

Center for the School of the Future Examines Efficacy of Personalized Competency-Based Learning

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Personalized Competency-Based Learning is an educational model that is gaining traction in the U.S.

Personalized Competency-Based Learning, or PCBL, is gaining traction as an educational model throughout the United States, including in Utah. State legislators and the Utah State Board of Education have discussed PCBL implementation and its objectives in the state's public schools. Recognizing Utah's interest in PCBL, researchers at Utah State University's [Center for the School of the Future](#) (CSF) developed a [policy and research brief](#) to examine PCBL's effectiveness in public education.

Because implementing PCBL is complex work, CSF researchers provided a summary of research findings related to PCBL to inform general discussions around its adoption and implementation. According to the research brief, PCBL helps personalize students' individual curriculum "based on their unique skills, abilities, interests, backgrounds and experiences." Proponents of PCBL report a key advantage when students have digital technology to support personalized curriculum.

However, research reports have revealed that test scores plummeted to historic lows nationwide following pandemic closures, even in areas where PCBL had been implemented, such as Juab School District in central Utah. Juab reported one of the highest graduation rates in the state after implementing PCBL (98% in 2021-22), while ACT and state standardized testing scores in this

district were some of the lowest in the state that same year. Student scores in English, reading, and science proficiency have dropped over the last five years. This was an unexpected trend when many anticipated PCBL would increase competency with individualization, choice and flexibility, and digital supplementation.

Parker Fawson, CSF director and Emma Eccles Jones Endowed Chair in Early Education, said that the "current research evidence doesn't appear to clarify the impacts of PCBL on K-12 student learning outcomes." Further research and study of PCBL is needed to inform state educational leaders' and policy makers' decisions around implementation of this educational model in Utah's public schools.

The brief was authored by Parker Fawson along with CSF associate director David E. Forbush and CSF senior research fellows D. Ray Reutzel and Janice A. Dole.