

## Transitioning from a Traditional Educational Model to a Competency-Based Educational Model: Lessons Learned from Administrators

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3. “Districts and schools are operating under state and national policies that uphold the traditional system” (Casey & Sturgis, 2018, p. 2).

According to Casey and Sturgis, one hundred innovators in competency education came together in 2011 for the first time and worked up a definition of high quality competency based education that included five elements. The innovators included leading teachers, principals, district, and state leaders.

The knowledge from these innovators has evolved since 2011 and now includes 10 distinguishing features of CBE. These features help leaders and teachers as they transition from traditional based education to competency based education. The updated 10 features, as identified by Casey and Sturgis (2018) are as follows:

1. “Student success outcomes are designed around preparation for college, career and lifelong learning” (Casey & Sturgis, 2018, p. 5);
2. “Districts and schools make a commitment to be responsible for all students mastering learning expectations” (Casey & Sturgis, 2018, p. 5);
3. “Districts and schools nurture empowering, inclusive cultures of learning” (Casey & Sturgis, 2018, p. 5);
4. “Students receive timely and differentiated instruction and support” (Casey & Sturgis, 2018, p. 6);
5. “Research-informed pedagogical principles emphasize meeting students where they are and building intrinsic motivation” (Casey & Sturgis, 2018, p. 6)
6. “Assessments are embedded in the personalized learning cycle and aligned to outcomes including the transfer of knowledge and skills” (Casey & Sturgis, 2018, p. 6);
7. “Mechanisms are in place to ensure consistency in expectations of what it means to master knowledge and skills” (Casey & Sturgis, 2018, p. 6);
8. “Schools and districts value transparency with clear and explicit expectations of what is to be learned, the level of performance for mastery, and how students are progressing” (Casey & Sturgis 2018, p. 7);
9. “Strategies for communicating progress support the learning process and student success” (Casey & Sturgis, 2018, p. 7); and
10. “Learners advance based on attainment of learning expectations (mastery) through personalized pathways” (Casey & Sturgis, 2018, p. 7).

## Personalized Learning

A component of competency-based education (2015) provided the following definition of personalized learning. Bray and McClaskey

In a personalized learning environment, learners actively participate in their learning. They have a voice in what they are learning based on how they learn best. Learners have a choice in how they demonstrate what they know and provide evidence of their learning. In a learner-centered environment, learners own and design their learning. The teacher is their guide on their personal journey. (p. 14)

Patrick, Kennedy, and Powell (2013) emphasized that “personalized learning is not equal to competency-based learning”; however, they said, “they are related and terms are often (mistakenly) used interchangeably” (p. 22).

The U.S. Department of Education (2013) tagged competency-based learning and personalized learning in the same title without distinction. The Department of Education views the two (competency-based learning and

personalized learning) as a way to transition away from seat time in favor of a structure that creates flexibility and allows students to progress as they demonstrate mastery of academic content. Students demonstrate mastery regardless of time, place or pace of learning. The strategies utilized in competency-based learning and personalized learning include online and blended learning, dual enrollment and early college high schools, project-based and community-based learning, and credit recovery.

The following research questions guided this study.

1. What perceptions do K-12 administrators' have of traditional educational systems prior to transitioning to competency-based education and to what extent and in what direction do these perceptions correlate with each other?
2. What perceptions do K-12 administrators have of why their districts chose to implement competency-based education and to what extent and in what direction do these perceptions correlate with each other?
3. How do K-12 administrators describe the various setbacks, if any, faced by administrations during implementation of a competency-based education system and to what extent do these setbacks occur with each other?
4. What benefits, if any, do K-12 administrators describe as a result of transitioning their schools to competency-based education and to what extent do these benefits occur with each other?
5. What resources, if any, do K-12 administrators perceive are needed to implement competency-based education and to what extent and in what direction do these perceptions correlate with each other?



Cumberland High School (RI)	1,280 students
Deer IsleStonington High School (ME)	110 students
Impact Academy (MN)	450 students
Montpelier High School (VT)	275 students
New Haven Academy (CT)	250 students
Noble High School (ME)	
Nokomis Regional High School (ME)	680 students
NYC Alternative Schools (NY)	10,000 students





Negative perceptions of traditional educational systems

The mean of perceptions ranged from 4.58 to 5.42 with all responses being in the strongly agree category. The mean and standard deviation of the responses for this question are identified in Table 2.

Table 2

Mean and Standard Deviation of 12 Administrator Perceptions of Traditional Based Education

Perceptions	Mean	SD
Failing to prepare students for life	4.58	1.18
Time based	5.42	.63
Grading practices not aligned to what is learned	5.32	.92
Resembles a fixed mindset	5.03	.96
Ranks and sorts students	5.29	.82
High variability in how teacher determines proficiency	5.24	.70

The results indicated a positive relationship between all perceptions ranging from .35 to .65. The largest correlation was a large, statistically significant correlation between the K administrators' perception that the traditional educational system grading practices do not accurately identify what the student has learned and the perception that the traditional system resembles a fixed mindset ( $r = .648, p < .01$ ). According to Cohen (1988), the correlation coefficient ( $r$ )

Why districts and schools chose to implement competency-based education

The mean of responses ranged from 2.55 to 5.21. This represented responses from Disagree to Agree of why schools moved to competency-based education. The mean and standard deviation of the responses are identified in Table 3.

Table 3

Mean and Standard Deviation of K \$ G P L Q L V W U D W R U V ¶ 3 H U F H S W L R Q R I W K

Why	Mean	SD
Struggling to meet the needs of the students	5.21	.83
Statewide initiative	2.55	1.83
District administration promoted and built capacity	4.87	1.40
Student achievement was low	3.92	1.63

The results indicated positive and negative relationships between the perceptions of why ranging from  $r_s = -.17$  to  $.61$ . The largest correlation was a positive, large effect, statistically significant correlation between the

why of student achievement being low and struggling to meet the needs of the students  $r_s = .61$ ,  $p < .01$ . According to Cohen (1988), this coefficient would be considered a large effect.

### Setbacks faced by K12 administrators during implementation of competency-based education

The mean of responses ranged from 1.92 to 3.41. This represented responses from a Moderate Amount of setbacks faced by K2 administrators. The mean and standard deviation of the responses for this question are identified in Table 4.

Table 4

Q q 0.00000912 0 612 7182.90ET Q esented responses from  
Mean and Standard Deviation of K2 Administrator Setbacks

Setbacks	Mean	SD
Resistance from staff	3.41	.98
Resistance from community	3.10	1.06
Resistance from students	2.59	1.03
Resistance from accreditation agencies	1.92	.81

The results indicated positive and negative relationships between setbacks ranging from .08 to .62. The largest correlation was a positive, large, statistically significant correlation between the setback of resistance from accreditation agencies (.81) and resistance from staff (.62).  
TJ ET Q q 505.18 429.19 36.624 27.6 r



### Resources needed as perceived by 12 administrators to implement competencybased education

The mean of responses ranged from 2.18 to 3.79. This represented responses ranging from Minimal to Extensive resources needed to implement competencybased education. The mean and standard deviation of responses for this question are identified in Table 6.

Table 6

Mean and Standard Deviation of 12 Administrator Perceptions of Resources Needed

Resources	Mean	SD
Professional developmen	3.79	.41
Flexible seating	2.45	.82
Additional staff	2.18	

### Characteristics in a school leader perceived by K12 administrators necessary for implementing a change to competency-based education

The mean of responses ranged from 5.05 to 5.79. This represented responses ranging from Moderately Important to Extremely Important characteristics of administrators needed to implement competency-based education. The mean and standard deviation of responses for this question are identified in Table 7.

Table 7

Mean and Standard Deviation of K









## References

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