



## Competency Based Systems

In a competency based system schools must show that students are advancing not just by demonstrating growth in learning, but also by demonstrating competency in the understanding and application of content knowledge.

A system that ensures we know all students is critical if we are going to support their engagement in a personalized, competency based approach to learning. This relationship will be developed and nurtured by teachers and advisors in an advisory program. The ultimate purpose of the advisor-student relationship is to translate each student's needs and aspirations into goals that define a clear pathway to college and career options. The personal learning plan (PLP) will be the 'map' that explains the details and progress towards achievement. The PLP will include a digital portfolio, allowing a collection of student work in multiple formats.

Since the steps to achievement of personal goals might not be fully realized in a traditional classroom setting, the advisor will connect the student to ELO opportunities that will help prepare them for success – including community-based learning, online coursework, and independent projects. The PLP will be reviewed each year (with students and families) to ensure goals mature and change along with the student. This annual review will be situated in a student-led conference, where the student presents their PLP and evidence of academic progress (through their digital portfolio) to the teacher, advisor, family members, and possibly other community members.

CSSR's approach to learning and engagement draws on the best knowledge and experience available as we move towards an environment where all students:

- Understand the competencies they must master in order to earn a diploma
- Are able to demonstrate mastery of competencies in a variety of meaningful, personalized ways.
- Explore and discover meaningful learning opportunities both within and outside the traditional school building and school day.
- Are encouraged to explore academic and career pathways, including setting and tracking their progress toward meaningful short and long term goals.
- And, with the support of parents and educators, all students—understand that what they are learning is key to their success in accomplishing their goals.



As students transition into a system where all coursework is described in terms of demonstrating proficiency, the importance and relevance of content becomes clear to each student. Competencies will be created and implemented in all high schools in the district. Competencies will meet the most rigorous level of competencies using the in New Hampshire Competency Validation Rubric to guide competency development:

- Align with national, state, and/or local standards/ frameworks; areas may be combined or clustered for learning.
- Articulate in a clear and descriptive way what is important in understanding the content area.
- Connect the content to higher concepts across content areas.
- Include skills that are transferable across content areas and applicable to real-life situations.
- Require an understanding of relationships between/among theories, principles, and/or concepts.
- Require deep understanding of content as well as application of knowledge to a variety of settings.
- Ask students to create conceptual connections and exhibit a level of understanding that is beyond the stated facts or literal interpretation and defend their position or point of view through application of content.
- Promote complex connections through creating, analyzing, designing, proving, developing, or formulating
- Define what is to be measured in clear and descriptive language.
- Promote multiple and varied opportunities to demonstrate evidence of learning in interdisciplinary fashion.

When schools are organized around rigorous competencies, learning shifts from "taking a course" to demonstrating proficiency of complex, clearly defined learning objectives. When schools are organized around personalized pathways to mastery, learning shifts from a standard sequence of courses (adult controlled) to the selection of personally relevant learning activities that are student controlled. As this becomes foundational to school culture, students will understand how knowledge, concepts and skills connect to their personal goals.

Demonstration of mastery in an ELO includes doing original research, a written reflection, and development of a product and an exhibition of the learning achieved through the ELO. Students in high schools have the opportunity to engage in deep learning experiences through the widespread use of extended learning experiences. ELO's allow students to earn credit for challenging work they do outside of the traditional classroom environment such as internships, community service projects



and online coursework. The ELO process requires involvement in the community to enhance exposure to a wider array of cultural differences.

Personalized learning recommendations are embodied in the Personal Learning Plan developed with each student, with the guidance of their teacher of record and family. As we move towards a system of personalized and deeper learning for each student, our concept of 'teacher of record' shifts to encompass a primary mentor/advisor role. We envision the teacher of record working closely with the guidance counselor to leverage the strengths of both for the benefit of each student. At the elementary level classroom teachers will collaborate with families to develop a student personal learning plan, which will provide them with a detailed understanding of each student's knowledge and skills. Through this PLP process, teachers, advisors, families and students will have access to student achievements and goals, and will be able to view their learning recommendations and pathways to achieving their goals.

Through the PLP process each student will be provided the time and training needed to use the tools and resources provided to track and manage their learning – either in a regular classroom setting or through an advisory period. The teacher of record will be provided sufficient time to develop the PLP with each student and to communicate the process and requirements to families.

### **Teaching and Leading**

To create an effective teaching force that uses a competency-based approach to learning, staff will be trained to use instructional strategies that foster deep learning experiences. New approaches to teacher preparation and professional development will be needed to help current and prospective teachers understand these instructional principles and methods, as well as the role of deeper learning and 21st century competencies<sup>3</sup> in mastering core academic content. If teachers are to not only understand these ideas, but also translate them into their daily instructional practice, they will need support from school and district administrators, including time for learning, shared lesson planning and review and reflection.

Implementing personalized learning environments, which are characterized by anytime, any place, and any pace learning strategies requires a change in how all parties approach their roles as students, parents, educators, and community members. New, more effective and personalized practices, supported by new skills and talents, will be necessary, requiring a shift in focus for all key stakeholders. Some practices will be abandoned while new, more effective practices will be added. Educators must be open to professional growth to support personalization, and the CSSR approach provides the training and development required to facilitate skill



building and management practices to support challenging transitions. Specific position and role change methodologies will be employed to ensure capacity is built not only to fully embrace personalization and community partnering but also to ensure sustainability beyond the term of the project.

An assessment activity to show the needs and strengths of each participating school will begin, coordinated by the District Leadership Team (DLT), and will be tied to the refinement of the logic model and development of the evaluation plan. The needs assessment will result in a coordinated plan of professional development and technical assistance across the consortium, as well as supporting individual schools in the identification and prioritization of action steps in their schools. We envision professional development to include, but not be limited to: improving teaching practices needed to personalize learning, examining student assignments and student work using new forms of assessment and developing collaborative practices that address each student's needs and aspirations. During this time teachers will be able to focus on specific elements of each student's personal learning plan, developing instructional practices that align individualized assignments with the PLP and creating common tasks that meet the needs of groups of students. Schools will incorporate locally developed performance assessments that include projects with common tasks that all students will be expected to undertake and projects with a common rubric. These assessments will have flexibility in the tasks that allow for student interest to create the project.

Each school's schedule will be modified to incorporate collaborative learning time for all staff. Teacher teams will be empowered to use allocated professional development time flexibly. There will be a balance of district focused professional development opportunities and school-specific, school-based offerings. District-based PD sessions will be scheduled a full school year at a time so that schools and districts can schedule appropriate participation and travel time. School-based opportunities will be built into the school's current timeframe for professional development offerings, while limiting travel.

Teacher teams will work together to develop inquiry-based units, develop aligned performance assessments and mastery exhibitions and design instructional approaches that allow students to chart a course to competency. Again, small schools with small faculties will immediately benefit from the opportunities to work across the consortium, learning from one another and raising the rigor for all students.

Training will be offered to move toward Inquiry-Based / Project-Based Learning so that student engagement is strengthened allowing for the deeper learning that college and career ready standards require cultivating 21st century skills so



infrequently measured by cognitive course work – communication, collaboration, critical thinking, creativity and the opportunity to apply all of these in new situations. Engagement in content will be marked by student choice in selecting the pathway to learning and students will get to choose how they engage this content, selecting the pathway to how their mastery is demonstrated. Students will intentionally be exposed to multiple methods of assessment and ways of demonstrating of their learning.

The heart of the data used to measure student progress toward college and career ready standards will be included in each student’s personal learning plan. The PLP will incorporate state assessments and other measures as the baseline as well as progress toward college- and career-ready goals. Teachers and students will review the PLPs several times per year, including at least two meetings with families. In addition, students will be regularly assessed using formative tools as part of the move towards the PARCC program. Each school currently uses some form of benchmark assessment to gauge student progress at regular intervals. Benchmarking information is regularly shared with teachers, students and families through report cards and conferences.