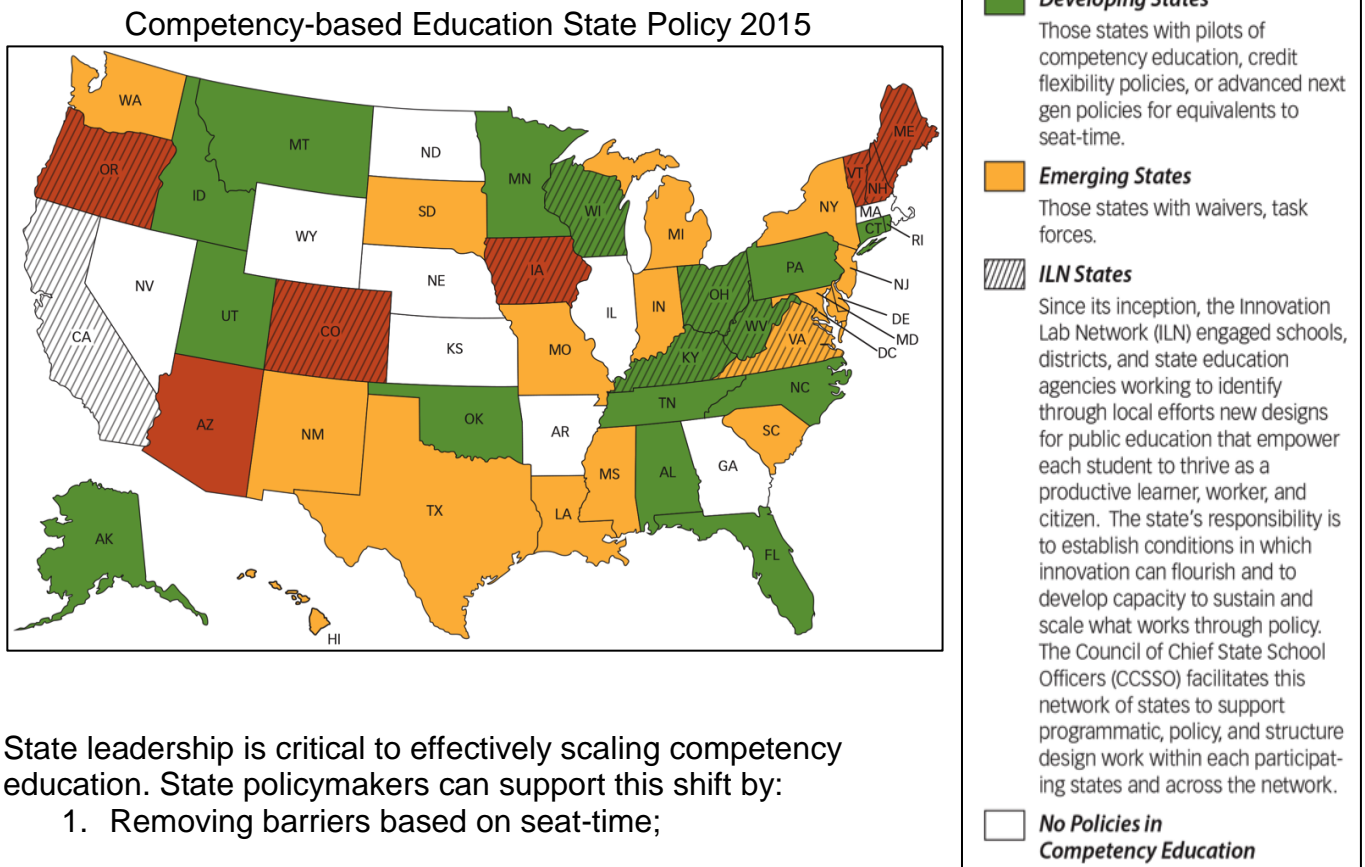
- Learning outcomes emphasize competencies that include application and creation of knowledge, along with the development of important skills and dispositions.

State Policy Makers are Advancing Competency-based Learning

Competency-based 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 empowering 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.



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 assistance and support to districts and schools as they transition to competency education.

iNACOL is available to provide the technical assistance needed as you develop policies that will enable competency education. For instance, we have developed a brief called, "[Necessary for Success: A State Policymaker's Guide to Competency Education](#)." You can click [here](#) to see all of iNACOL's resources regarding competency education.

District Leadership is the Driving Force

Across the country, districts have been the driving force for the conversion to personalization. Superintendents and principals who have converted schools to competency-based education all refer to the growing realization that, simply put, the practice of advancing students to the next grade level regardless of whether they had demonstrated mastery of the skills undermined any programs, initiatives, or policy reforms. They can begin to imagine what a system that is designed so all students are successful in school might look like, so that students can learn at any time and any place, have extended learning opportunities and have more personalized learning opportunities.

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 even partner with higher education institutions to gain college credits. These Extended Learning Opportunities (ELOs) integrate with the competency-based structure by connecting the learning experience to core content areas. Each ELO is different based on student interest and location on the progression, but shares a commonality of involving research, reflection, and a presentation or project that links to the state academic standards.

What Does Competency Education Look Like?

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. There may be posters on the wall for students to indicate where they are on their learning progression. 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.

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 ability to apply knowledge in different situations.

We have published a number of reports in 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.

Conclusion

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

Chairman Cupp, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of H.B. 64. I welcome any questions.