



Scaffolding Innovation Supports for Competency-Based Education in Illinois

The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) is encouraging high schools to create innovative, personalized learning opportunities for students through a statewide competency-based education (CBE) pilot. Districts that are participating in the pilot have the opportunity to develop and implement CBE learning opportunities in a variety of settings and subject areas. Because pilot districts are new to using CBE, they need training and technical supports to understand the organizational and instructional components of CBE, train teachers and administrators, and assess the outcomes for students participating in competency-based settings. ISBE requested help from the Midwest Comprehensive Center (MWCC) to implement the CBE pilot and provide resources, access to CBE experts, and peer-to-peer networking opportunities for pilot districts.

Our Work

During the 2017–18 academic year, MWCC **organized four in-person convenings** to provide pilots with training from national CBE experts, help pilot districts network and learn from each other, and engage districts in hands-on planning and problem-solving to achieve their CBE goals. Between in-person meetings, MWCC **facilitated a webinar series** to share examples of successful CBE implementation and facilitate cross-site sharing.

MWCC **hosted a book study** with author Rose Colby, a national CBE expert, to help pilot districts understand and discuss the core elements—i.e., the architecture of a CBE approach. In addition, MWCC **recruited national CBE experts** to provide direct coaching to pilot districts, supporting districts as they design their local CBE models and achieve their specific goals.

The CBE expert coaches recruited by MWCC also helped pilot sites address site-specific questions and challenges, including the following:

- To create consistency across its participating schools, one district worked with a national CBE expert to establish several foundational documents. The documents included an outline of foundational CBE principles, a CBE cross-school alignment plan, a plan for developing competencies, performance indicators, learning targets and assessments, and a course score calculation procedure/formula.
- Another district worked with a national CBE expert to develop learner competencies that are aligned to learning standards. The CBE expert not only provided district-level guidance, but also provided 1:1 support with teachers and department heads to support their CBE program design through virtual coaching sessions.

“ [There was] so much great information. This was probably the most excited I have been about an initiative in 20 years of education! ”

– Pilot District Participant

“ MWCC staff have played a vital role in the launch of the competency pilot in Illinois in terms of building understanding and capacity. The national research, networking, and expertise [provided by MWCC] has been extremely insightful to our agency staff as well as district staff. ”

– ISBE Staff Member

The Results

Representatives from all pilot districts in the first cohort attended the September 2017 and February 2018 in-person convenings. In addition, hundreds of participants attended two in-person events in June 2018, including staff from pilot districts and districts that are interested in joining the pilot. **Participating districts provided positive feedback** about the usefulness of the convenings, webinars, and book study. Pilot districts appreciated the opportunity to learn from each other and national experts.

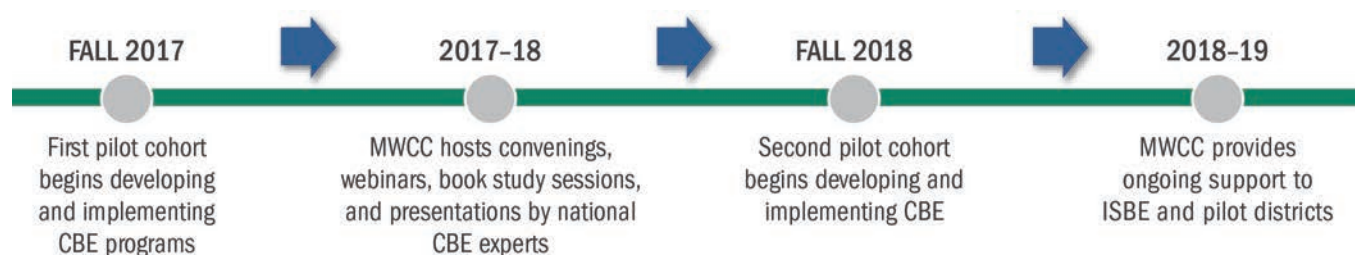
As districts begin implementing CBE, they are using the knowledge and resources that MWCC provided to adjust their pilot programs. **One district expanded their planned CBE implementation** from grade 6 only to grades 6-12. In addition, districts are making the most of the CBE expert coaches that MWCC introduced; **two districts have contracted with their CBE coaches** to provide more in-depth support for planning and implementation.

Through this collaboration, MWCC and ISBE **serve as partners** to pilot districts and learning is a two-way street. Pilot districts learn from the resources and expertise that MWCC and ISBE provide. At the same time, **ISBE is learning about the challenges and opportunities that come with implementing CBE programs** in different contexts, better equipping the state to support other districts interested in CBE.

Next Steps

The second cohort of pilot districts **will begin planning, developing, and implementing CBE programs** in the 2018-19 school year. **ISBE plans to continue scaffolding CBE implementation statewide**, allowing districts to develop unique models that work for their contexts.

Timeline



The contents of this document were developed under a grant from the Department of Education. However, those contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government.

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