

# Teacher and Student Perceptions of Competency-Based Education: A Mixed Methods Exploration

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This study aimed to explore the perceptions of elementary teachers and students about competency-based education (CBE) in a district transitioning from traditional practices. The purpose was to investigate how CBE is perceived from varying perspectives and to identify areas that are working well and those that need improvement during the transition. Utilizing a mixed-methods design, data were collected via surveys and interviews with teachers and students from two suburban elementary schools. Findings indicate teachers generally viewed CBE positively, highlighting benefits such as improved tracking of student mastery, positive classroom climates, and better differentiation. They perceived an increase in student agency and understanding of learning objectives. Challenges included inconsistencies in assessment and grading, confusion among families and teachers regarding the mastery-based system, and insufficient resources. Supportive staff and collaborative environments aided teachers. Students primarily reported positive or neutral perceptions but expressed a desire for greater control and the incorporation of their interests into their learning experiences. Findings suggest a need to enhance student agency through personalized learning, improve family communication about the new grading system, and provide more resources and clearer guidelines for effective CBE implementation. This research provides valuable insights into elementary CBE transitions despite limitations in sample size.

*Keywords:* competency-based education, traditional grading, grading transitions, teacher perceptions, student perceptions

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This study aimed to explore the perceptions of elementary education teachers and students regarding competency-based education (CBE) in a district transitioning from traditional to competency-based education practices. The focus of the district's transition during the school year of this study included changing grade reporting procedures to a mastery-based grade card, incorporating proficiency scales for math and reading standards in Grades K–5, and tailoring district-provided professional development to focus on CBE-related topics. The purpose of this study was to investigate how competency-based education was perceived from both the student and teacher perspectives in the elementary school system. The findings helped identify what was working well in the transition to CBE as well as areas for improvement.

While there is considerable research on what CBE is and the aspects needed to be effective, a gap exists in the research regarding the transition from traditional learning to CBE, especially in the elementary school setting. Chen (2023) investigated teachers' concerns about CBE, focusing on the perceptions of K–12 gifted teachers. This pool is too specific to generalize to the elementary education population. Studying the transition to CBE is important because many school districts may want to implement CBE but do not know how to start. Learning more about the transition to CBE can provide guidance to other districts on where to begin in their CBE journey.

## Literature Review

Competency-Based Education (CBE) is a system where students' progress is based on the mastery of standards, as opposed to the number of hours in the classroom or their age (Bingham et al., 2021; Broderson & Randel, 2017; Gagnon, 2023; Patrick, 2021). Key aspects and desired outcomes of Competency-Based Education include:

- Common rigorous expectations that are transparent to students and measurable (Evans et al., 2020; Gagnon, 2023; Patrick, 2021)
- Providing personalized pathways and plans for student learning (Gagnon, 2023; Lee, 2014; Patrick, 2021)
- Differentiating student learning (Bingham et al., 2021; Gagnon, 2023; Patrick, 2021)
- Promoting student agency (Evans et al., 2020; Gagnon, 2023; Patrick, 2021)
- Student-centered learning (Evans et al., 2020)
- High-quality, meaningful, consistent assessment (Evans et al., 2020; Gagnon, 2023; Patrick, 2021)
- Real-world opportunities through project-based learning (Lee, 2014)
- Promoting equity and closing disparity in academic achievement (Gagnon, 2023; Marion et al., 2020; Marzano et al., 2017; Patrick, 2021).
- Community and family involvement (Levine, 2019; Marzano et al., 2017)

To better understand CBE as it relates to the present research, this literature review will outline key terms and definitions used in CBE, highlight the benefits and challenges of CBE, and emphasize the main differences between CBE and traditional

education models. To ensure relevance to the present research, this review will focus specifically on CBE at the elementary level. CBE at the high school level appears differently because it incorporates internships, apprenticeships, college credit, and market value assets to equip students for the workforce, which is not relevant to CBE at the elementary level (Kauffman, 2025).

## Terms and Definitions

Several key terms in CBE need to be defined before moving forward, which are essential to understanding CBE at the elementary level:

- *Competency* refers to a student's ability to apply their learning and knowledge in real-world situations (Marion et al., 2020).
- *Mastery* is essentially what determines if students will advance or not. Students must demonstrate that they have grasped academic content to advance in their education (Patrick, 2021). Mastery focuses on achieving a deep understanding and proficiency in a specific subject area, laying the foundation for competency as students *apply* their expertise.
- *Project-Based Learning (PBL)* is a unit of instruction where learning revolves around an authentic project (DeVivo, 2021; Siler & Quick, 2018). PBL is a type of instruction and assessment that shares common goals with CBE and uses real-world learning to embed components of CBE.
- *Personalized learning plans* help teachers to adjust student learning goals, instructional methods, and the pace of learning to reflect individual student needs. They are instructional plans that include differentiation of needs, personality, interests, student mastery, and career goals. (Lee, 2014).
- *Proficiency scales* establish a clear progression of the concepts and skills students must develop, allowing teachers to determine a student's current level of understanding. They are typically scored on a scale from 0.0 to 4.0, with 3.0 representing proficiency. Proficiency scales can be used to assess cognitive and metacognitive skills as well as traditional academic standards (Marzano et al., 2017).
- *Rubrics* outline specific criteria regarding what the teacher is looking for in each assignment (Marzano et al., 2017). Rubrics show students exactly what a teacher expects from their work.
- The *traditional grading system* is the standard system of grading where students receive grades based on letters that correlate with points scored, ranging from 0 to 100 points. The highest grade a student can receive is an A, which typically corresponds to a score of 90–100%, while an F, the lowest grade, signifies a score of 50% or less (Hough, 2023).

## Benefits of Competency-Based Education

The state where the study's schools are located saw many benefits to CBE and was making efforts statewide to encourage districts to implement this approach to education. CBE seeks to solve key problems in the traditional school system, such as students moving to the next grade level without mastering the content of their cur-

rent grade level, students not being able to progress to more advanced content when they are ready, and a lack of student agency in what is learned, assessed, and taught (Marzano et al., 2017).

In 2012, few states were willing to implement policies to support the practice; however, a decade later, every state has taken advanced steps towards CBE (Gagnon, 2023). In the Lindsay Unified School District in California, the implementation of CBE practices increased proficiency in English-Language Arts and mathematics on state tests from 26% to 47% (Gagnon, 2023). Marzano et al. (2017) found that after crafting critical, holistic objectives in collaboration with local communities and families, the Chugach School District in Alaska experienced improved test scores, increased teacher retention, increased student participation in college entrance exams, and a greater number of their students demonstrating ownership of their learning. Their success resulted in receiving the Malcolm Bridge National Quality Award—a prestigious award that recognizes advances in business, healthcare, education, and nonprofit organizations. This increase in test scores is a common benefit of CBE and a driving force for more implementation across the country (Marzano et al., 2017; Patrick, 2021; Gagnon, 2023).

To support the further implementation of CBE, organizations ranging from the U.S. Federal Government to private and national organizations offer grants to schools seeking to implement CBE (Marzano et al., 2017). With districts finding success with CBE and more organizations willing to support it financially, it is no surprise that other states and schools are following suit.

### ***Challenges to Implementation of CBE***

Although CBE has made promising strides, there are still roadblocks that inhibit the smooth implementation of CBE in schools. These roadblocks may vary from district to district because what is easier for one district may be more challenging for another (Evans et al., 2020). Each district is unique in the communities it serves, the resources available to it, and the needs of its students. Among districts that have implemented CBE, common conflicts that have arisen include pressure from the state, standardized testing, and district concerns, as well as time consumption, a lack of models for schools to follow, and varying levels of fidelity in implementation.

### ***Pressure from the State, Standardized Testing, and the District***

External pressure from state departments can complicate the implementation of CBE. In a mastery-level classroom, students take standardized tests that align with their traditional grade level, rather than the level of the classroom in which they are learning, which can complicate test scores (Bingham et al., 2021; Broderson & Randel, 2017). A standardized test can be discouraging for students who have worked hard throughout the year, only to be given a high-stakes test that is either too advanced or too simple for them and does not accurately reflect their learning (Bingham et al., 2021). In some schools, state test scores dropped after implementing CBE, leading to the program's abandonment shortly after its initial implementation efforts (DeArmond & Mass, 2018). This drop in scores following the introduction of

a new educational initiative is a well-known phenomenon known as the implementation dip or implementation curve (Fullan, 1991). Research shows that scores increase after the initial implementation phase if schools adhere to the initiative with fidelity.

The school district can also serve as a source of external pressure for CBE schools and classrooms. Teachers may be required to follow curriculum pacing guides that make it difficult to move at varied paces and incorporate student choice (Bingham et al., 2021; Miller et al., 2023; DeArmond, & Mass, 2018). Even though pacing guides can hinder CBE implementation, teachers are still required to follow them, which can limit customization in the classroom.

### ***Time Consumption***

Many researchers found that the need for constant assessment and incorporating student choice was time-consuming (Bingham et al., 2021; Miller et al., 2023). To improve the situation, Bingham and her colleagues (2021) suggested scheduling time to accommodate assessment and helping students who need additional time to demonstrate mastery. An elementary school in Colorado allocated time for the intervention by blocking out 90 minutes a day for 30-minute lunch periods and 60 minutes for intervention, allowing students to receive additional support (Lopez, 2017).

### ***Lack of Models***

A lack of examples of CBE models was also a challenge to implementation (Evans et al., 2020). Teachers and administrators travel long distances, such as from Harrisburg, South Dakota, to schools in Maine or from schools in Missouri to schools in Wisconsin, to find models of CBE (Levine, 2019). While there are many promising features in CBE, implementing them can be challenging without a model demonstrating how to do so; however, these efforts can be costly. Observing how other schools execute CBE can help schools solidify ideas for their own implementation.

### ***Varying Fidelity in CBE Implementation***

Research shows that academic achievement is highest when CBE is implemented with the maximum degree of fidelity (Lee et al., 2021; Lee et al., 2022). Inconsistent levels of implementation complicate research that attempts to measure student outcomes in CBE schools (Evans et al., 2020). If schools want CBE to be successful, they need to commit fully to all tenets—some aspects of traditional learning clash with the goals of CBE. For example, Lee et al. (2022) found that many schools that were implementing CBE were still using traditional letter grades. This misalignment hinders efficacy because a letter grade alone does not clearly convey to teachers and families exactly what their student has mastered. To achieve successful outcomes, schools must implement all aspects of CBE. All the tenets work in concert to help students reach maximum potential.

### ***Differences Between CBE and Traditional Education Models***

Approaching the differences between CBE and traditional education models was one of the barriers encountered by the district investigated in this study. The

most notable differences are in how assessment is used to determine grades, the roles students play in the classroom, and the students' progression in their education. At the time of the research, the schools examined were focusing on assessment and grades as a step towards reimagining how students progress in their education and the role they play in the classroom.

### ***Ongoing Mastery-Oriented Assessment and Feedback***

To ensure that students meet their learning goals and are ready to advance to the next level, high-quality assessment is essential. Researchers advocate for balanced assessments that are coherently linked to learning targets, providing comprehensive pictures of learning. These assessments should provide a variety of sources that demonstrate learning and allow for students to be assessed efficiently and continuously with validity (Marion et al., 2020; Patrick, 2021).

When teachers plan assessments, they first consider the standards on which students will be evaluated. For students to be successful in CBE, they require high, transparent learning targets and standards (Bergmann, 2023; Evans et al., 2020; Gagnon, 2023; Lopez, 2017). All students need high expectations, and teachers need to self-reflect on potential biases that may influence their expectations and adjust their behavior accordingly (Marzano et al., 2017; Sturgis, 2016). Teacher-facing standards must use consistent language that communicates high expectations (Evans et al., 2020; Marion et al., 2020; Marzano et al., 2017). Additionally, these high expectations need to be accessible to students in kid-friendly language (Bergmann, 2023). Students will not know what is expected of them if the objectives are not at their level. For standards to be effective, they must be measurable and transferable for learning (Evans et al., 2020; Gagnon, 2023; Patrick, 2021). To help students know what to aim for, rubrics and student examples can show students exactly what the teacher is looking for to showcase mastery (Gagnon, 2023; Patrick, 2021). In addition to kid-friendly standards, examples can help students know what is expected of their learning. Students will be set up for success when they are evaluated on their learning.

To achieve the goals of a balanced assessment, teachers have options outside of traditional methods of assessment. They can gain a holistic view of students' abilities by using alternative assessment methods (Gagnon, 2023). Standardized tests are often too far removed from the classroom and do not provide timely, valuable feedback about classroom practices (Marion et al., 2020). Additionally, the way students demonstrate mastery on their assessments may differ (Bingham et al., 2021). A high-stakes multiple-choice test on a computer may not adequately demonstrate what every student has learned, especially if test anxiety can hinder a student's performance or discourage English language learners who are unfamiliar with the academic language of the exam. For this reason, a variety of alternative assessments can help students reach mastery in ways tailored to students' individual needs. Examples of alternative assessments include probing discussions, self-assessments, portfolios, observations, project-based assessments, and performance-based learning (Gagnon,

2023; Marzano et al., 2017; Marion et al., 2020). To assess student learning effectively, teachers must be knowledgeable about assessment and mastery to be effective in assessing student progress (Marion et al., 2020).

The part of the competency-based assessment that sets it apart from traditional assessments is the radical shift to eliminate letter grades, with an emphasis on mastery and feedback (Gagnon, 2023; Klein, 2024; Siler & Quick, 2018). When using letter grades, there is inconsistency between teachers in what counts towards a grade, and the weight of certain assignments can negatively impact a final grade. Additionally, an F, which accounts for a larger percentage of points than all the other letters, can drop a final grade to where it is nearly impossible to salvage. Students who start the year struggling but improve over time are disadvantaged because their early low grades continue to impact their final average. Their lower final grade would not reflect their growth (Hough, 2023). CBE proposes an alternative to the traditional system of grading that helps students understand their academic progress, specifically where they stand academically, and enables them to explain their growth throughout the year.

Specific written feedback can be given in conjunction with mastery-based assessments and grades (Klein, 2024; Siler & Quick, 2018). Four-point proficiency scales are commonly used as a replacement for letter grades (Broderson & Randel, 2017; Marzano et al., 2017; Siler & Quick, 2018). Rubrics can also help students know exactly what they should aim for and what mastery looks like (Bergmann, 2023; Gagnon, 2023; Patrick, 2021). Results of assessments should be transparent, and students and families should be able to access information about exactly where students are in their learning and what they need to do to advance (Gagnon, 2023; Lopez, 2017; Marion et al., 2020; Patrick, 2021; Siler & Quick, 2018). Adhering to a grading system that focuses on where students specifically reach proficiency helps parents and teachers know exactly where a student is in their learning, which cannot be achieved with letter grades (Lee et al., 2022; Marzano et al., 2017). In a system that focuses on mastery of specific goals, the grading and mastery requirements must align. Two students can receive the same letter grade but may have mastered completely different learning targets. The letter does not reflect what they have individually achieved. When transitioning to a new grading system, families need to understand how it works, but this can be a challenge when they are accustomed to traditional grading (Bingham et al., 2021; Siler & Quick, 2018). Families can learn and become familiar with the new grading system, but clear communication is necessary.

### ***Real World Opportunities through PBL***

One type of performance-based assessment highly encouraged in CBE at the elementary level is project-based learning (PBL) (DeVivo, 2021; Marion et al., 2020). Researchers suggest using PBL to enhance CBE in the classroom (Bergmann, 2023; DeVivo, 2021; Gagnon, 2023; Lee, 2014; Loveline, 2024; Siler & Quick, 2018). PBL is a learning approach where learning is driven by an authentic project conducted throughout the unit (DeVivo, 2021; Siler & Quick, 2018). The project must be deeply

connected with academic standards and must include a complex, open-ended inquiry that the students will investigate throughout the unit (DeVivo, 2021; Lee, 2014). PBL and CBE share many common goals, including equity-centered practices, clear learning goals, the emphasis of student agency in learning, authentic, real-world experiences, especially when they are connected to student interests, and ensuring positive, meaningful relationships (De Vivo, 2021; Lee, 2014; Siler & Quick, 2018). Student agency can be demonstrated by allowing students to choose what they learn, at what pace, and how they exhibit learning (Lee, 2014; Siler & Quick, 2018). Students can also engage in peer assessment and reflect on their learning during the process (Lee, 2014). With PBL, students receive multiple opportunities to demonstrate mastery, developing critical-thinking and problem-solving skills, and collaborate with fellow students, school staff, families, and the community. Teachers can also personalize learning to students' needs (Lee, 2014; Loveline, 2024; Siler & Quick, 2018). PBL is especially effective when the community is involved, particularly when students share the final results of the project with the community (DeVivo, 2021; Lee et al., 2021, 2022). Community involvement in PBL has many benefits, including increased motivation in students' schoolwork and career goals, connecting students with community professionals, promoting positive student behaviors, and enhancing learning in school to make it authentic for students (DeVivo, 2022; Gagnon, 2023; Lee et al., 2022).

## Methodology

After receiving approval from the Institutional Review Board of the university where the authors conduct their research (IRB-FY2025-190), permission was sought from a Midwest school district to obtain approval for surveying teachers and students in their district. After receiving permission from the district, the research team collaborated with two schools with which the university had existing partnerships in other capacities to survey and interview teachers and students about their perceptions of CBE. In the surveys, teachers had the option to participate in a semi-structured interview. Permission was obtained from parents to survey their children.

### Participants

The first elementary school surveyed was a suburban midwestern school with 18 classrooms. Of the 342 students enrolled in the school, 3.5% were Asian, 13.5% were Black, 14.6% were Hispanic, 10.5% were multi-racial, and 56.7% were White. Out of the student body, 69.5% of students were eligible for free/reduced lunch. Seven students participated in the survey for the study, while 16 of the 18 teachers (88%) completed the survey, and three were interviewed. The second elementary school in the study was another suburban midwestern school with 22 classrooms. Of the 538 students enrolled in the school, 7.4% were Asian, 3.5% were Black, 7.1% were Hispanic, 4.5% were multi-racial, and 76.8% were White; 30.8% were eligible for free/reduced lunch. At this school, 18 of the 22 teachers (81%) completed the survey, and one teacher participated in an interview.

Table 1 presents the demographic data of the teachers who completed the survey. Our research team interviewed four teachers who taught the following grades: first grade, second grade, fifth grade, and special education from third through fifth grade. Seven students participated in the survey: one 6-year-old, one 7-year-old, three 9-year-olds, a 10-year-old, and a 12-year-old.

**Table 1**  
*Teacher (N = 29) Demographic Information*

| <b>Demographic Characteristic</b> | <b>Category</b> | <b>Frequency</b> | <b>Percentage (%):</b> |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------|------------------|------------------------|
| Gender                            | Female          | 27               | 93.1                   |
|                                   | Male            | 2                | 6.9                    |
| Age                               | 25–34           | 7                | 24.1                   |
|                                   | 35–44           | 9                | 31.0                   |
|                                   | 49–54           | 9                | 31.0                   |
|                                   | 55–64           | 4                | 13.8                   |
| Race                              | White/Caucasian | 28               | 96.6                   |
|                                   | Two or More     | 1                | 3.4                    |

### **Data Collection**

The research was conducted using a qualitative survey with a cross-sectional survey design distributed through Qualtrics. A cross-sectional survey design can reveal whether change is needed based on the results of a survey administered at a single point in time, provided that candid information is given (Fink, 2017). A cross-sectional survey design was needed to determine the level of satisfaction among teachers and students with the execution of CBE in their school.

The survey was emailed to the elementary school principals, who shared it with the teachers. The principals also sent the consent form via email to parents, asking their permission for their children to participate. Participation was voluntary and family members were required to provide consent for their children to participate. Teachers were highly encouraged to complete the survey and incentivized with a Starbucks drink provided by their principal upon completion. The sample size consisted of 40 teachers from both schools, and 34 teachers responded for an 85% response rate. The research team wanted to include children's perspectives in our initial research because, as Fink (2017) explained, "many people agree that children are actors and participants in society, not just passive onlookers, so it makes sense to include them in surveys" (pp. 55–56).

For the student surveys, the researchers coordinated with the principal and classroom teachers to schedule the surveys in an interview style with students. Students were pulled out of class for a five- to seven-minute survey. Surveys were administered individually to each student, allowing the researchers to read the survey aloud

to students and clarify any questions as needed. Due to the low consent response rate from parents consenting for their children to participate, only seven children from the first school, with a population of 342 students, were surveyed.

Separate surveys were employed for the teachers and the students (Appendix A). After answering demographic questions, teachers were asked, “How familiar are you with competency-based education?” using a five-point Likert scale ranging from “very unfamiliar” to “very familiar.” This question was followed by questions regarding how often they perceived their school used the tenets of CBE, ranging from “very often” to “never.” They were then asked about their satisfaction with each tenet using a five-point Likert scale ranging from “very dissatisfied” to “very satisfied.” Finally, teachers were asked three short-answer questions: “What benefits of competency-based education do you see?” “What challenges of competency-based education have you come across?” and “What is your perception of the shift from traditional learning to competency-based education in your school?” Students were asked the same questions but the questions were modified into kid-friendly language.

Teachers could opt into a semi-structured interview by indicating their interest in the survey, which asked if they were interested in an interview. The interviews consisted of eleven questions regarding their experiences (Appendix B). Seidman (2019) advocates for interviewing because “at the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience” (p. 9). Interviews ranged from 15 to 30 minutes and were conducted at the elementary school or over Zoom.

## Data Analysis

Surveys were conducted using Qualtrics, and the raw data were downloaded into a spreadsheet. All Likert questions were recorded in pie charts for visual analysis, and short answers were copied and pasted into a separate document. Three interviews were conducted at the elementary school and recorded using Google Pixel’s Recorder app. The fourth was recorded over Zoom and transcribed using OtterAI. Transcripts of all the interviews were copied into a document and edited by the researcher.

Artificial intelligence (AI) was used to assist in extracting themes from the qualitative research data collected from the interviews and short-answer questions, using Google’s Notebook LM. This tool enables researchers to query specific sources that have been uploaded and does not utilize the uploaded data to train a larger AI model, making it a suitable tool for research purposes. Tabone and de Winter (2023) concluded that AI, specifically ChatGPT, was found to be a valid tool to summarize the data when analyzing interviews from human subjects. Furthermore, Hamilton et al. (2023) explained that combining human knowledge and AI technology, which can analyze large amounts of data quickly and explore patterns not easily recognized by people, can enhance analysis and lead to a deeper comprehension of the data. In other studies (Morgan, 2023), it was found that AI generated the same themes as human

coding through qualitative analysis when the research questions sought concrete, descriptive themes. Due to the relative newness of AI at the time of this writing, AI was utilized in addition to manual coding. Prior to using Notebook LM, the data was read thoroughly multiple times to capture big picture themes. We noted these big-picture themes in a research memo and then imported the transcripts and qualitative data from the survey into Notebook LM. It became clear that the themes noted in the research memo were similar to those that were produced through AI, confirming what Morgan (2023) and Hamilton et al. (2023) had found in their research.

All identifying information was removed from the documents when the teachers' short answers and interview transcripts were uploaded into Notebook LM. The researcher posed the guiding research questions to Notebook LM and examined the responses received. In a separate notebook, the document containing the students' short answers was downloaded into Notebook LM, which posed the guiding research questions. Findings and themes were recorded into a table, supported by annotations from the survey results, interviews, and the results of the Likert questions.

## Findings

This research sought to answer the following questions: What are teachers' perceptions of CBE? What are the perceived benefits of CBE? What are the challenges teachers reported about CBE? And, How could teachers be supported when implementing CBE? Similarly, the study investigated students' perceptions of CBE, what benefits they perceived, what challenges they encountered, and how they could be best supported. A table was created based on the Likert survey questions, followed by an analysis of the data. The results from the teachers' surveys and interviews were analyzed first, followed by those from the students.

### *What are teachers' perceptions of CBE?*

Table 2 displays the results from the Likert questions regarding satisfaction with CBE practices. More than half (57.1%) of the teachers stated they were familiar with CBE, a notably low percentage given that the district was implementing CBE for reading and math at the elementary level and focusing professional development around CBE. While opinions were mixed, teachers mostly perceived CBE positively in their schools. However, there were two tenets where teachers felt they needed improvement. Only 39.2% were satisfied or very satisfied with the personalized pathways provided for learning.

Additionally, only 28.6% were satisfied with how their school implemented PBL. Teachers were asked to rank on a scale of 1 through 5, with 5 meaning "very important," the importance of the transition to CBE for their students. Teachers responded positively, with 82.1% of teachers reporting a score of 4 or 5, indicating that most teachers believe that this transition is important to their students.

**Table 2**  
*Teacher Satisfaction with Competency-Based Education*

| Statements   | Teacher Satisfaction Likert Scores (%) |           |         |              |                   |
|--|--|-----------|---------|--------------|-------------------|
|  | Very Satisfied                         | Satisfied | Neutral | Dissatisfied | Very Dissatisfied |
| Rigorous and transparent expectations                    | 14.3                                   | 64.3      | 14.3    | 7.1          | 0                 |
| Personalized pathways for student learning               | 7.1                                    | 32.1      | 53.6    | 7.1          | 0                 |
| Differentiated instruction                               | 7.1                                    | 50.0      | 35.7    | 7.1          | 0                 |
| Student Agency   | 0                                      | 53.6      | 35.7    | 7.1          | 3.6               |
| Student-centered learning                                | 14.3                                   | 53.6      | 32.1    | 0            | 0                 |
| High-quality, meaningful, consistent assessment          | 14.3                                   | 53.6      | 17.9    | 10.7         | 3.6               |
| Real-world learning experiences through PBL              | 0                                      | 28.6      | 50.0    | 21.4         | 0                 |
| Equity and closing the disparity in academic achievement | 14.3                                   | 50.0      | 28.6    | 7.1          | 0                 |
| Community and family involvement                         | 32.1                                   | 60.7      | 3.6     | 3.6          | 0                 |

Teacher Satisfaction Likert Scores (%)  
N = 34 teachers

### ***What are the perceived benefits of CBE?***

Teachers found many perceived benefits in implementing CBE. Six teachers expressed that the new grading system used with CBE helped them identify where students are in their learning and where they still need support. Heather explained in her interview saying, “I think that competency-based [learning] lends itself more to that true progression of what we’re seeing in the classroom from day to day versus how a kid does on one assignment or one test.” Elise said, “I feel like [CBE] actually reflects on what a student can and cannot do at a given time, as opposed to an average of where they started when they shouldn’t really know what you’re teaching them to the end when, okay, now we should have it.”

Teachers noted a more positive classroom environment with the shift to CBE. Alex mentioned in his interview, “Everything doesn’t feel so high stakes, and [students] feel more open to make mistakes and talk about those mistakes all the time, especially in math.” One teacher reported on their survey that, “I’ve seen the overall positive mental health impacts with my students who normally [would] be hard on themselves about traditional grade[s] especially on tests.”

Three teachers noted that CBE helped them to differentiate instruction for their students, and three teachers reported ease in providing flexibility for their students. One teacher said in their survey, “CBE allows teachers to differentiate instruction and create intentional small group instruction that targets specific deficits in learning.” This comment reflects the Likert results from the survey, which showed that 67.8% of teachers believe their schools differentiate instruction often or very often.

Teachers also said that CBE supported student agency in the classroom and helped students understand the standards they were learning. One teacher said, “Standards are provided to students in easy-to-understand language, students know what they are doing and why it is important.” Heather explained, “It’s also something I feel like the kids can understand, especially when you compare it to riding a bike. That’s something that they have knowledge and understanding of, so I think that they can get it.” Students are also learning to assess their understanding. In Alex’s classroom, students use self-assessments that can be accessed in a folder in the classroom. He explained, “It is quick and easy, and it’s a routine that they’ve gotten into, so I would say that that’s working really well. Their ability to self-assess is actually on point.” Elise also shared, “I also have a turn-in tray that’s four turn-in trays. And on each tray is the scale, 1, 2, 3, or 4, and they actually evaluate their understanding before turning it into me, so that whenever I’m grading their papers, I automatically know, okay, this kid has confidence, but they’re not actually getting it. Or the opposite of this kid has no confidence, but they’re getting every single thing right.”

### ***What are the challenges teachers reported about CBE?***

Teachers voiced concern that different aspects of CBE have been inconsistent between classrooms. Two teachers reported inconsistency in grading, and one reported inconsistency in tracking competencies. Two teachers shared concerns about

whether the assessments tracked student proficiency with validity. Heather elaborated, “A lot of it’s very subjective, and so to us, it’s like, how do you get consistency across the board from classroom to classroom?” Heather also said, regarding the assessments themselves, “...there have been times where the way they want us to grade what the students have done doesn’t really line up with the skills listed for those competencies.” Another issue was the broad range in the proficiency scales, especially the range of skills level 2 encompassed. One teacher shared, “A 2 has a wide range of ability. A 2 isn’t clear if a child is missing most of a standard/skill or just a small part of the skill.” One teacher noticed that buy-in to CBE can affect their implementation. They said, “Some teachers may have differing opinions about CBE and therefore implement it in different ways/with different amounts of integrity.”

A notable hurdle to CBE was confusion from families and upper elementary teachers. Five teachers expressed in the survey and one in the interview that parent communication has been a challenge, especially since they are accustomed to the traditional method of grading. One teacher said in their survey, “I feel it’s probably also been a shift for our parents that have been used to seeing letter grades and want to understand if their students are ‘passing’ or ‘failing’ since that is what has been used for so long.” Five teachers mentioned in their short-answer responses that they found families preferred seeing a letter grade to competencies. In interviews, four teachers noted that K–2 teachers had already been implementing competency-based grading, and there was minimal transition required. However, three teachers noted in their short-answer responses that the switch to CBE was more challenging for upper elementary teachers because they were accustomed to assigning letter grades and percentages. One teacher found, “On some assessments, teachers are wanting to ‘count’ how many ‘points’ students got and then match the points to a proficiency scale.” In an interview, Heather noted, “[I’ve had more] understanding from my families this year than I have in years past.” She explained that she uses the same bike analogy with her students and their families. When asked if the visual helps families reach understanding, she said, “I think so, because I don’t think that they understood it before.” Elise said, “I almost think that if we went about it that way of showing this is an example of our goal that meets with the numbers, [families] might have a better understanding of what we’re looking for when we talk about the mastery of a skill.”

### ***How could teachers be supported when implementing CBE?***

When asked how teachers could be supported when implementing CBE, supportive staff, such as learning coaches and administration, was a common theme. Three teachers discussed how their learning coach had supported their needs. Heather said, “Sometimes, it’s just great to have an outside person listen to that and kind of coach you through or ask you certain questions to make those determinations.” Alex and Elise also both praised their principals as supportive in the transition to CBE.

Collaborative environments of open dialogue that include professional learning teams (PLT) also helped teachers. Alex said, “Through our PLTs, we’re often discussing how they relate to the standards, and if shifts need to be made, so the

environment here at this school is incredibly supportive.” Heather said, “I’m also not a person that’s afraid to ask questions or get help when I need it.”

Additional resources were also a way teachers could feel supported in CBE. One teacher said, “I had to determine what [the district] considered competent in order to receive a 3, 2, and 1, so the District Common Assessment sheets have helped a lot with that.” When asked how she could be further supported, Heather said, “Maybe just clarity of guidelines when you are grading or checking certain assessments for what the district wants us to put in. As far as their, like, levels go and how we track the kids.” Jenna also said, “Just resources. I still think having a good resource area that’s easy to find things, if you’re looking for something on a particular standard that kids need to improve upon.” Alex is saving student work to be used as examples next year. He said, “And I also recognize that the success of a competency-based grading approach is in the self-reflection of the students, and a big part of that is realistically assessing where they’re at, and so the best way that I think to do that is having examples of what proficient looks like.

### ***What are students’ perceptions of CBE?***

Table 3 shows the responses of the students regarding their satisfaction with CBE in their school. Students typically felt positive, with some reporting neutral feelings. More than half of students are satisfied with the high expectations of their school, how the school supports learning goals, how learning is customized to meet their needs, how the school lets them choose where, when, and how they learn, and how the school provides ways for all students to be successful. Over half of students (57.1%), however, reported neutral feelings regarding the ways they are asked to share their learning, though the remaining 42.9% are satisfied or very satisfied. A little under half (42.9%) of the students were neutral about how learning was centered around them, though a similar percent were also satisfied in this area, and 42.9% said that they were neutral about how their school implemented PBL.

### ***What do students perceive as the benefits of CBE?***

Students reported a variety of aspects of learning connected to CBE practices that they liked. Students reported two main benefits of CBE practices used in their classroom. One student explained that she liked being able to take a break from learning whenever she felt overwhelmed. She mentioned that she occasionally needed a break when things felt too hard or confusing, and her teacher provided a calming space for her to take that break, helping her brain to be ready to learn. Another student mentioned that they liked it when the teacher’s instructions were clear. This student seemed to like clear expectations and noted that it worked for him to be directed exactly where to submit his work based on how he felt he was performing on the assignment.

**Table 3**  
*Student Satisfaction with Competency-Based Education*

| Statement  | Student Satisfaction Likert Scores (%) |           |         |              |                   |
|--|--|-----------|---------|--------------|-------------------|
|  | Very Satisfied                         | Satisfied | Neutral | Dissatisfied | Very Dissatisfied |
| Rigorous and transparent expectations                | 28.6                                   | 42.9      | 14.3    | 14.3         | 0                 |
| Personalized pathways for student learning           | 28.6                                   | 28.6      | 28.6    | 14.3         | 0                 |
| Differentiated instruction                           | 14.3                                   | 57.1      | 14.3    | 14.3         | 0                 |
| Student Agency                                       | 28.6                                   | 28.6      | 28.6    | 14.3         | 0                 |
| Student-centered learning                            | 0                                      | 42.9      | 42.9    | 14.3         | 0                 |
| High-quality, meaningful, consistent assessment      | 14.3                                   | 28.6      | 57.1    | 0            | 0                 |
| Real-world learning experiences through PBL          | 42.9                                   | 0         | 42.9    | 0            | 14.3              |
| Equity and closing disparity in academic achievement | 42.9                                   | 42.9      | 14.3    | 0            | 0                 |
| Community and family involvement                     | 28.6                                   | 14.3      | 42.9    | 14.3         | 0                 |

*N* = 7 students

### ***What are the challenges students have reported about CBE?***

When asked what would make her learning better, a student said, “Making the kids in charge.” Though on the surface this seems like a silly answer, it provides insight into how students feel they want more control in their learning. Similarly, two students mentioned animals in their answers when asked how they would improve their learning, specifically pigs and chickens. Again, it shows that students may want to see more of their interests incorporated in their education, even though at first glance this may seem like a nonsensical answer.

When asked if there were any ways students could improve their learning, two students said, “I don’t know,” and three said, “Nothing.” These answers indirectly suggest a lack of strong engagement or clarity regarding their learning preferences at that moment. While this is not a challenge to the learning content itself, it could be a challenge in articulating their perspectives or feeling deeply connected to their learning and school.

## **Discussion & Implications**

The purpose of this research was to gain a deeper understanding of the perceptions of students and teachers regarding the transition from traditional learning to CBE in their school district. The research revealed important findings regarding CBE implementation that could provide insights to schools beginning their CBE journeys. Many teachers reported that CBE helped them track student progress in a way that reflects progression in student learning. Teachers reported positive classroom environments because of the switch to CBE, as well as being able to differentiate instruction with ease. Students were able to understand objectives in the classroom and why they were important, and some students were learning to self-assess their understanding. Challenges were identified in inconsistencies with various aspects of assessment, confusion in communication for families and upper elementary teachers, and the need for more instructional resources for grading and day-to-day examples of what CBE looked like in the classroom.

Teachers observed that CBE helped students understand the learning objectives and progression scales more effectively. In Alex and Elise’s classrooms, students were given opportunities to independently self-assess. In promoting student agency, CBE fosters student autonomy (Marzano et al., 2017; Pakarinen et al., 2024). In these classrooms, students showed awareness of expectations and the ability to evaluate their own progress. Without CBE, they may not have had the same opportunity to develop this autonomy or showcase their full potential.

This research also highlighted the importance of supportive administration and personnel, such as learning coaches, when answering questions regarding CBE, as well as PLTs. Research has highlighted that a supportive school culture and climate can support smooth CBE implementation (Evans et al., 2020; Sturgis, 2016). Research also supports that personal learning communities that meet often and receive appropriate professional development can help teachers (Evans et al., 2020; Gagnon, 2023; Lopez, 2017). Being able to express concerns with administration and other

teachers in a supportive learning environment will help teachers feel comfortable getting the answers they need.

Teachers reported that family communication was a challenge to CBE implementation, which is a finding supported by Evans et al. (2020) and Bingham et al. (2021). To secure their support, families need to understand why the switch to competency-based education and shifts in curriculum are necessary and how these changes can benefit their child (Bergmann, 2023; Evans et al., 2020; Marzano et al., 2017; Siler & Quick, 2018). This support can be provided through meetings where families can learn more about CBE, ask questions, and provide feedback about learning. These meetings should be accessible to as many people as possible, and steps to make this possible include invitations, reminders, refreshments, childcare, and student activities for children. It is best that terms are explained without unnecessary jargon (Bergmann, 2023; Marzano et al., 2017).

Another notable finding was the specific transition that upper elementary teachers experienced. It is possible that the bulk of parent confusion stems from parents with upper-elementary-aged children, because they are the ones expecting letter grades on their students' grade cards. Future research could focus specifically on upper elementary teachers and families to investigate the specific apprehensions they experience that lower elementary teachers do not. This could also be a topic of further research in high school, as students move through grade levels, since so much of advancing through the traditional American education system depends on the traditional grading system of receiving letter grades.

According to the survey results, half of the teachers report that they often or very often provide personalized pathways to student learning. A little over half of teachers (53.6%) reported that they often or very often promote student agency, and 64.2% of teachers indicated that they often or very often utilize student-centered learning. However, more than half of the students (57.1%) reported that they rarely set learning goals, and 71.5% of students said that learning is sometimes or rarely centered around them. Research shows that smooth implementation of CBE involves allowing students to have agency over their learning experiences (Marzano et al., 2017; Lopez, 2017; Evans et al., 2020; Gagnon, 2023). Cultivating student agency in student-centered classrooms can look like taking students' interests into account when planning lessons from the start (Klein, 2024; Miller et al., 2023; Pakarinen et al., 2024). When students can set goals for their learning, it can improve motivation, encourage them to persevere through challenging classwork, and help them achieve greater academic success than they would have had in a traditional system (Gagnon, 2023; Ritchie & Thorkildsen, 1994; Sturgis, 2016). By including student agency, learning also becomes more equitable because it stresses that there is shared collaborative power between teachers and students, highlights learning directed by students, and equips them with career and college-level skills that can benefit them for the rest of their lives (Marion et al., 2020). This can be achieved through a personalized learning plan. Personalized learning plans based on students' interests, characteristics, career goals, and mastery levels are essential for competency-based education (Gagnon, 2023; Lee, 2014; Lee et al., 2021). Student agency is an area for improvement in CBE implementation, given that it is critical to student learning.

Although students often say learning is not centered around them, very few students expressed dissatisfaction with their learning. Students may not be given the chance to explore the possibilities of school operating differently than they are accustomed to, so it may be challenging for students to imagine anything different. In a traditional classroom setting, students are seldom given the opportunity to make meaningful changes in the classroom and be active participants in their own learning. Conversely, in CBE, students in student-centered classrooms are seen as constructors of learning and active contributors to the classroom (Pakarinen et al., 2024). Students are encouraged to participate and can also give valuable feedback about classroom activities (Marzano et al., 2017; Miller et al., 2023; Pakarinen et al., 2024), which can lead to further research about how students can reimagine school or how often students are given the power to make meaningful changes in their learning.

## Limitations and Future Research

Limitations need to be taken into consideration in all research. First, our sample was limited to two schools with which our university had a partnership. Within those schools, there was a lack of racial and gender diversity, which was not reflective of the demographics of the schools' student body. Additionally, research needs to investigate family perspectives of CBE; focusing on their perspective could help schools identify specific concerns, enabling them to address these issues effectively.

There was also a small sample size when surveying students, and the students all came from the smaller, more diverse, and lower-income school due to limitations regarding receiving parental permission. It limits generalizability, and further research could expand on these findings. Exploring student perceptions further regarding CBE and how they compare to their teachers' perceptions of CBE would further enhance the literature on best practices around implementing CBE, especially at the elementary level.

Finally, our sample focused on only two schools within one large school district. The state in which this research was conducted was in the process of implementing CBE efforts statewide. Surveying and interviewing a broader sample of teachers from across the state would enhance the research overall and provide a more generalizable and robust data set. However, the small sample size collected provides valuable insights into the specific district and the two schools that were examined. Perhaps most notably, with only about half of teachers reporting familiarity with CBE, there is a clear need for more training to enable teachers to understand CBE on a deeper level so they can implement these practices in their classrooms with fidelity if the district expects them to practice CBE.

## Conclusion

In this research, teachers reported numerous strengths in how their district transitioned to CBE while also expressing some room for improvement. Teachers felt supported by the administration and learning coaches at their school, although they

would appreciate more resources. Based on their responses, they could also benefit from more explicit training in CBE to better understand this approach to education. However, teachers felt that there were inconsistencies in various aspects of the assessment, encountered hurdles in family communication, and experienced a lack of resources. Upper elementary teachers, in particular, faced more challenges during the transition. Likewise, students felt that there was not enough student agency in the classroom, despite teachers reporting otherwise.

This research contributed to the growing body of knowledge on CBE and helps fill the gap in research regarding the transition to CBE in elementary schools. The literature on school change would benefit from examining CBE in elementary schools, and more research is needed to provide a more generalizable data set. However, this is a step in providing valuable insight into how schools can begin their CBE journey.

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## Appendix A CBE Perception Survey for Children

Student Survey to be administered by a research team member. The following survey will be created in Qualtrics and a link shared with students. The research team will read the survey aloud as students answer questions.

1. Age
  1. 6
  2. 7
  3. 8
  4. 9
  5. 10
  6. 11
  7. 12
2. Grade level:
  1. 1st
  2. 2nd
  3. 3rd
  4. 4th
  5. 5th

The following questions will ask you to reflect on your school and your learning with competency-based education.

3. How often does your school have high expectations for learning?
  1. Never
  2. Rarely
  3. Sometimes
  4. Often
  5. Very often
4. How often do you get to set learning goals for your school year?
  1. Never
  2. Rarely
  3. Sometimes
  4. Often
  5. Very often
5. How often is your learning customized for your needs?
  1. Never
  2. Rarely
  3. Sometimes
  4. Often
  5. Very often

6. How often do you get to choose where you learn, what you learn, or how you learn?
  1. Never
  2. Rarely
  3. Sometimes
  4. Often
  5. Very often
7. How often is learning centered around you?
  1. Never
  2. Rarely
  3. Sometimes
  4. Often
  5. Very often
8. How often are you asked to show your learning in meaningful ways?
  1. Never
  2. Rarely
  3. Sometimes
  4. Often
  5. Very often
9. How often does your school use project-based learning?
  1. Never
  2. Rarely
  3. Sometimes
  4. Often
  5. Very often
10. How often does your school provide ways for all students to be successful?
  1. Never
  2. Rarely
  3. Sometimes
  4. Often
  5. Very often
11. How often are families and the community involved in learning?
  1. Never
  2. Rarely
  3. Sometimes
  4. Often
  5. Very often

The following questions will ask you to reflect on your overall satisfaction with how your school is implementing different elements of competency based education.

12. How do you feel about your school's high expectations?
  1. Very dissatisfied
  2. Dissatisfied
  3. Neutral
  4. Satisfied
  5. Very satisfied
13. How do you feel about the way your school supports your learning goals for the year?
  1. Very dissatisfied
  2. Dissatisfied
  3. Neutral
  4. Satisfied
  5. Very satisfied
14. How do you feel about the way your school customizes learning for your needs?
  1. Very dissatisfied
  2. Dissatisfied
  3. Neutral
  4. Satisfied
  5. Very satisfied
15. How do you feel about how your school lets you choose where you learn, what you learn, or how you learn?
  1. Very dissatisfied
  2. Dissatisfied
  3. Neutral
  4. Satisfied
  5. Very satisfied
16. How do you feel about your school's way of centering learning around you?
  1. Very dissatisfied
  2. Dissatisfied
  3. Neutral
  4. Satisfied
  5. Very satisfied
17. How do you feel about the ways you are asked to show your learning?
  1. Very dissatisfied
  2. Dissatisfied
  3. Neutral
  4. Satisfied
  5. Very satisfied

18. How do you feel about project-based learning?
  1. Very dissatisfied
  2. Dissatisfied
  3. Neutral
  4. Satisfied
  5. Very satisfied
19. How do you feel about how your school provides ways for all students to be successful?
  1. Very dissatisfied
  2. Dissatisfied
  3. Neutral
  4. Satisfied
  5. Very satisfied
20. How do you feel about the way families and communities are involved in your learning?
  1. Very dissatisfied
  2. Dissatisfied
  3. Neutral
  4. Satisfied
  5. Very satisfied
21. Short answer: What do you like about your learning?
22. Short answer: What would you want to make your learning better?

### **CBE Perceptions of Teachers**

This survey is to investigate the perceptions of teachers' of the transition from traditional learning to competency-based education. Competency-based education is when advancing in education is based on mastering learning goals, instead of automatically moving up after a school year or based on age, and includes all the following features: rigorous and transparent expectations, personalized pathways of learning for students, differentiated learning, promoting student agency, student-centered learning, high quality, meaningful, consistent assessment, real world opportunities through project-based learning (PBL), promoting equity and closing disparity in academic achievement, and community and family involvement. The questions are meant to gauge your perceptions of the transition to competency-based education in elementary schools.

1. Gender
  1. Male
  2. Female
  3. Transgender
  4. Non-binary
  5. Other:
  6. Prefer not to say

2. Age:
  1. 18-24
  2. 25-34
  3. 35-44
  4. 45-54
  5. 55-64
  6. 65+
3. Ethnicity:
  1. White/Caucasian
  2. Asian
  3. Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
  4. Hispanic or Latino
  5. African-American
  6. Native American
  7. Two or more
  8. Other (please specify):
  9. Unknown
  10. Prefer not to say
4. Connection to competency-based education in elementary schools:
  1. Teacher
  2. Admin/Staff
  3. Family member of a student
  4. Other:
  5. Prefer not to say
5. How familiar are you with competency-based education?
  1. Very unfamiliar
  2. Unfamiliar
  3. Neutral
  4. Familiar
  5. Very familiar

The following questions will ask you to reflect on your school's implementation of elements of competency-based education.

6. To what extent does your school utilize rigorous and transparent expectations:
  1. Never
  2. Rarely
  3. Sometimes
  4. Often
  5. Very often

7. To what extent does your school utilize providing personalized pathways for student learning:
  1. Never
  2. Rarely
  3. Sometimes
  4. Often
  5. Very often
8. To what extent does your school utilize the differentiating student learning:
  1. Never
  2. Rarely
  3. Sometimes
  4. Often
  5. Very often
9. To what extent does your school utilize promoting student agency:
  1. Never
  2. Rarely
  3. Sometimes
  4. Often
  5. Very often
10. To what extent does your school utilize student-centered learning:
  1. Never
  2. Rarely
  3. Sometimes
  4. Often
  5. Very often
11. To what extent does your school utilize high-quality, meaningful, consistent assessment:
  1. Never
  2. Rarely
  3. Sometimes
  4. Often
  5. Very often
12. To what extent does your school utilize real-world opportunities with Project-Based Learning:
  1. Never
  2. Rarely
  3. Sometimes
  4. Often
  5. Very often

- 13. To what extent does your school utilize promoting equity and closing disparity in academic achievement:
  - 1. Never
  - 2. Rarely
  - 3. Sometimes
  - 4. Often
  - 5. Very often
- 14. To what extent does your school utilize community and family involvement:
  - 1. Never
  - 2. Rarely
  - 3. Sometimes
  - 4. Often
  - 5. Very often

The following questions will ask you to reflect on your overall satisfaction with how your school is implementing different elements of competency-based education.

- 15. What is your perception of how your school provides rigorous and transparent expectations:
  - 1. Very dissatisfied
  - 2. Dissatisfied
  - 3. Neutral
  - 4. Satisfied
  - 5. Very satisfied
- 16. What is your perception of how your school provides personalized pathways for student learning:
  - 1. Very dissatisfied
  - 2. Dissatisfied
  - 3. Neutral
  - 4. Satisfied
  - 5. Very satisfied
- 17. What is your perception of how your school provides differentiating student learning:
  - 1. Never
  - 2. Rarely
  - 3. Sometimes
  - 4. Often
  - 5. Very often
- 18. What is your perception of how your school provides promoting student agency:
  - 1. Very dissatisfied
  - 2. Dissatisfied
  - 3. Neutral

4. Satisfied
  5. Very satisfied
19. What is your perception of how your school provides student centered learning:
1. Very dissatisfied
  2. Dissatisfied
  3. Neutral
  4. Satisfied
  5. Very satisfied
20. What is your perception of how your school provides high quality, meaningful, consistent assessment:
1. Very dissatisfied
  2. Dissatisfied
  3. Neutral
  4. Satisfied
  5. Very satisfied
21. What is your perception of how your school provides real world opportunities with project-based learning with Project-Based Learning:
1. Very dissatisfied
  2. Dissatisfied
  3. Neutral
  4. Satisfied
  5. Very satisfied
22. What is your perception of how your school provides promoting equity and closing disparity in academic achievement:
1. Very dissatisfied
  2. Dissatisfied
  3. Neutral
  4. Satisfied
  5. Very satisfied
23. What is your perception of how your school provides community and family involvement:
1. Very dissatisfied
  2. Dissatisfied
  3. Neutral
  4. Satisfied
  5. Very satisfied
24. How on a scale of one to five, five being very important, how important do you believe personalized learning experiences are for elementary students?
1. 1 - not important at all
  2. 2
  3. 3
  4. 4
  5. 5 - very important

Competency-based education is when advancing in education is based on mastering learning goals, instead of automatically moving up after a school year or based on age, and includes all the above features.

25. Short answer: What benefits of competency-based education do you see?

26. Short answer: What challenges of competency-based education have you come across?

27. Short answer: What is your perception of the shift from traditional learning to competency-based education in your school?

## Appendix B

### Perceptions of CBE Interview Protocol

The goal of this semi-structured interview is to gather the perceptions of teachers, students, and community members regarding competency-based education. The purpose of conducting interviews is to gain a more in-depth understanding of viewpoints regarding competency-based education and the transition from traditional learning to competency-based education. This interview will take approximately 20 to 40 minutes. This interview will be recorded to ensure accuracy in your responses, but measures will be taken to ensure that statements made are anonymous. Personal information, such as name, age, ethnicity, and any identifying factors, will not be included in the results. If names are needed for clarity purposes, pseudonyms will be used to protect your identity. Only the researcher will have access to the recorded content from the interviews. At any point, you can opt out of the interview without explanation, and no negative consequences will arise as a result. If you have any questions or concerns, please reach out to Dr. Amber Howard at [AmberHoward@MissouriState.edu](mailto:AmberHoward@MissouriState.edu).

The following questions are designed to help us get to know you and your background with this school district.

1. What is your educational background?
2. How long have you worked at this school district?
3. Have you had educational work experience outside of this school district?
4. What grade level do you work with? How long have you worked with that grade?

The following questions are designed to help you reflect on your perceptions of the transition to competency-based learning in this school district.

1. Tell me about your perception of the transition from traditional education to competency-based education.
2. What about the competency-based education do you feel is working for you and your student(s)?
3. What about competency-based education do you feel needs improvement?
  - a. Follow-up: What do you want to see that would improve this area of competency-based education?
4. How relevant do you feel that the transition to competency-based education is to your student(s)? Why or why not?
5. Do you feel that all features of competency-based education have been utilized as often as they should? Why or why not?
6. Do you feel that the transition to competency-based education has been smooth? Why?
  - a. Where do you think there could be improvement in the transition to competency-based education?

7. Do you feel supported in the transition to competency-based education?  
Why or why not?
  - a. What would you want to see to feel more supported during this transition?