Competency-based Education

Kettle Moraine School District - Moving Students Forward on a Learning Continuum

How does your organization define competency-based education?

Competency-based education (CBE) is a framework of learning and assessment that clearly articulates learning targets and competencies which recognizes students' voice, choice, path, pace, and place in the demonstration of learning. While aligned to district standards, competencies must be demonstrated before advancement, but competencies are not necessarily linear. CBE requires a balanced assessment framework, with students receiving formative feedback and supports as necessary to ensure mastery.

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Overview

Kettle Moraine began this work with two small instrumentality charter high schools or micro-schools, and over the past six years have expanded CBE into aspects of every school in the district. While we do not yet have full fidelity of implementation, our primary work is to scale this to include all students and all schools. Students beginning in Kindergarten are provided with an understanding of where they are on a continuum of learning for various subject and skill areas and as they demonstrate mastery they move along the continuum. Students set goals and monitor progress toward the goal to ensure that they are meeting growth objectives. As students navigate

the learning continuum they are guided and supported by their teacher(s). Teachers group and regroup students fluidly and frequently, according to their need for small group instruction and support. Multi-age learning environments and teachers who embrace co-teaching are common throughout the district. At the high school level, approximately one-third of the students are in a competency-based learning environment, which is similar to the number of middle and elementary school aged students who are learning as self-directed learners.

Beliefs

The core beliefs listed below were developed and revised over time through multiple Community Forums, school board meetings, annual leadership retreats, and opportunities for staff engagement. The beliefs are informed by our data collection (quantitative and qualitative) as we transform our environments.

1. All students can learn and want to learn.

2. Students can demonstrate mastery of a skill or disposition if they have indeed learned the skill or disposition.

3. Student agency is a powerful indicator of relevance and rigor.

4. Goal setting and monitoring of progress is an essential life skill.

Rationale

Building learning environments for students that focus on student agency makes sense, and it works. Student agency is one of the most important skills for schools to develop. Building student agency aligns with our data from the National Student Clearinghouse that suggests only around 40% of our learners complete the post-secondary plan that they set out to complete. Our data regarding the need for post-secondary remedial work suggests our students are well prepared academically. The conclusion is that our learners need development in dispositions.

Outcomes

Some of our most exciting data comes from the OECD Test for Schools (see Artifacts).

Surprises

A learning continuum is essential for teachers and learners to accurately understand the present level of performance and the next steps needed to continue to grow. A written and transparent continuum allows the learner to "own" the data.

1. Interdisciplinary learning is natural for students

2. When students are driving their learning it brings increased relevance and rigor

3. We can learn a lot from our students when we are open to their suggestions

Trade-offs

We have relinquished the illusion that we are in control of students' learning.

Considerations

Start small and begin with a team of educators who are highly capable and committed to the work. Scaling is more easily accomplished when you have models to observe and pattern work after. There is no technology system that fully meets our needs but a learning management system is essential. The role of leadership also changes - leadership that can continually communicate the vision and support the ground-up transformation is essential.

Artifacts

- [Literacy Continua](#)

- [Learner Independence Continuum](#)

- [Computer Science CBE Pathway](#)

- [Visual Art & Design CBE Pathway](#)