Defining Competency-Based Education in Michigan

To be successful, when they graduate from high school, students need the skills and knowledge to earn a self-sustaining wage and participate in postsecondary opportunities without the need for remediation. This includes competency in academic content, Social-Emotional Learning (SEL), and 21st century skills, and it is imperative that we prepare our students in a way that is different than how we have done so in the past. This document was developed in collaboration with practitioners across the state, the C-BE Steering Committee, and C-BE pilot districts.

In Michigan, C-BE aligns significantly with the Top 10 in 10 Strategic Goal #2 (Implement, with strong district and building leadership, high-quality instruction in every classroom through a highly coherent, child-centered instructional model where students meet their self-determined academic and personal goals to their highest potential.) This important connection stresses the need to support local districts in implementing C-BE. To do this, Michigan has invested in C-BE through legislative funding. Current policy allows schools to implement C-BE in multiple ways, including flexibility in the Michigan Merit curriculum (MMC), testing out, postsecondary enrollment options, project-based learning and other mechanisms to personalize learning for students.

Education leaders from across the state and country endorse the following primary components as a working definition of Competency-Based Education:

- Students are empowered daily to make important decisions about their learning experiences, how they will create and apply knowledge, and how they will demonstrate their learning.

- Assessment is a meaningful, positive, and empowering learning experience for students that yields timely, relevant, and actionable evidence.

- Students receive timely, differentiated support based on their individual learning needs.

- Students progress based on evidence of mastery, not seat time.

- Students learn actively using different pathways and varied pacing.

- Strategies to ensure equity for all students are embedded in the culture, structure, and pedagogy of schools and education systems.

- Rigorous, common expectations for learning (knowledge, skills, and dispositions) are explicit, transparent, measurable, and transferable.

This working definition provides the framework for guiding practice in Michigan. Additionally, CompetencyWorks provides a detailed definition of C-BE based on these components. This definition of C-BE is aligned with the definitions established in Michigan for Personalized Learning, Personalized Teaching, and Educational Technology. The term Personalized Learning is often used when discussing C-BE related to the learning experience for students. Michigan has created the following definition:

Personalized learning occurs when the student has a degree of choice over his or her

education in terms of delivery, context, and pacing. Individual outcomes and how proficiency will be demonstrated is collaboratively defined by the student and the teacher. The student's interests, experiences, and abilities guide his or her learning, making new information more relevant and meaningful. This approach has the potential to build the student's capacity and desire to learn beyond the scope of the curriculum and the confines of the classroom.

Michigan has also created the following definition for Personalized Teaching to address instruction and the interaction between students and teachers:

Personalized teaching is the continual collaboration between the teacher and the student, with the teacher facilitating, mentoring, and monitoring of student choices about personal learning plans. It incorporates flexibility within the learning environment to allow student needs to drive instructional strategies, assessments, use of time, and materials. Connecting a student's instruction to his or her personal interests, experiences, and abilities, fosters a greater sense of ownership and efficacy in the student.

Assessment

A C-BE system wherein students advance based upon demonstrated mastery requires a comprehensive assessment system that combines assessment for learning (formative assessment) that guides learning toward the achievement of explicit, measurable and transferable learning competencies with assessment of learning (summative assessments) that provides students with the opportunity to demonstrate mastery aligned to learning objectives and competencies. To achieve learning outcomes that include the application of knowledge and the development of skills and dispositions, assessment must be a meaningful and positive learning experience for students. Formative assessment should be embedded in learning and provide opportunities for students to continue to work toward mastery of learning objectives when they are "not yet proficient." Summative assessment should emphasize deeper learning and application of skills and dispositions and should accurately and explicitly measure the competencies defined by learning objectives.

Myths

There are several myths associated with C-BE. As we continue to build capacity and support relevant models, it is important to address these myths. The following are the most common:

- C-BE is exclusively or solely an online program. While many effective models utilize technology as a tool to improve education, students are still engaged in learning through effective instructional practices based on the components of C-BE.

- C-BE eliminates the need for teachers. In C-BE systems the teacher is the most critical element in providing instruction for students and assessing proficiency levels.

- C-BE only focuses on academic content. Michigan schools continue to express the need for students to have the SEL and 21st century skills necessary to succeed, and many are working hard at including these components in their approach to addressing the needs of the whole child.

- C-BE does not provide structure and allows students to fall behind. C-BE systems allow students to move at their own pace, and this includes ensuring that a Multi-Tiered System of Supports exists for students. Instruction in these systems includes

deadlines, and the instruction is designed around application of skills and knowledge.

- Colleges won't accept students from C-BE schools. C-BE reporting includes rich information regarding student achievement that offers details on the content and skills demonstrated by students, often through assessments that allow students to demonstrate mastery and application in multiple ways.

- C-BE depends on technology. While technology is an effective tool that can be used to enhance instruction, it does not drive C-BE. The Michigan definition for Educational Technology stresses how the technology is used as a tool to improve student outcomes. The appropriate use of technology in learning is paramount. The definition is as follows:

   Educational technology is essential to the implementation of personalized learning When used effectively, educational technology increases the access and engagement of educators and students in a system designed to adapt to the needs of the learner and support the customization of the learner's teaching and learning.

   Effective use of education technology increases the engagement of educators, students, and peers with learning goals by providing students with more control over their learning.

Another way to express the transition to C-BE is to look at how some of the traditional systems compare to C-BE. The graphic below provides an overview of some of those differences.

Traditional Systems	VS	Competency-Based Systems
Based on **Participation** and **Seat Time**	Credit	Based on **Proficiency** in **Content Standards**
Dependent on Lesson Delivery by **Teacher**	Content Pacing	Variable Based on **Student** Mastery
Based on **Marking Periods** or **Courses**	Reporting	Based on **Learning Targets** or **Competencies**
Measure what **Students Know**	Assessments	Measure what **Students Know** and **Can Do**
Delivered and Assessed in **Classrooms**	Content	Delivered and Assessed through **Multiple Pathways** Including Out of School Activities