

A blue-tinted photograph of students in a classroom. In the foreground, a young woman with curly hair is smiling and looking towards a young man who is leaning over her desk, also smiling. They appear to be engaged in a collaborative learning activity. In the background, other students are visible, some looking towards the camera and others looking down at their work. The overall atmosphere is positive and focused.

Planning for Postsecondary Competency-Based Learning

A Field Guide to Reimagine a System-Wide Approach to CBE

February 2022

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Thank you to the more than 200 participants who contributed to this planning process. For a complete list, see [Tools and Resources](#).



About this Field Guide

This Field Guide provides colleges, higher education systems, and state education agencies with a start-to-finish process to guide their own competency-based education (CBE) planning efforts. We developed the guide to address a question often considered in the higher education community: *How might postsecondary institutions better support learners' credential completion and job placement through more flexible educational offerings and supportive services?* The intention of this guide is to highlight the deliberate process required to holistically research, plan, and gain buy-in before deciding to move forward with program implementation.

As a key example, the guide will feature the ALIGN project, an intensive 18-month planning process to reimagine a system-wide approach to postsecondary competency-based education (CBE) across Kentucky's 16 community colleges.

This planning process, developed and led by the Competency-Based Education Network (C-BEN), provided the framework for fully engaging faculty and other stakeholders to reimagine how the whole system enterprise, not just discrete interventions or individual institutions, can deliver student-centered, flexible competency-based learning models.

Leaders at C-BEN strategically guided the Kentucky Community and Technical College System (KCTCS) through a planning process to 'think big' about an alternative learning model that could be responsive to both unprecedented change in the higher education landscape and a shifting labor market.

This Field Guide was prepared by a documentation team—Barbara Endel, PhD and Maggie Snyder—to advance the learning from KCTCS's work for other colleges and systems considering joining the CBE movement.

The guide begins with a **Quick Start** section to help college leaders, faculty, and staff understand the planning phases of work and to share Kentucky's timeline and outcomes. It includes steps to take to begin CBE exploration. Next, we present the specific **six-phase process** developed by C-BEN and how the process was undertaken by KCTCS. We explore the **recommendations** the team developed as a result of the process. Last, we surface important areas of focus for any college and system as they consider CBE in **Managing Change, Lessons Learned, and Tools and Resources**.

Quick Start



Why CBE?

The US labor market is increasingly dynamic, demanding new and more advanced skills from workers and requiring most adults to have a postsecondary credential. There is also continued acknowledgement of learners' needs, with one-third of students attending college over the age of 25 and 64 percent continuing to work while they are in school.¹ The changing nature of work is shortening the shelf life of job-specific skills. Without flexible delivery models, many learners will face long-term limitations in their career opportunities. Today's learners are also increasingly demanding an opportunity to connect what they already know with what they can do. That demand, combined with a desire to be served by flexible programs that provide quality learning leading to employment and career advancement, is something higher education is struggling to undertake.

“Competency-based education combines an intentional and transparent approach to curricular design with an academic model in which the time it takes to demonstrate competencies varies and the expectations about learning are held constant. Students acquire and demonstrate their knowledge and skills by engaging in learning exercises, activities and experiences that align with clearly defined programmatic outcomes. Students receive proactive guidance and support from faculty and staff. Learners earn credentials by demonstrating mastery through multiple forms of assessment, often at a personalized pace.” *C-BEN's Definition of CBE*

¹Today's Student (2019). Lumina Foundation. Retrieved from: <https://www.luminafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/todays-student.pdf>

KENTUCKY'S RESPONSE

To proactively address these issues, the Kentucky Community and Technical College System (KCTCS) began in fall 2019 to build a plan to understand what an alternative education model could look like. In 2020, KCTCS, supported by funding from Ascendium Education Group, teamed up with the Competency-Based Education Network (C-BEN) to launch a planning process to explore what competency-based education (CBE) could offer KCTCS learners. C-BEN is a network of professionals focused on effective, efficient, and equitable outcomes for learners. C-BEN starts with the principle that competency is the key to unlocking the talent that learners bring with them.

The College CBE Landscape

By the Numbers²



3,127 colleges and universities have at least some elements of CBE (2020 data)



76% of colleges believe CBE will grow in the next 5 years



60% of community colleges have CBE programs in development



28% of the 3,127 institutions with a CBE program are public 2-year institutions

²2020 National Survey of Postsecondary Competency Based Education (NPSCBE)

How to Get Started

For colleges or college systems ready to start planning for CBE models, the following steps will ensure an intentional and research-based process.

STEP 1:

Review this Field Guide, which provides insights and information to other states, systems, and colleges that may be interested in exploring a CBE planning process similar to that of KCTCS.

STEP 2:

Prepare for institution or state-wide conversation by convening a meeting with leadership to review the value proposition of CBE models and gain buy-in. For technical assistance and consultation, contact the team at the [Competency-Based Education Network](#).

STEP 3:

Convene a meeting with the executive team and/or cabinet to review the Field Guide and talk through the potential to engage in a planning process.

STEP 4:

Discuss the value proposition of CBE with key stakeholders, such as employer partners, college leaders, faculty, staff, and students.

STEP 5:

Design a planning process specific to your institution's needs. For questions about the planning process or for consultation and technical assistance, contact C-BEN at www.cbenetwork.org. For information specific to KCTCS, contact ALIGN@KCTCS.edu.

C-BEN's CBE Model Planning Process and Six Phases

The CBE planning process, consisting of six phases, was designed by C-BEN for any college or system to explore a potential CBE delivery model. The team from KCTCS activated a 10-person facilitation team (a combination of system office staff and college faculty and staff) to strategically guide the collective group of stakeholders. Faculty and staff across all 16 colleges, including the system office staff representing the entire college enterprise, were deeply engaged.

PHASE



Project Framing

Work with executive leadership to discuss how a CBE initiative could align with strategic goals and create high-level intended outcomes, as well as a framework for who should be involved in the planning process and communication plans to ensure transparency. Secure any necessary resources to conduct the planning process. Assemble the structure and leadership team needed for executing the planning process and working toward the goal of creating an implementation plan.

PHASE



Vision Setting & Sharing

Convene a broad group of stakeholders, including learners, faculty, staff, employers, and state and community agencies, to determine how CBE can serve each audience. Based on feedback, create a shared vision and value proposition for each stakeholder group that should be vetted with the diverse audiences and then shared widely to broaden engagement.

C-BEN's CBE Model Planning Process and Six Phases cont.**PHASE****3** Identifying Current & Future State

Evaluate the current state and effectiveness of the current model. Evidence should be gathered from both academic and non-academic areas and from any external partners who can provide insights. Facilitate a process to specifically define what a competency-based model might look like in both the system and institutions. Define key terms by developing a shared lexicon to ensure consistency throughout the potential adoption of competencies and assessments across the curriculum and departments.

PHASE**5** Performing Gap Analysis

Decide which resources would be needed to implement the competency-based model by comparing the current state to the desired future state using evidence collected during Phases 3 and 4. Resource planning at this phase examines all areas of the institution to determine what financial, human, technological, and communications resources, student supports, and external affairs are necessary, detailing by each area why the resources are needed to reach the defined future state.

PHASE**4** Researching Best Practices

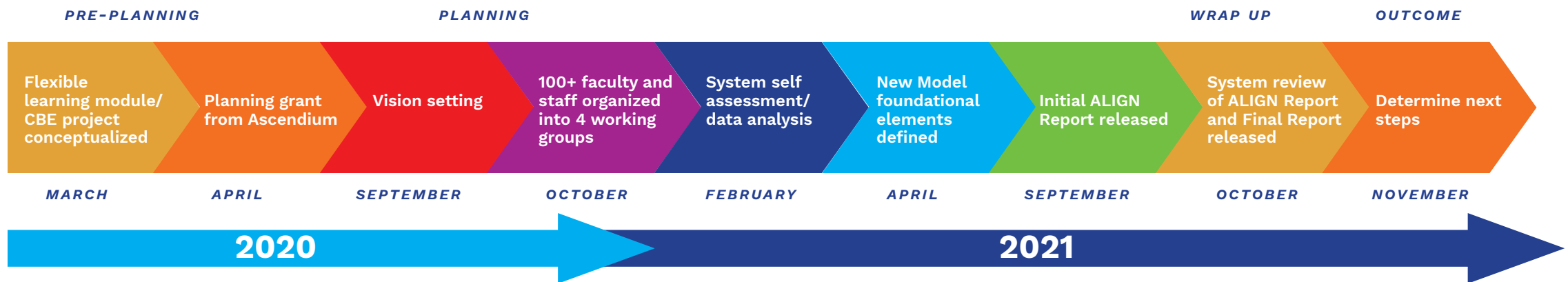
Review existing literature, toolkits, and field guides to further develop and expand on ideas for what the competency-based model should look like in practice. Participate in fact-finding sessions with others who have implemented CBE and investigate related activities happening in your region.

PHASE**6** Proposing Recommendations for Moving Forward

Determine the specific steps that must be taken to move from the current state to a competency-based future state, placing recommendations in order of priority and completion. Recommendations should be placed on an implementation timeline, including if a phased approach would be best, along with when and how any resources will be procured.

Example CBE Project Planning Timeline

This high-level, 12-18 month timeline is an example of how a college or system can engage major stakeholder groups to explore and plan a transition to CBE. This model empowers faculty, staff, and leadership across the whole college/system and was used by KCTCS to determine feasibility of reimagining a new CBE teaching and learning delivery model.



PRE-PLANNING

The pre-planning timeline and activities are extensive, with at least five months required to complete the preparation needed for CBE exploration. While the pre-planning formally begins on this timeline in March 2020, the initial activities undertaken by Kentucky began in fall 2019 when the KCTCS Vice Chancellor drafted the initial concept for the CBE project at scale and sought external funding.

The pre-planning built buy-in among key stakeholders at KCTCS, as well as with key government staff, influential employers, and other state agencies. The pre-planning also included engaging in a grant proposal process, building the external consultant team to support faculty and staff, and establishing the project's guiding leadership team.

Pre-Planning cont.

Identifying the Opportunity Window

As you consider pursuing CBE at your institution or system, it is important to understand the opportunity signals that indicate the timing is right to pursue planning for alternative education delivery models. Here are signals that can help your team gauge readiness.

- 1. Entrepreneurial leadership who can identify pressing problems and potential solutions:** KCTCS's Vice Chancellor for Academics and Workforce Development had been searching for a way to close workforce gaps in the state. An initial problem he thought CBE could address was the translation of skills and knowledge developed via education to actual business needs. He looked for creative ways to solve this problem and turned to CBE. Simply put, CBE would allow for education to be distilled into competencies that students and employers could understand, communicate, and compare.
- 2. A recognition of the changing future of work:** This is a phenomenon happening across the country and was a special focus within Kentucky to try to better move at the speed of business. It is key that system and/or college stakeholders consider the implications and importance of their role in adapting to meet new learners and fast-changing market needs based on a specific regional context.
- 3. An identified disconnect between labor market needs and the workforce:** The need to upskill and reskill the population quickly and effectively was evident in Kentucky, driving the need for the colleges and system to be more creative in recruitment and offerings to remain viable. The vice chancellor believed that, due to this, there may be increased incentive for the colleges to consider flexible educational delivery models, such as CBE.
- 4. A link to the statewide workforce development plan:** The Kentucky plan prioritized alignment between education and industry demands, as well as an integration between P-12, adult education, and postsecondary education to provide lifelong opportunities.
- 5. Active external initiatives that indicate similar problem prioritization:** Kentucky was selected as one of three grant-supported states by the US Chamber of Commerce to pilot their Talent Pipeline Management (TPM) program. One goal of TPM is to ensure citizens can build the skills to enter in-demand career pathways via individualized educational opportunities.

The confluence of these factors increased prioritization in Kentucky for aligning employer, education, and learner interests, defining credentials of interest, and building an economy that worked better for more people.

Pre-Planning cont.

Securing Funding

While external funding is not a requirement to successfully plan for a CBE process, it can help ensure success and collaboration. Kentucky was able to secure external funding from Ascendium Education Group. This was key to KCTCS's ability to undertake such a thoughtful and comprehensive planning process with C-BEN's guidance. The funding permitted KCTCS to structure a very intensive faculty and staff engagement process with the ability to pay stipends to the working group leaders and two Chancellor's Fellows who served on the project leadership team.



“*The ALIGN project provided us an opportunity to take a hard look at ourselves to determine how we can streamline our processes to become more efficient and student friendly. Our goal is always to do what's best for students. It's extremely important that we support what our business partners need as well, which is getting students through the pipeline quickly. That's why I'm excited about the possibility of flexible learning models that can be prototyped and scaled.*”

Dr. Paul Czarapata, KCTCS President

PLANNING

The planning stage was composed of C-BEN's six planning phases. The timeline above includes key moments when major activities were completed, such as when the vision was established by key Kentucky stakeholders and extensive college data was reviewed as part of defining the current state. The [planning process](#) is described later in this field guide.

WRAP UP

The final planning stage in fall 2021 culminated into a set of 17 recommendations made by the six working groups (in total over 100 faculty and staff and over 200 external stakeholders) and underscored that the entire planning process yielded more than imagined about how to enhance the learner experience across the entire college enterprise. These [17 recommendations](#) are discussed in detail later in this field guide.

OUTCOME

The entire process was designed to answer the question: What could a new flexible competency-based education delivery system for offering education and student support services look like? In November 2021, the reimagined CBE model, created by the working groups and facilitation team, reflecting the entire planning process was brought forward, in the form of a motion, to the KCTCS executive leadership for approval. Because of strong shared governance in the system, this step was needed to ensure the broad endorsement of the project to move forward.

The motion, first and foremost, recognized the outstanding work of the more than 100 KCTCS employees who created the overall recommendations. Second, the motion recognized that, in order to determine which colleges wished to implement one or more of the ALIGN recommendations, a follow-up effort would need to be designed with a more concrete operational plan spelled out. The executive leadership approved both components of the motion.

Given that Kentucky is moving forward, a survey of the KCTCS college presidents in early 2022 will determine which colleges are ready to consider implementation of any of the 17 recommendations within the report. If colleges wish to move forward, a cross-functional college and system office team will be formed to support implementation.



“ This is one of the first initiatives KCTCS has worked on that is from the ground up where staff and faculty can truly explore before saying yes or no. ”

*Ingrid Washington, Vice President, Student Support Services,
Gateway Community and Technical College, and Facilitation Team Member*

Planning Process



C-BEN's Planning Process and Six Phases



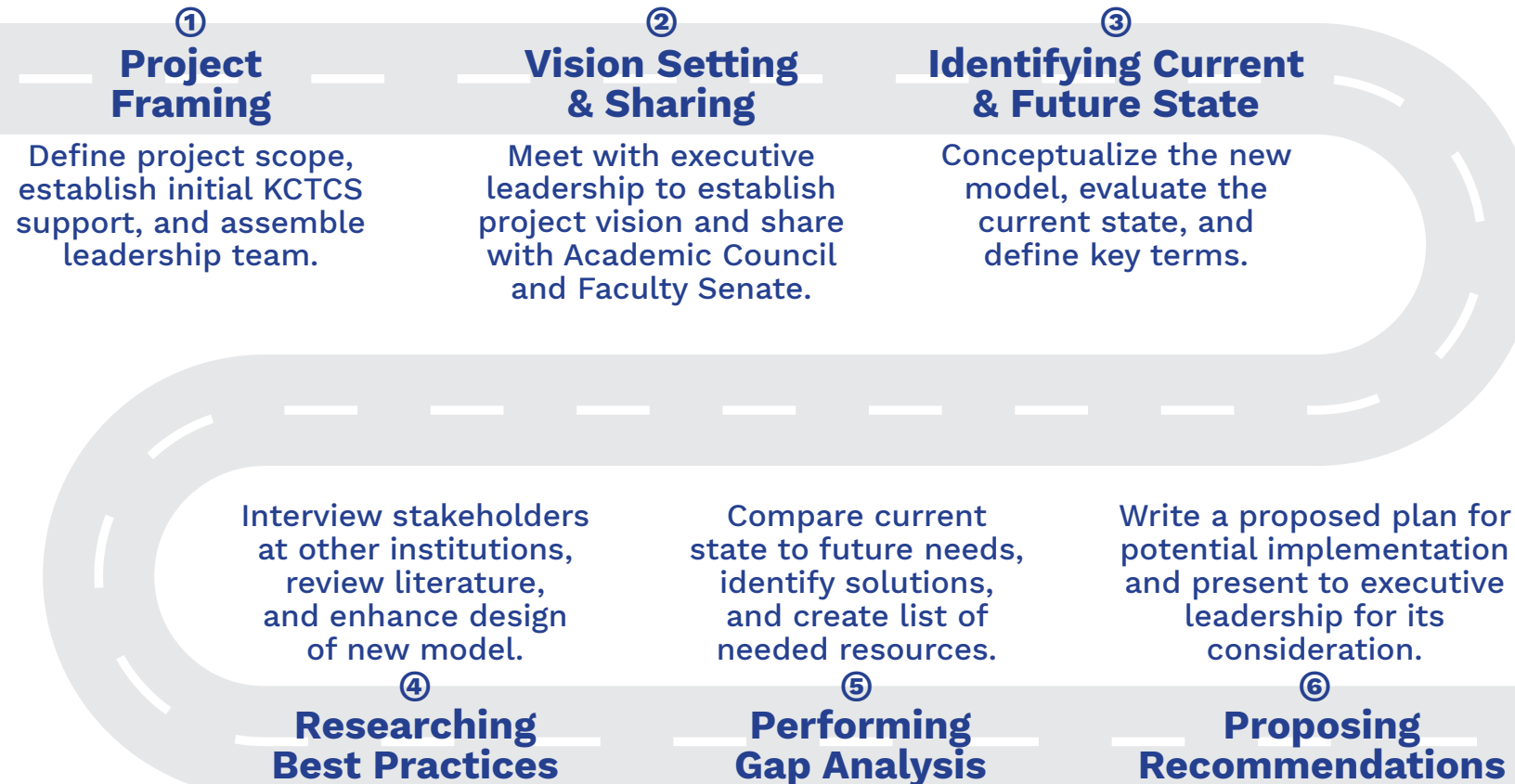
“C-BEN is extremely proud to partner with the Kentucky Community and Technical College System and lead it through a comprehensive planning process, exploring the viability of competency-based learning. Kentucky’s community and technical colleges have long been leaders in innovation. Over the past 18 months we have supported the system to explore and consider the complex challenges facing learners and employers and the skills and competencies needed to navigate a dynamic landscape.”

Dr. Charla Long, President, Competency-Based Education Network

The ALIGN planning process consisted of six phases. These phases were developed by C-BEN and implemented by the ALIGN project facilitation team over the course of 18 months to strategically guide stakeholders through a process of inquiry to reimagine teaching and learning. The phases activate the decision-theory based process to ensure faculty and staff-comprised working groups could learn about CBE, understand the current state of KCTCS data and outcomes, research best practices, and draft recommendations outlining how CBE could be considered, if adopted, within its general education, technical education, and workforce solutions offerings. C-BEN helped the working groups take into account how the programs and the student support systems, business services, information systems, technology, human resources, and other internal systems could be evolved to add flexible CBE models. Importantly, C-BEN guided a comprehensive process for colleges to analyze their own data. The data analysis led to the development of comprehensive recommendations that span the entire learner experience.

Six Phases of the Planning Process

“This isn’t just a roadmap for CBE; it’s a roadmap leading the colleges to better outcomes.” – Faculty member



1 Project Framing

What it is: Work with executive leadership to discuss how a CBE initiative could align with strategic goals and create high-level intended outcomes, as well as a framework for who should be involved in the planning process and communication plans to ensure transparency. Secure any necessary resources to conduct the planning process. Assemble the structure and leadership team needed for executing the planning process and working toward the goal of creating an implementation plan.

How it worked in Kentucky: KCTCS leaders, with consultant partners, established the facilitation team and advisory council and developed the timeline and corresponding work plan.

Your Next Steps:

- **Create a facilitation team** with diverse perspectives that represent college and system office (if applicable) personnel. While your team may look different, here are the key roles Kentucky selected for their project team:
 - Vice Chancellor of Workforce Development at the system office
 - C-BEN consultant partners
 - Two Chancellor’s Fellows for the Future of Work (one representing technical education and one faculty member representing general education) who would serve as liaisons between the planning team and faculty
 - A project manager
 - Documentation consultant partners
 - One representative from the Academic Council (Chief Academic Officer from each college)
 - One representative from the Student Affairs Council (Chief Student Affairs Officer from each college)
- **Build an advisory council.** This is necessary to ensure the relevance of any proposed model to your local network. Kentucky invited organizations like:
 - The Kentucky Chamber of Commerce
 - The Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education
 - Employer representatives such as the Kentucky Association of Manufacturers

Your Next Steps cont.

KCTCS ADVISORY COUNCIL EXPECTATIONS

“The advisory council will meet quarterly to provide substantive feedback and recommendations based on the overarching goals of the planning process, which will develop strategies to:

- Develop a seamless translation process with business and industry to ensure the skills that are acquired by students at our colleges are tightly aligned with the needs of business and industry so that students are ‘job ready.’
- Integrate KCTCS’s emerging efforts to evaluate, assess, and award college credit for prior learning/experience to streamline adult students through certificate and degree programs, particularly for adults in targeted populations and key geographic sectors such as rural communities.
- Increase the ability for our students to take ‘on ramps’ and ‘off ramps’ within the KCTCS freeway system of postsecondary training and education when new skill sets provide students opportunities within the workforce to up-skill along the way.
- Map skills and competencies across career pathways that illustrate transferability of certain skills among different programs of study, occupations, and industries, creating flexibility and agility for students as they explore and choose new career fields.
- Increase interaction between faculty and students through the online learning system that allows our students to work at a personalized pace.
- Expand upon our ability to attract and retain adult students who need flexible course offerings as they juggle work, home-life, and school.”

→ **Develop the timeline and work plan** to coordinate with the six key phases of planning and developing CBE models, ensuring at least 10-12 months of planning time.

Your Next Steps *cont.*

→ **Structure the working groups.** Include representatives from each stakeholder group. This key design principle ensures that the faculty and staff comprising working groups can learn about CBE, understand the current state of data and outcomes, research best practices, and draft recommendations outlining how CBE could be considered, if adopted, within its general education, technical education, and workforce offerings and communicate that back to their colleagues. C-BEN helped to structure several working groups with faculty and staff from every college. The groups were:

Business Process and Services

Key topics for consideration include:

- Business model tuition, academic terms
- Compliance with federal financial aid and accreditor guidelines
- Proposed changes to existing state, system, or institutional policies and procedures
- Potential funding sources for possible implementation

Curriculum and Learning Transformation (with sub groups for General Education, Technical Education, and Workforce Solutions)

Key topics for consideration include:

- Guiding principles and approach
- Course/content structure
- Competency and/or skills framework
- Curricular opportunities and priorities
- Faculty and staff readiness
- Transcription and transferability of learning and competencies

Information Technology

Key topics for consideration include:

- Suite of available and needed software and technological tools, including Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP), Learning Management System (LMS), Learning Tools, Learning Resources, Student Advisement, Student Support & Care, Transcription, and Security
- Evaluation of interoperability of various solutions
- Right mix of tools to enable ALIGN

Student Support Services

Key topics for consideration include:

- Understanding targeted learners' needs
- Best practice interventions, systems, and technology
- Wraparound student support model
- Range of services and supports needed
- Allowing for local adaptation



“**The way KCTCS designed ALIGN was one of the most comprehensive and engaging planning processes I have experienced.**”

Dr. Gregory Feeney, Provost at Bluegrass Community and Technical College, Lexington, KY

② Vision Setting & Sharing

What it is: Convene a broad group of stakeholders, including learners, faculty, staff, employers, and state and community agencies, to determine how CBE can serve each audience. Based on feedback, create a shared vision and value proposition for each stakeholder group that should be vetted with the diverse audiences and then shared widely to broaden engagement.

How it Worked in Kentucky: The facilitation team worked with the executive leadership team to name the initiative and establish the vision and broad guideposts for the eventual model, such as applicability to all modes of delivery, including face-to-face, online, and hybrid models. They also shared the developed vision among college, system, and Commonwealth stakeholders, developed a communications plan, and, most importantly, recruited working group members.

Your Next Steps:

→ **Name the project and develop the vision.** Kentucky held a series of meetings with the executive leadership to set a vision for the project and incorporate a diverse range of perspectives. The resulting vision and value propositions, outlined in a foundational document, were shared with stakeholders and those who inquired about the goals of this project. Through C-BEN's facilitation of the initial vision sessions, it was determined that the proposed new model should include the following features:

- A community that surrounds each learner with the services and supports needed for success;
- Flexibility to ensure all learners have the opportunity to pursue education and persist to completion;
- Instruction that leads to workforce readiness through the demonstration of required knowledge and skills needed by employers both now and in the future; and
- Applicability to all modes of delivery, including face-to-face, online, and hybrid models.

→ **Ensure an understanding of CBE among stakeholders.** C-BEN shared CBE's quality program elements with KCTCS during the visioning sessions, including:

- Co-constructed competencies
- Performance-based, authentic assessments
- Coherent learning journeys with proactive support from faculty and staff
- Substantial employer engagement
- Transparency of learning
- Continuous improvement processes

Your Next Steps *cont.*

→ **Develop a communication plan** to ensure all of the major stakeholders groups are engaged, apprised of progress and key findings, and can help weigh in if there are decision points. Below is an example of how KCTCS and the project team communicated about ALIGN.

Kentucky's Communication Plan

Recipient	Method	Frequency
College Faculty	Column in Chancellor's Corner Newsletter written by the Chancellor's Fellows	Shared monthly during the academic year
	College discussions and information sharing via campus stakeholders involved in ALIGN	As appropriate on campus
All Faculty and Staff	ALIGN Site: Chancellor's Office InfoCenter	Updated with monthly reports from strands/committees and as other documents are added
Academic Council	Report from the Facilitation Team and Chief Academic Officers who serve in leadership roles in ALIGN	Monthly
Business Affairs Team	Report from working group lead or leadership liaison	Monthly
Student Services Council	Report from the Student Services Support working group lead, the leadership liaison, and other staff who represent student services on ALIGN	Monthly
Technology Solutions Advisory Team	Report from working group lead or leadership liaison	Monthly
Advisory Committee	Email to committee members with summary of faculty updates	Every other month
Executive Team	Report from the Delivery and Programs Action Team Chair	Monthly via executive team meetings

Your Next Steps *cont.*

→ **Recruit for the working groups.** Create an information sheet for prospective members with expectations of time and duties. Request nominations from college leaders. With the ALIGN project, working group leads' responsibilities were as follows:

- Conduct the working group meeting
- Engage working group members, and ensure everybody's voice is heard
- Ensure team meets project deadlines
- Ensure planning questions are fully answered
- Develop and disseminate documents related to working group's charge
- Represent the working group
- Write the working group's proposed implementation plan

③ Identifying Current and Future State

What it is: Evaluate the current state and effectiveness of the current educational model. Evidence should be gathered from both academic and non-academic areas and from any external partners who can provide insights. Facilitate a process to specifically define what a competency-based model might look like for both the system and institutions. Define key terms by developing a shared lexicon to ensure consistency throughout the potential adoption of competencies and assessments across the curriculum and departments.

How it worked in Kentucky: In order to identify the current state, more than 100 members of the faculty and staff working on ALIGN co-developed a comprehensive internal survey to guide the development of a potential CBE model. The survey tool was designed to understand topics such as: (1) any competency-based instruction already occurring, and in which sectors; (2) current student outcomes, like retention and persistence rates; (3) an inventory of current courses and number of KCTCS credentials and micro-credentials offered; and (4) percentage of faculty with explicit learning outcomes in their courses. This phase also included visioning for the future state and defining a shared lexicon among the teams.

Your Next Steps:

→ **Evaluate the current state.** This can be done by looking at existing data and/or creating a survey or another tool to analyze relevant topics. Reporting out to all stakeholders with the current state information will help to provide a justification for the need to consider change and redesign. Reviewing data will also ensure everyone is directionally aligned.



“*ALIGN requires us to think differently about the way we are delivering education. This is the kind of dramatic change that we need to stay relevant.*”

Dr. Vic Adams, President/CEO of Southeast Kentucky Community and Technical College (SKCTC)

Your Next Steps *cont.*

→ **Develop a data strategy.** Understanding the current state was one of the most important phases of the project. In order to equip the working groups (composed of faculty and staff who may not have current access to a comprehensive data snapshot), this phase had the following characteristics:

1. Each working group identified a broad set of questions (e.g., credential completion rates) to understand the current state and set up the mechanism to reimagine a new model and/or new model elements to enhance current practices;
2. The surveys strategically identified the following key data: three-year graduation rates, student transfer rates, percentage of face-to-face, hybrid, and online teaching, percentage of competency-specific instruction taught within current courses, number of overall credentials offered throughout the system, student support services most accessed, and several others;
3. College surveys were developed and sent to all 16 colleges for most departments to add data points;
4. Data was summarized by consultant partners and system office staff, with working groups meeting to discuss the results and implications across several sessions;
5. The data strategy significantly turned the course of the project, with the working groups becoming even more committed, given this exercise resulted in key insights into areas of strength and areas for possible improvement;

→ **Begin to develop the future state model.** Use the current state data as a baseline to reimagine the possibilities of education delivery. Leave enough time for this component. It took KCTCS approximately two months to analyze data and create their future state. ALIGN project members developed a core set of foundational elements that served as a “northstar” throughout the project.



KCTCS's Foundational Elements

Following the review of data, the working groups came together and collectively developed the foundational elements for its proposed model. This work included first securing executive sponsorship and engaging faculty and staff, including the technology infrastructure needed, professional development on CBE, and the financial resources to support the possible adoption of the CBE model. Information Technology (IT) is indicated between each model element emphasizing the need for potential involvement of IT in every component.

The foundational elements of KCTCS's ALIGN Model, discussed in detail later [in this guide](#), form the core of the recommendations developed by KCTCS working groups. The model elements include:

- A credentialing strategy to ensure academic and economic mobility
- A shared language to ensure consistency in curriculum and increase employer and learner confidence in KCTCS credential outcomes
- An assessment repository to ensure learners may demonstrate mastery through authentic assessments
- Wraparound supports to ensure learners follow a predetermined journey map for the proper learner persona
- An instructional learning journey to ensure learners will receive a highly relevant and personalized academic experience
- External engagement to ensure integration of knowledge and resources into daily operations through multi-institutional sector teams
- Systemic drivers to ensure relevant and necessary variables are in place to power the other foundational elements

4 Researching Best Practices

What it is: Review existing literature, toolkits, and field guides to further develop and expand on ideas for what the competency-based model should look like in practice. Participate in fact-finding sessions with others who have implemented CBE and investigate related activities happening in your region.

How it worked in Kentucky: Researching best practices included two major activities for all six of the working groups: 1) gathering information on related activities happening in Kentucky by mapping core initiatives, interviewing key stakeholders, such as colleges leading the country in CBE design and implementation, and engaging in communication with the executive leadership team; and 2) researching and crafting a literature review.

Your Next Steps:

- **Set up panels of external experts** to more fully build out your institution's future state and infuse it with best practices from the field. Arrange external panels of faculty and institutional leaders with experience in building and implementing CBE programs in other states.
- **Conduct a literature review if needed.** This step made a huge difference to the ALIGN project's Curriculum and Learning Transformation team and was the missing piece for some team members.
- **Facilitate a vendor showcase.** The Information Technology working group determined that, to best analyze and determine what the strongest future state could look like for the design and delivery of a potential CBE model, they would need to sponsor an IT Vendor Showcase. This was successful in allowing the working groups, and the system at large, to envision possible technology infrastructure updates to support CBE delivery holistically.



“*The core project of ALIGN is compelling: structure the programming we offer so that it matches the needs of our industry partners and then articulate that match. CBE frees our instructors, the subject matter experts, to rethink how to organize and teach the skills so that our students can focus their time and energy on what they find most challenging. Unfortunately, rethinking course structure often runs up against non-pedagogical barriers, such as scheduling, fees, teaching loads, etc. Fortunately, a number of our colleagues in other schools, such as Nicolet College, have paved the way in offering a number of programs in a CBE format, and we can learn from their examples to build a system that works best for us.*”

Dr. Uppinder Mehan, Vice President of Academic Affairs, West Kentucky Community and Technical College

5 Performing Gap Analysis

What it is: Decide which resources would be needed to implement the competency-based model by comparing the current state to the desired future state using evidence collected during Phases 3 and 4. Resource planning at this phase examines all areas of the institution to determine what financial, human, technological, and communications resources, student supports, and external affairs are necessary, detailing why the resources are needed to reach the defined future state.

How it worked in Kentucky: Working group leads and the facilitation team convened an interactive, all-day working session to document and capture what was learned from the data collection and what design elements (or ‘must haves’) should be included in the ALIGN model. Doing so led to the questions: What do we know today, and what is needed for the future state in this gap analysis framework? The result of the working session was the development of a critically important “Summary of Current State and Potential Model,” which enabled working group members to conceptualize new model elements.

Your Next Steps:

- **Identify the gaps.** Convene your working group leads to document what was learned from the internal data collection in Phase 3 and best practices in Phase 4. It will be important to distill your working groups’ recommendations at this phase and ensure majority approval for whatever plan is developed.
- **Finish fleshing out the future state model from Phase 3 and share widely.** In Kentucky, the summary of preliminary recommendations was the key driver enabling working groups to conceptualize new model elements after taking a hard look at the data.



“As a professor, one of the most significant learnings from the ALIGN project for me was that good teaching starts with the end in mind. By using a backward design in course development, students are provided a clear pathway to mastery. Focusing on mastery of competencies allows students to feel confident in what they both know and can do. That is the goal of great educators!”

Carla Hornback, Chancellor's Fellow and Professor of Communication, Elizabethtown Community & Technical College

6 Proposing Recommendations

What it is: Determine the specific steps that must be taken to move from the current state to a competency-based future state, placing recommendations in order of priority and completion. Recommendations should be placed on an implementation timeline, including if a phased approach would be best, along with when and how any resources will be procured.

How it worked in Kentucky: Supported by the working groups' work and informed by stakeholders over the entire process, working group leads and the facilitation team created a set of 17 recommendations that include examples and explanations of the current state, data collected that supports the recommendation, the status of the recommendation, and potential barriers with associated solutions.

Your Next Steps:

- **Draft recommendations.** Depending on your process, the individual working group's participation is largely complete. The facilitation team takes the information gleaned from the gap analysis session(s) and model elements and co-develops a set of recommendations with the working group leads. Although each individual working group member may not be in full agreement with each recommendation, the majority of working group members must support the majority of recommendations to ensure success in any future rollout.
- **Socialize recommendations** to garner wide-spread support among stakeholders. The draft recommendations should be shared with the decision makers at your institution, such as faculty senate/council and other key councils of shared governance. They should also be shared with campus leaders to socialize with faculty and staff.

Your Next Steps *cont.*

ALIGN Project Recommendation

For the purposes of this Field Guide, we are excerpting one recommendation below, with an overview of all 17 recommendations described later in this guide. The resources presented in this full recommendation are intended to indicate the level of support required to ensure successful implementation of the recommendations. This excerpted recommendation consists of a statement of the recommendation, which includes developmental context, potential barriers, and solutions. A summary of all ALIGN recommendations is listed in the [ALIGN: Recommendations for a New Educational Model to Support Learners](#).

Recommendation: Evaluate Existing Certifications and Credentials

Statement of Recommendation

Existing certifications and credentials should be evaluated for applicability, potential omissions, gaps, and clear pathways. Working group discussions centered on the need to determine the relevance of existing KCTCS certifications to employers and noted the importance of curriculum review with curriculum committees, employers, and advisory boards for this determination. Working group members felt it was essential for an ongoing review of certifications with an emphasis on the value of stackable credentials, state- or regulating board-required credentials, and those credentials leading to newly emerging job opportunities. This requires collaboration with employers and advisory board members who are in tune with the workforce needs of the service region.

Making It Possible

Barrier: Although most programs have advisory boards, their level of involvement varies, and many meet infrequently. There is a concern that some advisory boards will not provide the feedback needed to make necessary changes.

Solution: Business & Industry

Leadership Teams (BILT) should be created for each program rather than utilizing the traditional advisory boards. More information is available [here](#).

**ALIGN: Kentucky's
Recommendations for a
New Educational Model
to Support Learners**



CBE Working Group Recommendations

Over the summer of 2021, the facilitation team prepared a feasible plan that operationalized the recommendations developed in the sixth and final phase of work. The recommendations were developed to meet the charge of creating an educational model that provides learners with the relevant knowledge and skills needed to meet local, regional, and state employer needs. The final internal report included the recommendation, the financial and human resources needed to implement, and sustainability considerations. In this section, we present the 17 recommendations for other colleges or systems to consider when exploring CBE.

KCTCS Foundational Model Elements

Each of the 17 recommendations is categorized according to the foundational element from the KCTCS Foundational Model (see image below) created during Phase 3. Information Technology (IT) is indicated between each model element emphasizing the need for potential involvement of IT in every component. The foundational elements form the core of the recommendations, and we include the model and recommendations language here for other colleges to review and consider to support their contextual needs.



CBE Working Group Recommendations cont.

Credentialing Strategy

1. Evaluate Existing Certifications and Credentials
2. Design and Implement a Subscription Service Model for the ALIGN model

Shared Language

3. Create Integrated Career Clusters
4. Identify and Define a Shared Competency Set for Credentials

Assessment Repository

5. Develop Common Formative and Summative Assessment Tools

Wraparound Student Supports

6. Implement a Consistent Resource Center Experience for Students
7. Create and Implement a Case Management Model and Develop Learner Personas

Instructional Learning Journey

8. Develop Contextualized General Education Courses within Integrated Career Clusters

External Engagement

9. Enhance External Engagement of Key Stakeholders
10. Structure College Leadership with Workforce Solutions Reporting Directly to the President

Systemic Drivers

11. Implement the ALIGN Model Using a Phased Roll-out Approach
12. Provide Targeted Professional Development Opportunities for Faculty to Build Capacity for Implementation of the ALIGN Model
13. Provide Faculty with Access to CBE Instruction and Curriculum Design Experts to Develop Capacity for Program and Curriculum Development and Instruction within the ALIGN Model
14. Systemically Promote Cultural Diversity and Inclusion
15. Recognize Faculty Time and Expertise for Responsibilities within the ALIGN Model
16. Guarantee Faculty Load in First Year of Implementation of the ALIGN Model at Each College
17. Research, Adopt, and Implement Comprehensive Technology Solutions to Support Students and Staff Throughout their Time with KCTCS

CBE Working Group Recommendations cont.**Credentialing Strategy****Recommendation 1:
Evaluate Existing Certifications and Credentials**

Existing certifications and credentials should be evaluated for applicability, potential omissions, gaps, and clear pathways. Working group discussions centered on the need to determine relevance to employers of existing certifications offered by KCTCS and noted the importance of curriculum review with curriculum committees, employers, and advisory boards for this determination. Working group members felt it was essential to have an ongoing review of certifications with an emphasis on the value of stackable credentials, state or regulating board required credentials, and those credentials leading to newly emerging job opportunities. This requires collaboration with employers and Advisory Board members that are in tune with the workforce needs of the service region.

**Recommendation 2:
Design and Implement a Subscription Service Model for the ALIGN Model**

A subscription service model, with a phased implementation, should be created as the financial ALIGN model. The ALIGN model should offer courses that have a component of measure comparable to credit hours, to which a faculty member can receive an appropriate representation in consideration of their course load and salary implications, overloads, etc. For example, a four-month subscription term = a three-hour class for consideration to a professor's course load, which can then be combined with other credit hour courses taught to get the full picture of the faculty member's course load. The same can be the case for any subscription term, depending on the course and content.

Feedback in the discovery stage of the ALIGN project revealed a desire from companies to have employees enrolled in CBE programs immediately, as in the first step on campus. With the current recommendation, the quickest KCTCS could enroll a student is each month.

CBE Working Group Recommendations cont.**Shared Language****Recommendation 3:
Create Integrated Career Clusters**

Integrated sector teams, called Career Clusters, should be formed that include Technical Education, General Education, and Workforce Solutions. Creating Career Clusters should serve to break down silos, supporting a single point of entry with a simple admissions process and a pathway for students, regardless of their starting point. The following should be included:

- System to matriculate Workforce Solutions students
- Repository of vetted assessment tools
- Shared and sufficient access to equipment
- Efficient evaluation for credit for prior learning
- Acceleration of credential to employment

Career Clusters will allow for a centralized admissions process and would create a “no wrong door” model. The use of a resource center as the first point of contact for everyone (as described in [Recommendation 6: Implement a Consistent Resource Center Experience for Students](#)) benefits all learners. In this way, students can be directed to potential credit for prior learning opportunities, and the resource center can support learners to see all the various pathways they can take based on what they know and can do. Features in this recommendation, such as credit for prior learning

opportunities, increases the opportunity to assess what a learner knows at entrance and find ways to recognize this learning early in order to personalize the learning journey. Additionally, an initial streamlined application process regardless of point of entry could be enhanced to ask questions appropriate to meet the learner where they are in their journey. All learners, regardless of current intention, would complete the intake process and have a learning plan on file to ensure learner support regardless of the point of entry. This approach allows the establishment of a deeper learning community among faculty, staff, learners, and sector employers.

**Recommendation 4:
Identify and Define a Shared Competency Set for Credentials**

Shared competency sets should be identified and defined for all credentials. The ALIGN model is grounded in the implementation of a CBE approach in which students progress by demonstration of competencies. One of the foundational elements of the new model is Shared Language, including sets of shared competencies, definitions, and performance expectations; thus, shared language for KCTCS outcomes is required for the new model.

CBE Working Group Recommendations *cont.***Assessment
Repository****Recommendation 5:
Develop Common Formative and Summative
Assessment Tools**

A set of formative and summative assessment tools should be developed that can be used by faculty in courses if desired. The development of formative and summative assessment tools should be a collaborative effort among faculty teaching a CBE designated course and include the Curriculum Committee as determined when the recommendation is adopted for implementation. Assessments could be developed independently and used by a given faculty member if preferred. In addition, faculty with lab courses are advised to work together to utilize laboratory facilities, making certain each learner has the opportunity for adequate access to equipment and facilities so that student learning outcomes may be evaluated in a formative or summative manner. This repository can be especially helpful to new and adjunct faculty to calibrate assessments while providing flexibility.



CBE Working Group Recommendations cont.**Wraparound Supports****Recommendation 6:
Implement a Consistent Resource Center Experience for Students**

A resource center, with both physical and virtual locations, should be created, implemented, and/or enhanced consistently across all KCTCS institutions. The majority of the KCTCS colleges have some sort of location where students begin their college venture. This recommendation enhances these locations to a full-fledged resource center for new students and current students. The number of staff per center and to what extent the center deals with a particular subject area will be determined by the local college.

Characteristics of the resource centers include:

- The center will be a single location, preferably one on each campus that is centrally located to multiple student services.
- The center will be staffed by trained personnel who will be able to answer most questions related to other areas of the college but, when needed, will make an “intentional referral” to subject matter experts related to financial aid, veteran services, disability services, etc. The appropriate number of employees will be decided by each home college.
- Students will know that this is the place to go for information or receive guidance.
- Personnel will have contact information for all non-academic advisors (case managers) to keep them informed, when needed, about one of their students.
- Computers and printers will be available for students to assist them with items such as applications and FAFSA.

- A virtual center will be on the webpage that will allow students to find the same information online as they would if they walked into the center.
- Technology, utilizing AI like Ocelot Chatbot, could be implemented to assist students from anywhere. This type of technology can answer students’ questions at any time.

**Recommendation 7:
Create and Implement a Case Management Model and Develop Learner Personas**

Wraparound student support and services should be provided to all students to assist in the development of career pathways and appropriate learning journeys. Services should include the utilization of a case manager approach with a pre-assessment to assist in the development of a career pathway, with a case manager serving as a resource to address obstacles interfering with student success while maintaining interactions with the student to encourage their progression through the curriculum.

A case management model should also be implemented for student support from application to graduation. The model should offer “intrusive” services through the case management approach based upon learner persona and identified cluster.

Learner persona journey maps, supports, and processes should be developed. To enhance student success, the admissions process should be improved with special touches for different groups of students or, in this case, student personas. These personas would all be identified with a journey map to assist with a positive and successful educational experience.

CBE Working Group Recommendations *cont.***Instructional
Learning
Journey****Recommendation 8:
Contextualize General Education Courses within
Integrated Career Clusters**

Communication between General Education, Technical Education, and Workforce Solutions faculty should be fostered to determine the most appropriate general education courses and assist in mapping broad general education competencies to learning outcomes, contextualized content, and the development of authentic assessments in programs adopting the ALIGN model. The proposed model suggests creating a single path for all students to enroll, regardless if the student is entering for an AA/AS transfer degree, AAS degree, or workforce/industry credential. In situations where general education courses are needed to support programs adopting the ALIGN model, collaboration and input from all areas will be beneficial in selecting appropriate general education courses. Frank discussion and conversations regarding the mapping of broad general education competencies to program competencies will assist in the contextualization of general education courses and development of authentic assessments.



CBE Working Group Recommendations *cont.*


External Engagement

Recommendation 9: Enhance External Engagement with Key Stakeholders

External engagement should be enhanced to determine business and industry needs, evaluate relevance of curriculum and competencies, and incorporate work-based learning opportunities across programs. This includes the following:

- Create meaningful business engagement opportunities that will support increased responsiveness by institutions to specific workforce challenges.
- Deploy a state, regional, and local approach to address economic and workforce needs and opportunities for partnership with chambers of commerce, workforce boards, professional/trade associations, and employers.
- Add work-based learning opportunities by relevant sectors in programs and require work-based learning in all credentials.
- Capitalize on the existing relationships that Workforce Solutions has with employers in the region.
- Working group teams found that external engagement currently takes place primarily through program-level advisory committees. This should be built upon.

For example, advisory boards currently meet twice per year, but they should be assembled more often and include Workforce Solutions at the table. This recommendation for enhanced external engagement includes the establishment of a structured pipeline for regular communication with employers to determine needs and embed those into competency and curriculum development and evaluate relevance. This will allow employers to more clearly articulate the knowledge and skills needed.

Recommendation 10: Structure College Leadership with Workforce Solutions Reporting Directly to the President

The Workforce Solutions leader should report directly to the college president. KCTCS should design the organizational reporting structure so that the Workforce Solutions leader has a clear, consistent, and open path of communication to the president of the college. Ideally, the Workforce Solutions leader should report directly to the college president, putting Workforce Solutions on par with Academics (General Education/Technical Education) to support the external engagement and economic development efforts of the Workforce Solutions division.

*CBE Working Group Recommendations cont.***Systemic Drivers****Recommendation 11:
Implement the ALIGN Model Using a Phased Rollout Approach**

A phased approach should be used to implement the ALIGN model across the system. For example, this structure may include rollout at four colleges per year that implement the new model in three to four of their credentials. It is recommended that certificates be rolled out first, then potentially full diplomas and Associate degree programs. In this way, certificates can be a building block or micro-credential that serves as a catalyst into a degree program or pathway.

Phased implementation enables the colleges and system to carefully and deliberately develop and adapt current courses/credentials to CBE modality. In addition, a methodical and phased implementation will provide opportunities to learn what does and does not work, fine tuning the process of converting credentials and implementing the new model. Further, it is possible that beginning with certificates and then expanding to full diplomas and Associate degrees will better target workforce needs and student populations that may be the best fit for the new model.

**Recommendation 12:
Provide Targeted Professional Development Opportunities for Faculty and Staff to Build Capacity for Implementation of the ALIGN Model**

Extensive professional development opportunities should be provided for faculty to assist in CBE competency creation, prior learning assessments, robust assessments, and course design. More specifically, the ALIGN model will require extensive professional development for faculty in backward design, flipped-classroom pedagogy, contextualized/integrated course pedagogy, authentic assessment of learning outcomes, rubric development, and CBE course management. Robust professional development opportunities for faculty will assist in the development of competency-based course materials and assessments. Professional development should be ongoing and include a peer mentor or partner. This might include CBE faculty who initiated a course in an earlier phase of the ALIGN model implementation.



“ This is about taking bold steps to help learners translate educational experiences into economic opportunity. ”

Mike Rodgers, Chief Advancement Officer, Owensboro Community and Technical College and KCTCS Chancellor Fellow

*CBE Working Group Recommendations cont.***Systemic Drivers****Recommendation 13:
Provide Faculty with Access to CBE Instruction and Curriculum Design Experts to Develop Capacity for Program and Curriculum Development and Instruction within the ALIGN Model**

Access to instructional design experts should be available to assist in CBE course development. The shift to a new model requires radical changes in course structure and delivery. This may include the review and revision of competencies and learning outcomes in courses and programs. Faculty will require continuous guidance and feedback from curriculum and instructional design specialists in transitioning courses and programs to the new model. This support is fundamental for the delivery of high-quality course content to an emerging learner population who might seek alternate pathways to degree completion. There is universal recognition that access to instructional design experts would greatly enhance teaching, especially when considering the initiation of the new model.

**Recommendation 14:
Systemically Promote Cultural Diversity and Inclusion**

Cultural diversity and inclusion should be promoted in the classroom and through external advisory boards. The strands focused on the need to promote diversity and inclusion at all levels using Council on Postsecondary Education and demographic data at each institution, including the Director of Diversity at each college as a key stakeholder. At all levels of the ALIGN model, cultural diversity and inclusion must be considered,

and reaching the underserved learner must be a priority. This should happen across all learners, and the delivery mode is neutral for this recommendation. Implementation of this recommendation should be intentional in the ALIGN model and independent of CBE modality to benefit all learners.

**Recommendation 15:
Recognize Faculty Time and Expertise for Responsibilities within the ALIGN Model**

Faculty time should be reassigned, overload compensation should be provided, and an adjustment in percentages on the Performance, Planning and Evaluation (PPE) for internal service and professional development for the creation of courses/course materials for the ALIGN model should be calculated. The new model will require significant faculty time for professional development, curriculum design, course restructuring, and development of learning assessments. Faculty time and expertise should be recognized through the use of release time and/or overload compensation during the development process.

Further, adjustments in the Faculty Performance, Planning, and Evaluation Form during the development process should be considered. Faculty use the PPE Form annually. Percentages for faculty contributions in the areas of position responsibilities, internal service, external service, professional development, and leadership are approved and evaluated annually by direct supervisors of faculty and college CAOs.

*CBE Working Group Recommendations cont.***Systemic Drivers****Recommendation 16:
Guarantee Faculty Load in First Year of Implementation of the ALIGN Model at Each College**

Faculty load should be guaranteed during the first year of implementation regardless of enrollment in courses. During the first year of implementation of the ALIGN model at each college, courses associated with credentials adopting the new model, including general education courses if applicable, should be guaranteed to be retained on the schedule, regardless of enrollment, and count toward faculty load if taught by full-time faculty.

**Recommendation 17:
Research, Adopt, and Implement Comprehensive Technology Solutions to Support Students Throughout their Time with KCTCS**

Adopt a comprehensive solution for supporting students throughout their time with KCTCS. The solution should be one that allows for the student to have a single point of contact for all aspects of their interactions with KCTCS, including all aspects of student services, advising, communications, credentialing, and support services. The primary KCTCS administrative systems would need to be evaluated against competitors to select the most comprehensive solution that can support CBE, that is seamless for students, and that is intuitive for faculty and support staff. It should be a unified and uniform system that allows for all technology solutions to be interoperable in a way that supports a better student experience.

Managing Change



As noted, the higher education community is under significant pressure to change in numerous ways. Various change process initiatives, in addition to CBE projects across the country, include efforts to:

- Increase student-centered outcomes and completion rates
- Address equity
- Become more operationally efficient and effective
- Align programs to regional employment needs
- Recruit and retain college executive team leaders and faculty
- Improve learner retention and completion
- Ensure stronger outcomes for rural colleges and their communities

Effective transformation requires a college or college system to consider an enterprise-wide approach to improve and enhance organizational models, operating processes, technology, leadership, and talent models. As such, the college's resources must focus on more than the project itself; it must also include internal and external stakeholder commitment.

A commonly understood goal of change management is to create and support the approval and implementation of new strategies, technologies, initiatives, and processes.³ Change management is often not a priority in higher education, which can lead to subpar results. C-BEN consultant partners, together with the ALIGN facilitation team, worked diligently to ensure change management was integrated across all six phases of the initiative.

The following four factors were key components of the change management strategy implemented by the facilitation team. For each, we outline what KCTCS did and what could have been improved so that other colleges and systems can benefit from our learning.



Building strategic buy-in and political support with broad stakeholders



Designing Key Moments for forward momentum at the right time with the right people



Empowering faculty voice and engagement



Addressing Resistance through Creating Communication and Marketing Strategies

³Seven Principle for Effective Change Management (2017). Deloitte Consulting, LLP. Retrieved from <https://www2.deloitte.com/us/en/pages/public-sector/articles/effective-change-management-higher-education.html>

Building Strategic Buy-In

In KCTCS's context, the Vice Chancellor of Academics and Workforce Development was very aware of the need for strategic buy-in among the executive leadership team. Initially, the Vice Chancellor spoke with his supervisor, the KCTCS Chancellor, and got her buy-in to pursue the concept before any funder or consultant conversations began. This was important to ensure her support and involvement early on. The Chief Academic Officers (CAOs) across the 16 colleges were not provided much of an opportunity to engage in the early project concept and design. This limited endorsement and overall excitement about the potential of this work. Some faculty who were engaged in the working groups also struggled to be brought along. However, external partners, such as employers and other state agencies, were very supportive. Eventually, when college data was analyzed, CBE panels from other colleges were engaged, and consistent communications were delivered, the CAOs' support increased.

Ideally, the KCTCS team leading this work could have prioritized briefings with different stakeholders earlier in the timeline to make sure no single group, especially the CAOs, felt left out of key decision making at the start of the project. More leaders engaged in the process may have facilitated increased initial buy-in from faculty and staff at the individual campuses.

Designing Key Moments for Forward Momentum

There were several key moments in time that either contributed to the positive change management ideals or resulted in project delays.

The facilitation team included individuals who had a commitment to the project and its potential outcomes and were dedicated to building rapport and working together. This was necessary to get the work across the finish line. What made the team especially unique was the addition of C-BEN and the documentation team to enable a clear record of events, reactions, and progress for both the benefit of KCTCS and other institutions interested in implementing similar work.

Another well-designed key moment was the presentation to the incoming KCTCS president. The new president was selected about six months after the project launched. The facilitation team knew that to continue the momentum of this project, they needed to secure the support of the incoming leader. They built a compelling slide deck and offered time for questions and feedback. The president left the meeting expressing support, presenting ALIGN's flexibility as a key driver for the system at a CAO meeting in early summer 2021.

Empowering Faculty Voice

Faculty were engaged with this work through working group participation. At first, faculty who did not engage in a working group had fewer opportunities to make their voices heard. In November 2020, when all four working groups (approximately 100 faculty and staff) started to meet, more positive engagement resulted.

The facilitation team and college leadership circulated information about the project, outlining the opportunities and expected outcomes for faculty teaching within CBE models. The project director and Chancellor's Fellows made several presentations to faculty meetings in an effort to spread information about ALIGN. Last, a section about the ALIGN project was added to the Chancellor's monthly newsletter, which is distributed to all faculty. This newsletter was cited as enabling a more equitable understanding of the project. However, some faculty who submitted a survey about the experience at the end expressed that there was no mechanism to empower faculty feedback from those who were not involved and few helpful ways to address misinformation. The faculty Senate Council received regular reports and leaders participated in the Advisory Council, but more participation from the Senate Council would have also benefited the project.



“ We designed ALIGN to look at everything we are doing from a learner-centered perspective from the ground up. We’ve understood that we need to be ahead of the curve and innovate instructional delivery models to meet the future of work. As a system of 16 colleges, we must shape the future...or it will shape us. ”

Dr. Kris Williams, Chancellor, Kentucky Community & Technical College System

Addressing Resistance through Communication and Marketing Strategies

There is resistance in any change management initiative. Often, resistance to change can be categorized by a lack of clarity or understanding, a general disinterest, or fear of the unknown. Resistance caused by a lack of understanding could be solved through improved messaging or marketing. General disinterest is trickier to address, as it often includes a feeling of ‘this too, shall pass.’ Further, at the onset of the project, the term “competency-based education” meant different things to different people, and while there was considerable effort to define the term in the communications plan, more communication was needed.

As such, it became clear that the team needed a strategy to allow stakeholders to understand the process behind ALIGN and the status of the project. In October 2020, the ALIGN project page on the Chancellor’s Office internal Infocenter site went live and was advertised in the chancellor’s newsletter that month.

The Infocenter site served as the main place for the entire system to get updates on the planning and was regularly updated with the work to date, videos, and documents.

There was also a special edition newsletter focused solely on ALIGN in March 2021. That issue was important because the four Delivery and Program Action Team Presidents came together to share their support for the work and unpack why it is important for KCTCS to focus on “exploring potential models that can more efficiently and effectively help our students gain the knowledge and skills they need to immediately get a job or transfer and ultimately get a job.” They expressed openness to reviewing future ALIGN recommendations and offered thanks to the teams behind the work. This show of leadership at the college level may prove invaluable to the faculty and staff at their colleges as they consider moving forward with the recommendations.



Lessons Learned

“ This was a very complex initiative. The most complicated I’ve seen in my years here, requiring extraordinary faculty and staff participation, but we did it...even during a pandemic, we did it! ”
ALIGN Working Group Lead

The documentation of this process illuminated many of KCTCS’s lessons learned, which are important for other institutions and systems to consider as they potentially implement this work and/or conduct future planning processes with system-wide implications.

Begin Engagement Early to Build Champions

One of the most important lessons learned early in the planning was the importance of communication and cultivating buy-in through accurate and well-designed communications. To cultivate buy-in for this work, the facilitation team and original system champion, the Vice Chancellor, asked to speak at leadership meetings and work groups across the system. Because of the highly complex nature of this project, there were many groups that needed to communicate with their teams and campuses in order for this work to have buy-in. Through experience, it was decided that leaders needed to be briefed on the project in smaller groups or individually prior to any full team meetings to ensure people were on board with the ideas prior to a public forum. When this was not done, it seemed the attendees could get more caught up in the details of the proposed planning process rather than focusing on the potential outcomes.

Similarly, individuals who were not part of the working group or on any cross-campus leadership team were likely unaware of the work happening through this project, at least at the beginning. It is important to bring as many people into the work as possible to best facilitate the mindset shifts that will enable this work to be successful. KCTCS understood they needed to get the campuses on board to make this project more successful. Further, marketing, communications, and human resources were not included in the early planning work, which led to delays in processing stipend payments to working group leads and additional time spent creating collateral later on.

Considerations as you move forward:

- Treat all stakeholders with the same degree of care, and work to facilitate buy-in individually prior to any large public meeting.
- Involve affiliated groups (e.g., marketing, communications, human resources) early in the process to ensure non-duplicative work and to save time in the end.

Prioritize Project Management

Strong project management is essential for success. This project mobilized an entire 16-college system statewide and engaged more than 200 stakeholders in active planning and advisory roles. This is difficult and arduous work. ALIGN had the benefit of a very strong project director with deep, long-term knowledge of the system office and college leaders to shepherd the communications and convenings.

Further, this project is best executed when everyone is aware of their job descriptions and responsibilities. In order to facilitate buy-in and encourage the potential of longer-term adoption, the project director and Chancellor's Fellows need to be in leadership roles with full decision-making power for how to direct the work forward.

Considerations as you move forward:

- Develop a comprehensive job description, appoint a project director/manager, and appropriately budget for the time it will take for them to support the execution of this work.
- Adopt a project director leadership role and create a meeting schedule as early on in the project as possible.

Center Students Throughout the Planning Process

Just two students were involved in the ALIGN advisory council for this work, and they did not have a substantive role or voice across the planning. There were no focus groups with students. For leaders considering adopting this process, we recommend additional involvement and checkpoints with students to gain feedback on the various strategies throughout the phases.

Consideration as you move forward:

- Center students throughout the planning process. For example, it would have been useful to have students provide feedback on the current state to identify what does and doesn't work for them with the current education delivery model. It would also be valuable to gain feedback on the recommendations, discussing whether the recommendations would meet their needs and encourage persistence and job readiness.

Engage Faculty Intentionally

The working groups formed the backbone of the work for this planning process. The involvement and deep engagement of the working group members were key in allowing this initiative to meet the needs and expectations of faculty and staff. Some working group members raised questions about how the working group participants were decided upon and asked whether enough information was provided to the campuses before nominating potential members. Colleges approached the selection of working group members differently. Some chose to nominate more faculty, while others nominated more administrators. Faculty suggested the creation of a detailed task list that could provide deeper role clarity about expectations.

Due to the nature of working group member nomination and selection, most of the working groups had a representative from each college, allowing for voices to be heard from across the system. This allowed for a grassroots approach to designing an implementation plan that works for the potential implementers. However, it was also challenging because of the sheer number of people involved. While much of this was mitigated by virtual meetings because of COVID restrictions, the number of people involved and the virtual nature of this work made engagement across working groups varied. It was even hypothesized that perhaps the working groups had too many people involved to actually get meaningful work done. Several of the working groups mentioned that they made more headway when assigning small group homework and then coming back together in the larger group to discuss.

Relatedly, because this work had three Curriculum and Learning Transformation (CLT) sub-working groups, there was an added layer of complexity. The CLT group needed to present cohesive recommendations but did not often join in one space to discuss their progress. This is mostly because of the large number of people involved across the three sub-working groups.

Engage Faculty Intentionally cont.

In addition, the working group leads were important facilitators to manage and level up their working group's work and to be peer champions for their college. This dual role is difficult, especially as working group leads were not CBE or change management experts. They didn't have the benefit of strong onboarding, such as specific job descriptions to outline the expectations of their work. They also could have been provided stronger direction and leadership for their working groups with more upfront training and exposure to panels from colleges already doing CBE work. It is important to empower working group leads to own problem solving and to assist working group members in working through doubts and misunderstandings.

Last, working group leads and fellows need to work closely together to ensure integrated communications. The fellows and KCTCS project director reflected on the need to work together to build a "finish line plan" to ensure that all the components are explored and answered by the time the working group work ends. This big picture strategy was helpful in keeping the project on track. It also allowed leaders to proactively communicate with working group leads to keep them in the loop on upcoming tasks and expectations.

Considerations as you move forward:

- Provide additional guidance on working group member selection and the ideal composition of faculty versus administrators. This additional guidance could lead to more intentionality around working group member selection.
- It is important to balance the need for diverse and representative involvement with the need to complete the work. This composition will look different at every institution, so this needs to be discussed intentionally at the beginning of the engagement.

Engage Faculty Intentionally *cont.*

- It is important to share feedback across working groups that are working on similar components during the project. The best way to facilitate this will vary based on team structure. That said, we recommend facilitated, semi-structured check-ins to address both specific challenges arising and considerations for the whole group to keep everyone on the same page and the ideas cohesive.
- Develop job descriptions for working group leads and equip them with the “just-in-time information” and sample communication cadence they need to be ambassadors for the work. Working group leads need to be able to drive the work forward on their teams, as well as report progress to the project facilitation team.
- Ensure a communications schedule is developed and followed at all levels of engagement, particularly between working groups and project leaders, to ensure everyone is operating under the same timeline and set of shared assumptions.

Order the Process Effectively

There were six key phases the working groups moved through to conduct their work, including: defining the project vision, identifying the current and future state, researching best practices, performing gap analyses, and drafting the recommendations. Though these phases were presented sequentially, there was overlap among the first four phases, and phases were not required to be completed before moving to the next one. The sequence of these phases is important.

The first sequencing issue emerged in the first meeting with all the working groups. During this meeting, a slide deck was presented, including a sample model to help participants begin to think about what their work could result in. Ultimately, the sample model may have served to confuse working group members more than help them. The model was presented as a “Proposed model- first draft,” which ultimately confused many working group members who thought that perhaps the decision had already been made to move forward with this model.

Order the Process Effectively cont.

Another key moment for sequencing came when researching solutions and identifying best practices. In January 2021, C-BEN convened a panel of external representatives who had implemented CBE in their own colleges. This was organized by the Facilitation Team CAO representative. To the facilitation team managing the day-to-day work, it seemed too early to engage these experts, as the current state data collection had not been completed yet. This was echoed in some of the working group meetings in early 2021, during which there were some questions about starting to define or explore what the model could look like and identify key features without the benefit of the data and gap analysis.

Alternatively, some of the facilitation team believed that the CBE implementation panels should have been held earlier as a proxy for the draft model shown. It was hypothesized that if they were scheduled earlier, the working groups may have needed to identify and synthesize less survey data and could have envisioned the KCTCS model sooner. This could have facilitated greater ground-up support.

Order the Process Effectively *cont.*

Considerations as you move forward:

- Consider the pros and cons of sharing a draft model. Will it help participants think big about what can be included, or will it limit thinking and confuse participants to think a decision has already been made? Consider the language used to describe the model, and lean heavily on language indicating it is a “prototype” or draft. Alternatively, it may be useful to present a variety of models, not as a menu to choose from but rather as an indication of the varied directions the working group participants could go. This work should be about creativity and brainstorming, not about statically moving forward with a particular element.
- Be intentional about how to sequence and when to schedule engagement with outside experts. There may be a need to create different on-ramps with different working groups depending on how quickly they can grasp what a model can look like. There also needs to be adaptability within the working groups and opportunities to pivot based on feedback from participants about what would help them succeed.

Center the Data

Data gathering was an important component of establishing the current state at KCTCS. The working group teams developed survey questions, and the facilitation team implemented the survey across the colleges. This data gathering activity did not take into account data already available from the research staff at the system office. There was also some misinterpretation of what data elements were needed and reported across the colleges (i.e., some colleges reported data for all students, while others may have included only full-time students).

Consideration as you move forward:

- Define required data elements to establish the current state among working groups and then streamline questions. Check with research staff first to review any relevant available data to establish the current state before going through the potentially onerous process of implementing a survey or other data collection method.



Conclusion

Addressing Today's Higher Education Landscape

Community colleges must continue to evolve to best meet students' needs. To make teaching and learning more relevant for learners, better meet the needs of business, and for colleges to move at the speed of today's dynamic economy, the field needs evidence-based, flexible learning models that produce more equitable outcomes.

The primary goal of this Field Guide is to offer an intensive overview of the rigorous planning process brought to the field by C-BEN and tested by the the community and technical colleges in Kentucky. This guide is designed to support the reimagining of competency-based education as a viable, proactive organizational strategy in the face of substantial challenges.

This guide reinforces the power of intensive planning, data inquiry, and faculty and stakeholder engagement before colleges make a decision to start piloting or implementing new models. For postsecondary education systems and colleges interested in pursuing major redesign efforts, this planning process is one strong strategy to enhance teaching and learning.

Utility of this Field Guide

It was our ultimate goal to present the framework for fully engaging stakeholders to reimagine how the whole system enterprise, not just discrete interventions or individual institutions, can deliver student-centered, flexible competency-based learning models.

To illustrate how other colleges or systems can structure a rigorous process, leaders at C-BEN strategically guided the Kentucky Community and Technical College System (KCTCS) through a

planning process to 'think big' about an alternative learning model that could be responsive to both unprecedented change in the higher education landscape and a shifting labor market.

We think the way Kentucky structured their CBE work is insightful for the field. The faculty, staff, and project team learned a lot along this 18-month journey. The guide reflects that, sharing what worked, lessons learned, and the data inquiry process that most influenced their success. We hope the utility of this work is to short-circuit your learning curve and reinforce the power of planning.

What's Ahead? Moving from Why to How

With over 3,000 colleges and universities engaged with some elements of CBE, the CBE movement is unquestionably gaining momentum. The benefits and return on investment to learners, faculty and staff, colleges, and communities continue to emerge and show outcomes. For Kentucky, this process already yielded great insight into focus areas to address. The next steps for KCTCS will be spending 2022 developing a formal CBE implementation working group with system office and college members. The working group's charge is to plan and resource the operationalization of their CBE model. Because every department of the college was intensively engaged in the planning process in 2020/2021, the need to build the case for the 'Why?' is being replaced with 'How?'

We hope the insights provided in this guide will jumpstart your team's CBE planning process. We look forward to learning more about how you and your college or system are advancing CBE and joining this national movement.

Tools & Resources

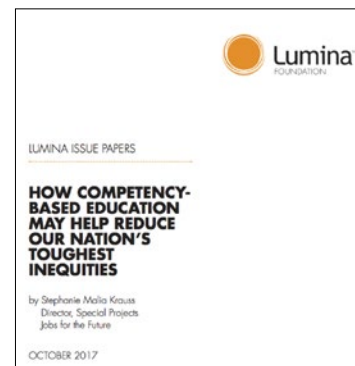
A blue-tinted photograph of a diverse group of people, including two women in the foreground, smiling and looking at a laptop screen. The text "Tools & Resources" is overlaid in white on the left side.



[C-BEN Quality Framework](#)



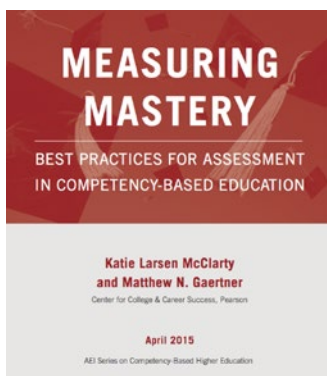
[National Survey of Postsecondary Competency-Based Education](#)



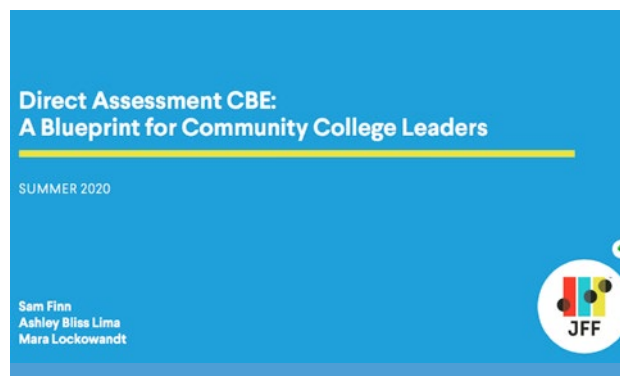
[How Competency- Based Education May Help Reduce Our Nation's Toughest Inequities](#)



[ALIGN: A New Educational Model to Support Learners](#)



[Measuring Mastery: Best Practices for Assessment in Competency-Based Education. Katie Larsen McClarty and Matthew N. Gaertner. 2015.](#)



[Direct Assessment CBE: A Blueprint for Community College Leaders](#)



[Agile Work Learn Model](#)

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Disclaimer: *The content of this document reflects the views of the author(s) and does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Kentucky Community and Technical College System, its colleges, the Competency-Based Education Network, or Ascendium Education Group.*

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Competency-Based Education Network (C-BEN) is a network of institutions, employers, and experts committed to unlocking the potential of competency-based learning to ensure education and training is more flexible, responsive, and valuable. C-BEN is the go-to source on competency-based learning—home to experts, researchers, practitioners, and institutional leaders who are reimagining education and training systems and helping others design and build high quality programs. Through their work, C-BEN aims to advance the understanding of competency-based learning, accelerate its development and scale, develop and maintain quality standards, and remove barriers to its continued growth. Dr. Tiffany Denton, Senior Consultant, and Dr. Charla Long, C-BEN President, were lead consultants, joined by Amber Garrison Duncan, C-BEN Executive Vice President, supporting the KCTCS ALIGN project. Dr. Denton is a board-certified behavioral analyst with doctoral designation and has extensive experience building CBE programs in both higher education and work-based settings. Dr. Long, C-BEN's Executive Director, is co-author of *The Leader's Guide to Competency-Based Education* and has been recognized by *The Chronicle of Higher Education* as one of the Top 10 Most Influential People in Higher Education for her work in competency-based education.

Kentucky Community and Technical College System supports its 16 colleges in their individual and collective efforts for student success.

KCTCS's mission is to enhance the quality of life and the employability of the citizens of the Commonwealth by serving as the primary provider of:

- College and Workforce Readiness
- Transfer Education
- Workforce Education and Training

More than half of KCTCS students dream of completing an associate degree and transferring to a four-year institution. Others want to earn a credential that will lead to a good paying job, and a few thousand more dream of getting customized training that will help them advance in their field. No matter the path they choose, it is KCTCS's mission to help them succeed.

Ascendium Education Group is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization committed to helping people reach the education and career goals that matter to them. Ascendium invests in initiatives designed to increase the number of students from low-income backgrounds who complete postsecondary degrees, certificates and workforce training programs, with an emphasis on first-generation students, incarcerated adults, rural community members, students of color and veterans. Ascendium's work identifies, validates and expands best practices to promote large-scale change at the institutional, system and state levels, with the intention of elevating opportunity for all.

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