

## Your Question

You asked for information about students skipping grades and competency-based education. Specifically:

1. What states allow children to skip grades and under what circumstances?
2. In states allowing students to skip grades, are there any correlations between high school graduation rates, and other high-risk behaviors (truancy, teen pregnancies, etc.)?
3. What states have K-12 competency-based education laws?

## Our Response

You will find answers to your questions about skipping grades in the first section, including state examples and resources. The second section includes information about personalized and competency-based education. If you would like more in-depth information on any of these topics, please contact us.

## Grade Acceleration

According to the [National Association for Gifted Children](#), [grade acceleration](#) allows students to move through traditional curriculum and/or grade structures at a faster rate than typical. This may include: early kindergarten or college entrance, grade-skipping, dual-credit courses (AP or concurrent enrollment), and subject-based acceleration.

### State Examples

According to the [Acceleration Institute](#), about 15 states have policies explicitly allowing acceleration, although the types of acceleration policies seem to vary widely. Most states either explicitly or tacitly leave decisions about acceleration up to local school districts. The Acceleration Institute maintains detailed, state-by-state information about types of acceleration allowed, including links to various state resources and department of education policies. (Be advised that I found that at least some of their information is inaccurate or incomplete. Similar, though less detailed, information is available on the National Association for Gifted Children's [website](#).)

Below are a handful of state examples. It appears Florida and Ohio have some of the more robust acceleration policies in state statute.

### State Acceleration Policy Examples

<b>Colorado</b>	Colo. Rev. Stat. Ann <a href="#">§ 22-7-1013(2.5)</a> . This statute directs each local school district to consider procedures allowing for academic acceleration. State policy also allows for early kindergarten and first-grade entrance.
<b>Florida</b>	Fla. Stat. Ann. <a href="#">§ 1002.3105</a> . Academically Challenging Curriculum to Enhance Learning (ACCEL) program. Schools and districts establish student eligibility guidelines based on state guidelines. At minimum, all schools must offer whole-grade and mid-year grade promotion, among other options. (More information <a href="#">here</a> and <a href="#">here</a> .)

<b>Minnesota</b>	Minn. Stat. Ann. <a href="#">§ 120B.15</a> . All school districts must have procedures for the academic acceleration of gifted and talented students.
<b>Ohio</b>	Ohio Rev. Code Ann. <a href="#">§ 3324.10</a> . The state board of education must maintain a model student acceleration policy addressing whole-grade acceleration, subject area acceleration, and early high school graduation. School districts are required to implement a model acceleration policy or alternative research-based policies. (More information available <a href="#">on the department of education's website</a> .)
<b>Texas</b>	Tex. Educ. Code Ann. <a href="#">§ 28.021</a> , <a href="#">§ 28.023</a> . Students are promoted on the basis of academic achievement or demonstrated proficiency of the subject matter of the course or grade level. School districts must have examinations for accelerations for all grades and academic subjects and must advance students based on these test results under certain conditions.

### Research and Resources

I was not able to find any information discussing the relationship between a state's grade acceleration policies and student indicators, such as graduation rates and high-risk behaviors (truancy or teen pregnancy rates, for example). However, I did find a few resources that may be of interest.

[High-Achieving Students in the Era of NCLB](#), Thomas B. Fordham Institute (2008). The authors assert that the assessment and accountability systems ushered in by the No Child Left Behind Act has encouraged educators and education systems to emphasize the performance of lower-performing students to the detriment of high achievers. Specifically, the authors reviewed NAEP data from several years and found that low-performing students made rapid gains under NCLB, while high-performing students made fewer academic gains. The authors suggest that a high-stakes accountability system encourages educators and education systems focus their finite resources on improving the performance of struggling students while paying less attention to the highest-performing students.

[Guidelines for Developing an Academic Acceleration Policy](#), 2009. This report is the result of the 2009 National Work Group on Acceleration, sponsored by Institute for Research and Policy on Acceleration, the National Association for Gifted Children, and the Council of State Directors of Programs for the Gifted. The work group made several policy recommendations, summarized below (see pages 5-7).

- Characterized by accessibility, equity, and openness. The referral is open to all student populations and parents and the community have access to procedures and policies.
- Provides guidelines for the implementation of acceleration. Some of the recommended elements include:
  - The entire process is detailed in the policy.
  - Decisions are made by teams, not individuals, and guided by a student-specific written acceleration plan.
- Provides guidelines on administrative matters to ensure fair and systematic use of accelerative opportunities and recognition for participation in those accelerative opportunities. Some issues to be addressed include:
  - The process of awarding credit.
  - Identifying assessments students should take.
  - Ensuring students' accelerated standing is maintained.
- Includes guidelines for preventing nonacademic barriers to acceleration. For example, how schools handle participation in extracurricular activities, and determining how acceleration affects school funding.
- Includes features to prevent unintended consequences. Specifically, include an appeals process for decisions at any step in the process and regularly evaluate the policy on its effectiveness.

[Academic Acceleration: Summary of Research and Policy Considerations Informational Brief](#), New York Comprehensive Center (2012). This was prepared in advance of a state regents meeting in 2012. The authors compiled information about three acceleration practices: whole-grade skipping, telescoping curriculum, and curriculum compacting. Information about the various types of accelerative practices is on pages 2-4 and in Appendix 1. The authors also conducted a literature review, with the summary on pages 5-9. Finally, policy considerations are on pages 10-16.

[State and Federal Policy: Gifted and talented youth](#), ECS (2016). This resource provides an overview of gifted and talented policies across the states and discusses types of gifted programs, including acceleration policies (page 5).

## Competency-Based Education

Personalized learning and competency-based education are complex and nuanced issues, and much of the state-level work in these areas is still largely fledgling. Thus, most of the information around competency-based and personalized learning is relatively high level. While a number of states have expressed interest in or taken steps to create competency-based education systems, most of the activity around this issue is happening at the school or district level ([this article](#) provides a few examples). New Hampshire is widely regarded as being at the forefront of this issues, and several other states, like Idaho, Maine, and Utah, have also made steps to introduce or strengthen competency-based programs statewide.

### Resources

I highly recommend the organization [iNACOL](#) for more information on this topic. I think the following three publications will be particularly useful for you, although I suggest reviewing their other resources.

[Promising State Policies for Personalized Learning](#), 2016. This report highlights specific state policy examples to support personalized and competency-based learning programs. The authors include examples of states getting started through task forces and other states that have created policies to move from seat-time to credit flexibility, create pilot programs, implement proficiency-based diplomas, reworking assessment systems, and so on. Some of the highlighted states include Colorado, Idaho, New Hampshire, Oregon, and Vermont, among others.

[State Policy & K-12 Competency-Based Education](#), 2017. This issue brief provides a high-level overview of competency-based education and highlights some state policy recommendations and other “first steps” for state leaders.

[Mean What You Say: Defining and Integrating Personalized, Blended and Competency Education](#), 2015. This in-depth report defines personalized, blended, and competency education programs and discusses important components of and factors for these types of programs. It also provides in-depth discussions about how these types of programs can be implemented and different program models.

### State Examples

Below are a few examples of how states are implementing policies around personalized and competency-based education practices.

### *New Hampshire*

Nearly two decades ago, leaders in New Hampshire took steps to rethink the state’s education system, including introducing a competency-based learning system for some learners. Two iNACOL resources – from [2016](#) and [2017](#) – provide an excellent overview of the state’s efforts at creating a competency-based system. [This 2014 report](#) from the New Hampshire Department of Education, while long, is also a helpful and robust overview of the state’s decision to overhaul education systems.

As part of the education system reform efforts, the state has been working on alternative state assessments. Beginning in 2012, all school districts were invited to participate in the assessment program [Performance Assessment of Competency Education \(PACE\)](#). This program reduces standardized testing in favor of frequent assessment integrated into students’ day-to-day work through a competency education system. New Hampshire received an [NCLB waiver](#) from the system of annual assessment in grades 3-8 and once in high school. Instead, [participating districts administer statewide performance assessments](#) once during each grade span (elementary, middle, and high school) in English language arts, math, and science. Nine school districts participated in the 2016-17 school year. While New Hampshire is farthest along in developing and implementing a competency-based education system, its assessment and accountability system is not yet scalable statewide.

#### Additional Resources

- [New Hampshire: Building an Integrated Competency-Based System](#), iNACOL (2017).
- [Personalized Learning in Action: Postcard from New Hampshire](#), Ed Week (2016).
- [New Hampshire Learning Initiative](#).

### *Maine*

A 2012 bill, [LD 1422](#), created a proficiency-based high school diploma system, requiring students to demonstrate proficiency in eight areas before graduating. The standards were to take effect with the class of 2018, although many school districts received waivers to delay implementation. However, the legislature passed [LD 1627](#) in 2016 extending implementation of these requirements, phasing them in through 2025. The 2016 bill requires students to demonstrate proficiency in four areas first, eventually requiring students to demonstrate proficiency in all content areas. Students may still gain proficiency through multiple pathways and demonstrate proficiency through multiple formats.

Researchers from the University of Southern Maine studied school districts in Maine as they started implementing the state’s 2012 graduation policies. The four studies provide “on the ground” insight from district leaders as they implemented the 2012 policies. However, it is not clear what has or will change following the 2016 legislation (study links below).

Various school districts in Maine have been converting to proficiency-based learning systems on their own through collaboratives such as the Northern Maine Education Collaborative (see links below from *CompetencyWorks* for more information).

#### Additional Resources

- [The future of proficiency-based education](#), The Hechinger Report (2017).
- [Preliminary Implementation of Maine’s Proficiency-Based Diploma Program](#), University of Southern Maine (2013).

- [Implementation of a Proficiency-Based Diploma System: Early Experiences in Maine](#), University of Southern Maine (2014).
- [Implementation of a Proficiency-Based Diploma System in Maine: Phase II – District Level Analysis](#), University of Southern Maine (2014).
- [Proficiency-Based Diploma Systems in Maine: Implementing District-Level High School Graduation Policies](#), University of Southern Maine (2015).

### *Utah*

In 2016, the state created a grant program for school districts that create personalized learning, bended learning, extended learning, or competency-based education systems ([Utah Code Ann. § 53A-15-18](#)). In 2017, the legislature passed a bill ([SB 220](#)) about assessments in these programs. Specifically, the legislation defines “computer adaptive assessment” and specifically requires these assessments to be adaptable to competency-based education programs. It also allows the state board of education to change a grade-level specification for a statewide assessment to a different grade-level specification or a competency-based specification in some circumstances. Finally, the legislature passed [SB 34](#) in 2017, which establishes provisions for students that fulfill graduation requirements early through a competency-based education program and graduate from high school in advance of their peers.

### *Idaho*

In 2015, the state passed legislation ([HB 110](#)) creating a task force about shifting toward a mastery-based education system. (More information about Idaho’s work in this area available [here](#).)

### Related Failed Legislation

- **Indiana:** During the 2017 legislative session, the legislature introduced a measure ([HB 1386](#)) that would have established a pilot program for competency-based education. However, the bill failed.
- **Rhode Island:** [Senate Bill 103](#) (2017) would have directed the state to adopt a competency-based and proficiency-based learning policy and model district policy to expand competency-based learning opportunities; the measure failed to pass.