

This response was prepared for Brenda Berg, BEST NC

Your Question:

You asked for information about state approaches to competency-based learning, specifically formative and summative assessments.

Our Response:

Competency-based education (CBE) approaches are designed to ensure students advance to the next level after demonstrating a mastery of standards. CBE requires schools to provide timely, differentiated support that addresses students' needs, as determined by effective student assessment. States have a number of policy options to grant flexibility and autonomy needed to implement CBE. Education Commission of the States' publication, [Policy Approaches to Competency-Based Education](#), includes *examples of states* leveraging options including:

- Seat time waivers.
- Credit flexibility.
- Pilot programs.
- Innovation zones.
- Proficiency-based diplomas.
- Multiple graduation pathways.
- State graduate profiles.
- Statewide competencies.

While federal accountability requirements require states to administer statewide assessments in specific grades and subject areas, states have some flexibility in other components of their state's assessment system. Specifically, states can create flexibilities for school districts to allow students earn credit based on their mastery of standards or competencies rather than a traditional Carnegie unit. A 2022 ECS publication, [State Policies to Support Student-Centered Learning](#), which includes a *50-state policy scan (see Appendix A)*, reports that at least 25 states permit or require students to satisfy graduation requirements through student-centered assessment options. These policies create space for districts to employ more personalized approaches to student assessment that, along with end-of-course assessments or standardized assessments, provide an additional way to measure student learning.

Below you will find additional state examples.

State Examples

Montana [regulations](#) allow school districts to award students credit for a course that is completed in a longer or shorter time than would normally be required with permission of the local school board so long as the course meets the districts' curriculum and assessment requirements.

New Hampshire expanded its [competency-based system](#) by developing the Performance Assessment of Competency Education. To evaluate proficiency, [PACE](#) uses locally developed and administered assessments that are aligned with identified competencies.

New Jersey law provides that students can meet the state’s 120-credit graduation requirement through a range of individualized learning opportunities. District boards of education must establish a process for granting credits through successful completion of assessments that verify student achievement in meeting or exceeding the New Jersey Student Learning Standards at the high school level. The assessments may occur all or in part prior to a student’s high school enrollment, but these locally administered assessments do not preclude or exempt student participation in applicable statewide assessments at grades three through 12.

North Carolina allows districts, based on a body of evidence, to award a student credit in a particular course without requiring them to complete classroom instruction for a certain amount of seat time. Students demonstrate mastery through a multi-phase assessment, consisting of: (1) a standard assessment, which must be the end-of-course or end-of-grade assessment where applicable, or a final exam developed locally and (2) an artifact that requires the student to apply knowledge and skills relevant to the content standards.

Rhode Island requires schools to develop **proficiency-based graduation requirements** that are aligned to state standards. Students may demonstrate mastery in multiple ways, including formative assessment, summative assessments, locally designed assessments, performance assessments, and state and national standardized assessment.

Virginia law requires local school boards to establish a procedure to facilitate acceleration for qualified students. The procedure must allow the students, with the recommendation of the district superintendent, to obtain credit for a 140-hour class without completing it by demonstrating mastery of the course content and objectives and receiving a passing score on the relevant **Standards of Learning assessment**.

Additional Information

State Policy Ecosystem for Student-Centered Pathways – This Policy Outline offers policymakers an opportunity to consider the connections between six policy areas that can support successful implementation of student-centered pathways. (Education Commission of the States, 2024)

Competency-Based Education Policy Across the Nation – This map provides a snapshot, as of May 2025, of state-level K-12 education policies that support K-12 competency-based education at the school and district levels. (Aurora Institute, 2025)