Exploring the Role of Performance Assessment in Competency-Based Education: Recommendations from the National Summit on K-12 Competency-based Education

by Laurie Gagnon

Based on reports created for the National Summit on K-12 Competency-based Education, this article explores how educators can take action to build momentum for and implement competency education and performance assessment.

In June 2017, CompetencyWorks and iNACOL gathered "100 leading innovators to move the field of competency-based education through the next generation of ideas and actionable outcomes" at the National Summit on K-12 Competency-based Education. Such a summit had not been convened since 2011, when the Competency-Based Learning Summit resulted in the current working definition of competency-based education.

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The Summit sought to tackle the major issues that have emerged as the field has developed. Prior to the Summit, organizers wrote four framing reports to prepare participants to generate shared solutions. The themes of equity and diversity were interwoven both in the content and the process. Technical advisory groups (TAGs) were used to foster broader participation in the crafting of the four reports and particular attention was paid to the diversity of participants at the Summit.

USING TEXT-BASED DISCUSSION TO RELATE

SUMMIT TAKEAWAYS TO YOUR OWN WORK

This article explores how we can apply the resources and takeaways of the Summit to our own work to build momentum for and fully implement competency education and its essential corollary, performance assessment. As a guide to taking action, in the next section we have provided:

- links to the four framing reports from the Summit

- six key issues in performance assessment that emerged from the discussions of the framing reports at the conference, listed under the relevant report

- suggestions for relating these concepts to your own work through close reading of parts of the text and sample discussion questions, in a methodology often referred to as a text-based protocol

Text-based discussions can be used as an entry point to analyze our own practices. Consider the goals and needs of the group as you select a protocol and text excerpts. Here are a couple of starting points:

- The 4-As protocol: engage with a text through identifying assumptions, what you agree with, what you might argue with, and what you aspire to in your own work?

- Basic text-based discussion with a framing question: The framing question plays a key role in focusing the discussion on the connections between the ideas in the text and the reality of your work in practice.

FRAMING REPORTS, KEY TAKEAWAYS, AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Framing Report 1:

In Pursuit of Equality: A Framework for Equity Strategies in Personalized, Competency-Based Education

By Chris Sturgis with contributions from Ashley Jones

> **1. Performance assessment can help transform systems that enhance equity and access.** Read pages 2-4 and one of the VUE 46 Case Studies about the New York Performance Standards Consortium, International High School at Langley Park, or Chelsea High School. How do the assessment systems in the case studies generate a different kind of data than a standardized accountability test? Where might the school in the case study still want to explore further transformation?

> **2. Performance assessment allows students to take responsibility for their own learning by emphasizing feedback and practice and creating multiple opportunities to engage in assessment for learning.** Explore the chart unpacking the

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working definition of competency-based education on pages 8-9. Where do you see connections between performance assessment and the competency education definition?

Framing Report 2:

Meeting Students Where They Are

By Antonia Rudenstine, Sydney Schaef, and Dixie Bacallao

> **3. Instructional practices that are student-centered and meet students where they are drive the student experience in a competency-based system.** Which performance assessment designs exhibit the features and strategies discussed in the report? As you examine specific performance assessment examples, consider how you might incorporate the practices discussed – from fostering engagement, access, and rigor to offering timely, differentiating supports. Opening up our practice for analysis ensures that the performance assessment leads to instructional shifts at the heart of competency-based education.

Framing Report 3:

Fit for Purpose: Taking the Long View on Systems Change and Policy to Support Competency Education

By Susan Patrick, Maria Worthen, Natalie Truong, and Dale Frost

> **4. How we define success shapes how and what we teach, learn, and assess.** Pages 3-4 discuss how a Profile of the Graduate can define a more holistic vision of what we care about from our education system. Beyond academics, what helped many of us be successful also included transferable skills, habits and dispositions for perseverance, empathy, and collaboration, and social-emotional intelligence. What Vision of the Graduate do your promotion and graduation requirements create? Start or revisit the process of building a community vision using the Quality Performance Assessment Vision of the Graduate protocol (free resource; registration required).

> **5. Assessment literacy and teacher capacity building are essential elements in the process of implementing personalized, competency-based practices and systems.** Performance assessment, in the hands of students and educators, is specifically designed to foster their learning. For example, in VUE 46, Dan French and Barnett Berry look at how micro-credentials build educators' performance assessment literacy through a competency-based, personalized learning process.

Framing Report 4:

In Search of Efficacy: Defining the Elements of Quality in a

By Chris Sturgis with contributions from Natalie Abel

> **6. Full implementation is key and we need to focus on pathways for implementing with fidelity and sustaining (re)designed systems.** Select a compelling section of the framework to explore, such as structural domain 3 on pages 12-13, Continuum of Learning Objectives, Student Performance, Growth, and Progress are Transparent. Ask yourself the key questions from that section and discuss what to look for and exemplars from your own system or a model system you are examining. As you explore what success could look like in this domain, ask yourself how you are addressing the lessons.

The Summit asked us to chart a course to an education system that meets the needs of each child in order to find a pathway to a successful and productive life. The variety of contexts and experiences represented at the Summit underscore that high-quality, equitable, competency-based education need not look exactly the same, but rather that within a shared framework, there are multiple pathways and approaches to a transformed system. Performance assessment offers a high-leverage entry point to one of the pathways for schools, districts, and states to design assessment, teaching, and learning practices that are aligned with and supportive of each other.

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