

Bring Competency Based Learning into Your District

In theory, the choice is simple. We can continue to utilize a time-bound, age-based, one-size-fits-all curriculum-driven instructional model or choose to develop a personalized competency based learning system which identifies crucial learning outcomes, gives students the instruction and practice they need at their level of readiness, and monitors and adjusts instruction for as long as needed until competency is fully achieved.

Competency based learning offers us a different systems model for teaching and learning. Instead of standardized one-size-fits-all instruction, competency is personalized for every essential skill along the pathways to higher levels of knowledge. The architecture of the competency based system is based on the following principles:

- Clearly identify a small set of crucial learning outcomes, and learning pathways to higher level skills
- Use systematic formative assessment to determine the readiness levels of your students in relation to essential outcomes
- Offer informed instruction, at the student's personal level of readiness
- Use ongoing monitoring of progress until these skills/objectives are deeply understood (competency)
- Allow students to move on to more advanced learning as soon as they are ready

This is not a new way of thinking about teaching and learning. Every good coach, music teacher, and scout leader understands the importance of competency. They give kids what they need, at any pace necessary to keep children engaged, confident, and learning.

Competency based learning is focused on student learning outcomes, and is

built with the following design principles in mind:

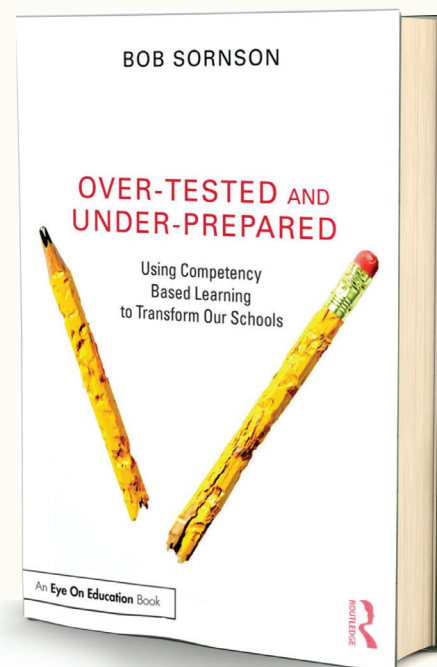
- Students advance upon mastery, not age.
- The pathway to competency is built with explicit and measurable learning objectives.
- Assessment is primarily formative, and skills or concepts are assessed in multiple contexts to guarantee both deep understanding and application.

In the competency model, students are no longer passed along with large gaps in understanding causing them to fall further and further behind. For the identified crucial learning outcomes, instruction is designed to match the developmental readiness of the students so that they are engaged and challenged but not frustrated. Students advance upon mastery to higher levels of skill and challenge.

The Early Learning Foundation

The Early Learning Foundation has developed a competency based learning structure for school districts, independent schools and universities. Founder Bob Sornson has worked internationally with schools and universities to develop high quality competency based learning initiatives at every level. His book, **Over-Tested and Under-Prepared: Using Competency Based Learning to Transform Our Schools** is the leading guide for districts, universities, and organizations trying to develop effective competency based learning systems.

Experts like Bob Sornson believe



we've reached a turning point. Some schools, districts, and states will hold onto the patterns from our past for as long as they can. They will ignore issues of efficacy and equity. They will deny the economic and social costs of continuing our curriculum driven system because that's how our schools work, and change would be hard. In other schools, districts, and states, leaders have already begun the transformation. We've reached a unique moment in time. The ideas, models and tools are readily available. The Early Learning Foundation can help build a system that meets the needs of learners in the age of innovation, technology, information, and lifelong learning.

Bob Sornson is an award-winning author, Southeast Education Network thought leader and consultant who teaches about systems and practices which support competency based learning and early learning success. Contact him at the **Early Learning Foundation** by email at bob@earlylearningfoundation.com

