

Illinois State Board of Education
Illinois Competency-Based High School Graduation Requirements Pilot Project
Frequently Asked Questions

January 19, 2017

1. Question: Can applicants describe the overall district strategy as well as the individual school strategies since each school is going to pilot in a different way?

Answer: Yes, strategies by school and district can be shared.

2. Question: Is there a narrative length limit?

Answer: No, there is no limit on the narrative length. The application should respond to all prompts in the [Request for Application](#).

3. Question: Should each school's projected strategy be described as well as how it fits into the broader whole?

Answer: Yes, the proposed plan should follow the guidelines, requirements, and format described in the [Request for Application](#).

4. Question: Is there a sample budget that must be submitted, at least for the planning year?

Answer: Since there is no current funding appropriated for this pilot project, a budget is not a required component of the application. It is helpful and can be included in the narrative, but it is not required.

5. Question: What level of detail is required for the project timeline, and is this a timeline through 2022-23 or just for the planning phase?

Answer: The proposed timeline should include the planning and implementation phase through at least 2018-19.

6. Question: Are the signatures required just for teachers participating in the initial planning phase, or does it need to be ALL teachers within the school?

Answer: Signatures required include district superintendent, board president, bargaining unit president, community college representative, and higher education institution representative. If the bargaining unit president does not sign the plan, then the district should either submit a statement from the president regarding the bargaining unit's position or provide a description of the district's good faith efforts to obtain the signature and/or statement. The names of teachers participating in the plan should be included.

7. Question: One of the proposed pilot schools would like to begin the pilot for the seventh-grade classes in the academic center that are taking ninth-grade level courses. Is this allowable?

Answer: [Public Act 99-0674](#) states "A school district may participate in the pilot program for some or all of its schools serving grades 9 through 12." It is up to the district to determine the implementation timeline.

8. Question: Is it allowable to choose a content area (English) for the competency-based pilot?

Answer: Each district, in collaboration with its standing planning and implementation committee and partners, can propose a model that works best for its community and students subject to the parameters of

the law. Some districts may choose to phase in their competency-based education system, while others may choose to adopt a schoolwide competency-based system for all courses.

9. Question: Can you elaborate on the vision as to the role and responsibility of the institution of higher education in the pilot?

Answer: [State statute](#) specifies that eligible applicants for the pilot program include a commitment from “a community college and a higher education institution other than a community college.” The [Request for Applications](#) includes the requirement that applicants “Actively partner with a community college and a higher education institution other than a community college for consultation on the development and administration of its competency-based learning system. The plan should address how high school graduates of a competency-based learning system will be able to provide information normally expected by postsecondary institutions for admission and financial aid.” Higher education institutions should help provide guidance to school district applicants to ensure seamless matriculation for students involved in the pilot.

10. Question: Will there be funding available to the 12 selected pilot districts?

Answer: No state funding has been appropriated for this pilot program in fiscal year 2017.

11. Question: What is the expected timeline for implementation?

Answer: Districts will propose an implementation timeline in their applications. Section 25 of the [new law](#) specifies that phase 1 includes an initial application and selection process, and phase 2 includes full development and implementation of a competency-based learning system. It is up to the districts to propose a timeline that works best for them. Some districts may be ready to implement in the 2017-18 school year while others propose using that year for professional development and planning.

12. Question: What's the advantage of being in the pilot?

Answer: The new law allows districts included in the pilot program to replace current graduation requirements with a competency-based learning system and request waiver or modification of mandates to implement the new learning system. Participating districts will receive recognition for involvement in an innovative learning environment and benefit from technical assistance and networking opportunities.

13. Question: Will there be waivers on licensure?

Answer: Section 25 (f) of the [new law](#) includes a provision that says:
“(f) Notwithstanding any other provisions of the School Code or any other law of this State to the contrary, school districts participating in the pilot program may petition the State Superintendent of Education for a waiver or modification of the mandates of the School Code or of the administrative rules adopted by ISBE in order to support the implementation of the school district's proposed competency-based learning system. However, no waiver shall be granted under this subsection (f) relating to State assessments, accountability requirements, teacher tenure or seniority, teacher or principal evaluations, or learning standards or that removes legal protections or supports intended for the protection of children or a particular category of students, such as students with disabilities or English learners. Any waiver or modification of teacher educator licensure requirements to permit instruction by non-educators or educators without an appropriate license must ensure that an appropriately licensed teacher and the provider of instruction partner in order to verify the method for assessing competency of mastery and verify whether a student has demonstrated mastery. All requests must be jointly signed by the school

district superintendent and the president of the school board and must describe the position of teachers within the school district that will be involved in the competency-based learning system's implementation on the application....”

14. Question: Do Illinois law and administrative rules allow for Career and Technical Education (CTE) funding to be flexible and include competency modalities of learning?

Answer: Current funding streams for CTE allow for alternative methods of student skill evaluation and performance.

15. Question: Is there a rubric for how districts will be selected?

Answer: The [Request for Applications](#) includes the rubric that will be used for selection.

16. Question: Can a competency-based system be used in addition to a regular course load?

Answer: Competency-based learning systems can be narrowly focused or they can create dramatically different structures than existing learning environments. Some districts may choose to phase in their new competency-based system. For example, a district may offer competency-based education in mathematics courses, but not in English and social studies for the first year. Or, a district may offer options for 11th - 12th grades, but not for 9th-10th grades.

17. Question: Is there a requirement or recommendation on what grade bands our pilot focuses on? For example, would we start with ninth grade and then build out that cohort with time? Or start 9-12?

Answer: Eligible districts must serve grades 9-12. It is up to the district to determine the implementation timeline. Some districts may choose to phase in their new competency-based system.

18. Question: How have schools dealt with issues of athletic eligibility?

Answer: ISBE does not determine athletic eligibility. Districts with questions in that area may want to contact the Illinois High School Association.

19. Question: Where can we learn more about parallel grading?

Answer: The [ISBE website](#) includes resources to learn more about competency-based education. Specific examples include [Cumberland High School in Rhode Island](#) and [Building 21 in Philadelphia](#), which has a system based on competencies that also includes translations into letter grades. Competency Works provides an [overview](#) of Building 21’s competency structure and an explanation of its [dashboard](#).

20. Question: Will there be coaches through this process and resources that have already been developed?

Answer: ISBE will provide technical assistance for selected pilot districts to support implementation. ISBE is currently finalizing its specific plans for technical support, which will be announced once districts have been selected. It is likely that support will include regular opportunities for pilot sites to connect with one another accompanied by facilitation and support, provision of curated competency-based learning system resources, and access to national competency-based education experts.

21. Question: How have New Hampshire and Ohio addressed dual credit agreements since our laws require secondary education use a postsecondary curriculum?

Answer: ISBE is working collaboratively with postsecondary education in Illinois to explore further development of dual credit opportunities for students. For examples of dual credit initiatives in neighboring states, see [Michigan Department of Education](#) and [Ohio Department of Education College Credit Plus](#). The [College and Career Readiness and Success Center](#) also offers a Facilitator Guide and other resources on developing articulation agreements with higher education.

22. Question: How have schools leveraged competency-based education for scheduling adjustments (master schedule)?

Answer: Districts may propose a competency-based learning system that adjusts where and when learning takes place; for example, making adjustments to learning periods, school day, school year, and/or the location where learning takes place. Philadelphia's [Building 21's](#) model emphasizes flexibility in time, pace, and place, including how students are supported to design their own pathway to graduation. Coweta County, Georgia, provides a [Central Educational Center](#) example of time and location flexibility and the integration of real-world work opportunities before graduation.

23. Question: Do schools use a competency-based approach for all school curricula or select particular curricula to apply this model?

Answer: Each district, in collaboration with its standing planning and implementation committee and partners, can propose a model that works best for its community and students subject to the parameters of the law. Some districts may choose to phase in their competency-based education system, while others may choose to adopt a schoolwide competency-based system for all courses.

24. Question: Can competency-based learning systems be an option for students? If students enroll and do not complete in a semester or year, do they continue or must a failed attempt be recorded?

Answer: Section 20 (1) (C) of the [new law](#) specifies "Students shall advance once they have demonstrated mastery, and students shall receive more time and personalized instruction to demonstrate mastery, if needed."

25. Question: Can students simply take the course final assessment and, if they are successful, progress to the next appropriate level of learning? Does the application need to be systemic or can we begin small, in the hope of system redesign?

Answer: Districts can design their proposed competency-based learning system to fit their community needs and promote students' readiness for college and career. Earning credit and advancing based on demonstrated mastery of required competencies regardless of course participation is one option districts can offer as part of their competency-based education system. Proposed plans can be limited in scope or large in learning redesign.

26. Question: Will districts be able to withdraw if the program is not a fit?

Answer: Districts must submit an application by January 27, 2017, in order to be considered for the first phase of the first cohort of the pilot program. If a district finds that it does not want to continue in the pilot, it may withdraw.

27. Question: If a school is not selected as one of the 12 in the first cohort of the pilot, is it still allowed to access the possible implementation of the concepts and ideology found in the law that allows for the pilot schools?

Answer: All schools are encouraged to explore the benefits of competency-based learning systems and can benefit from the experience of those in the pilot. Schools not included in the pilot program may continue to explore, but will be limited by existing statutory requirements.

28. Question: Can schools that already planned to go in the direction of competency-based education keep exploring and progressing even if they are not selected to participate in the first pilot cohort?

Answer: ISBE intends to create a learning community for selected pilot districts around competency-based education once the first districts are selected for the pilot program. Promising practices and lessons learned by our initial group of pilot districts will be shared statewide to ensure that other districts benefit from the research and practices resulting from those involved in the pilot program. In addition, ISBE plans to offer resources and selected learning opportunities to all interested districts during our pilot initiative.