Illinois State Board of Education
Illinois Competency-Based High School Graduation Requirements Pilot Project
Frequently Asked Questions
May 8, 2019

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: There is no current funding appropriated for this pilot project, so 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 phases through at least 2020-21.

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

    Answer: Signatures that are 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.

    Collaborative district applications must include the required signatures from each individual district. Only one signature of the partnering institutions of higher education is required for a collaborative application. For additional information on collaborative applications please visit the [Competency Pilot webpage](#).

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

    Answer: Section 20 of the Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness Act states, "A school district may participate in the pilot program for some or all of its schools." It is up to the district to determine the implementation timeline and grade bands. All participating schools within the district must be listed in the application.

8. **Question:** Is it allowable to choose a content area such as 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 by grade band or content area, while others may choose to adopt a district-wide 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 must 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. Within a collaborative application, state statute requires each application include one community college and one institution other than a community college, however, there is no limit so additional partnerships with higher education may be referenced in the narrative. For additional information on collaborative applications please visit the Competency Pilot webpage.

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

    Answer: No state funding has been appropriated for this pilot program in fiscal year 2019 to date.

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

    Answer: Districts will propose an implementation timeline in their applications. Section 25 of the 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 2019-2020 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 Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness Act (110 ILCS 148/)](#) 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 or seat time?

Answer: Section 25 (f) of the [law](#) includes a provision that states:
"(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 redesigned 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. Descriptions of some of the current pilot sites can be seen here.

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

    Answer: Eligible districts may serve grades k-12. It is up to the district to determine the implementation timeline. Some districts may choose to phase in their competency-based system by grade bands.

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. The competency pilot currently has a working group on this issue.

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 has partnered with the Midwest Comprehensive Center to facilitate the provision of coaching and technical assistance to current pilot districts. Support includes regular opportunities for pilot sites to connect with one another, provision of curated competency-based learning system resources, and access to national competency-based education experts through face-to-face learning opportunities and webinars.

21. **Question:** How have New Hampshire and Ohio addressed dual credit agreements since our laws require that secondary education uses 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's Guide and other resources on developing articulation agreements with higher education. The competency pilot currently has a work group collaborating with postsecondary 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. 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 district-wide 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 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 June 21, 2019, in order to be considered for the pilot program at this time. 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 in 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 pilot?

Answer: ISBE is creating a learning community for selected pilot districts around competency-based education. Promising practices and lessons learned by the pilot districts will be shared statewide to ensure that other districts can share in those benefits. Competency-based tools you can use to create more equitable learning opportunities for students and additional resources are available on our website. The Illinois Learner Competencies Guidance Document may provide additional information.

29. **Question:** What information goes in the column titled "Waiver Request Type" in the application?

Answer: Section 25 (5) of the law specifies that districts must identify any waivers or modifications of state law or rules for implementation in the proposed plan. The law outlines those areas that cannot be waived. Some examples of requirements that districts may consider include:

Waiver Request Type	Flexibility Requested	Impact of the Waiver
School Calendar	105 ILCS 5/10-19 A school district must develop a school calendar based on "seat time." School calendar must have 185 days to ensure 176 days of actual pupil attendance.	Allow flexibility in the school calendar that accommodates students who participate in competency-based learning.
Student Attendance	105 ILCS 5/26-1 and 26-2 Students are compelled to physically attend school.	Allow students who have mastered material to be considered as attending school.
Daily Physical Education	105 ILCS 5/27.6 Students are required to have daily P.E.	Allow students to show mastery in a different manner and allow flexibility in their schedule in order to participate in competency-based learning.
Years of Study	105 ILCS 5/27-22 Requires various "years" of study for required subject matters in order for a student	Allow students to receive high school credit or a high school diploma based on mastery of subject matters.

	to receive a high school diploma.	
Consumer Education	23 IL Adm. Code 1.420(k) A program in consumer education shall include at least the topics required by Section 27-12.1 of the School Code (105 ILCS 5/27-12.1).	To allow for consumer education credit upon completion or mastery of competency-based learning.
Definition of a unit of instruction	23 IL Adm. Code 1.440(c) A "unit" is the credit accrued for a year's study or its equivalent. A student may be permitted to retake a course that he or she has already successfully completed (for example, to earn a better grade). However, credit may not be awarded more than once for completion of the same course, and the same course may not be counted more than once toward fulfillment of the state requirements for graduation.	Redefine "unit" to allow for competency-based learning and mastery.

30. Question: Which Illinois schools are currently in the pilot program?

Answer: The following districts are currently in the pilot program:

Athens Community Unit School District 213
Auburn Community Unit School District 10
Ball-Chatham Community School District 5
Belvidere Community Unit School District 100
Champaign Community Unit School District 4
Charleston Community Unit School District 1
City of Chicago Public School District 299
Community School District 300
East St. Louis School District 189
Edinburg Community School District 4
Greenview Community School District 200
Heritage Community School District 8
Huntley Community School District 158
Illinois Valley Central 321
Kankakee School District 111
LeRoy Community Unit School District 2
Mahomet-Seymour Community Unit District 3
Maine Township High School District 207

31. **Question:** How do collaborative districts apply for the competency pilot?

Answer: In the application of a collaborative of districts, each district participating in the collaborative shall comply with the requirements outlined in the application.
The districts participating in the collaborative may establish and maintain a standing planning and implementation committee individually or collaboratively. Please visit the [Competency Pilot webpage](#) for additional information.

32. **Question:** Does becoming a competency-based district require local board approval?

Answer: The district application requires the signature of the school board president and the collaborative application requires the signatures of the school board presidents from each district applying to be part of the collaborative. It is up to each individual district to determine if this pilot program requires board approval.

33. **Question:** How is competency-based education noted on transcripts and report cards?

Answer: It is up to each individual district to determine how competencies are viewed on transcripts and report cards.

34. **Question:** Are resource documents available to learn more about competency-based education?

Answer: The Learner Competency Guidance Document provides initial guidance for developing academic and adaptive learner competencies. The ISBE Competency Pilot webpage includes additional resources.

35. **Question:** What role can a Regional Superintendent play in the application and implementation of competency-based education?

Answer: Section 20 of 110 ILCS 148/ requires that only school districts are eligible applicants. Regional Superintendents may play a vital support role in planning and implementation committees, coordinate and facilitate collaborative applications, and explore innovative practices and/or funding opportunities for district implementation.