

Competency-based Education

Sitka School District – Leveraging Collaboration & Flexible Schedules

How does your organization define competency-based education?

Providing learning opportunities that support each student to master content in a manner and pace that has meaning for them.



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http://digitalpromise.org/cbe_resource/sitka-school-district-leveraging-collaboration-flexible-schedules/

Overview

We are at the start of our CBE work as a system, but have been laying a foundation of flexible, collaborative learning at our alternative high school. The role that collaboration plays in our work is both to facilitate meaningful learning in the context of the classroom and also to welcome local partners to contribute to the learning possibilities. Our schedule facilitates deep learning and collaboration in the following ways:

- There are three teachers and about 40 students at our alternative high school. Using competencies as a base, teachers write their own curriculum for the academic classes, as a class consists of students across the high school grades who each come with their own set of academic skills and needs.
- The school has a daily schedule that fosters immersive learning in academic content. Specifically, 4 days a week students take only two classes a day - one in the morning and one in the afternoon, and they choose between English Language Arts, Math, Science, or Social Studies. Then on the fifth day they have a day of elective classes. Each session runs for about six weeks.

This toolkit was developed through a partnership between



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- Half-day classes allow teachers to create rich learning opportunities that build on collaboration between students and welcome connection to real-life application of academic content. Although each student in the class has specific learning targets, they all collaboratively engage in the theme of the session and explore it through hands-on activities where they collaborate to co-create the context for learning.
- Finally, the six-week schedule allows teachers to create unique themes to inspire learning. For example, in the Science class the theme in one session may be Why Not to Kill a Spider; the next session they may be studying the laws of physics with a culminating event having each class member safely belay down a cliff with classmates providing support.

Another way that collaboration plays a part in the learning activities at our alternative high school comes in during the day of elective classes. Community partners volunteer their time to offer a wide variety of elective opportunities for our students. Some examples are having a local published author work with students who want to write professionally; a local Tlingit artist working with students to build a skateboard that they paint; a scientist from a local science center working with a group of students interested in learning about the impact of the waste from the 2011 Japanese earthquake that is making its way to Alaskan shores; or a local professional graphic designer/media consultant working with students interested in photography and learning about the role that pictures play in communicating in today's world.

Beliefs

Learning happens in the “inter” of interaction, and talking is the best way to support critical and integrative thinking, which is a foundational skill for life. Also, a deep respect for place-based learning and working with community partners (e.g., Sitka Sound Science Center) allows our collaborative learning opportunities to be supported by content experts.

Rationale

Learning happens in the “inter” of interaction, and talking is the best way to support critical and integrative thinking, which is a foundational skill for life. Also, a deep respect for place-based learning and working with community partners (e.g., Sitka Sound Science Center) allows our collaborative learning opportunities to be supported by content experts.

Outcomes

Students master not only the academic content but also important life skills in the process of collaborating.

Surprises

We did not anticipate the importance of having a CBE-aligned data system in order to make this learning meaningful for every student. We are still working on the best ways to capture data and provide targeted support for our alternative high school students.

Trade-offs

When you build collaborative learning experiences, you lose the opportunity for complete individualization - you can still individualize, as collaborative learning does not always have to mean group learning; however, you do lose some flexibility when it comes to individual pacing.

Considerations

A visit to other districts who already employ CBE learning structures is extremely helpful in building a more intentional CBE framework.

Artifacts

- [Sitka Science Community Connections](#)