

# Aim Higher

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Access | Affordability | Completion

## **Advancing Competency-Based Education Act of 2017**

Today's college students are far different than they were when the Higher Education Act was last authorized in 2008. Recent research shows that nearly 60 percent of college students are working while taking classes, [almost 40 percent are older than the age of 25, and 25 percent are raising children while enrolled in school](#). At the same time, the cost of a degree continues to rise, forcing students to borrow more each year.

Competency-based education is an innovative model for higher education where credits are awarded based on students' demonstrable knowledge. Many traditional higher education programs are based on time. For example, an average class may take four months and students receive credit after completing the course in that time. Competency-based education operates differently, and students can advance through their degree as soon as they demonstrate that they have mastered a competency. As a result, competency-based education can take less time and cost less than a traditional degree program, making it an appealing option for today's diverse body of college students.

Despite significant progress in recent years, competency-based education is hindered by a variety of federal laws and regulations. To address this challenge, the Advancing Competency-Based Education Act of 2017 provides flexibility for competency-based education programs, while at the same time establishing new levels of transparency and accountability.

### **The Advancing Competency-Based Education Act of 2017 does the following:**

- Promotes innovation in higher education by allowing competency-based education programs in the demonstration project to request additional flexibility from current statutory and regulatory requirements that are current barriers to implementation.
- Increases transparency by requiring an annual evaluation of each competency-based education program in the demonstration project to determine program quality, the progress of participating students towards earning a degree, and a students' ability to pay off their loans and find employment upon graduation.
- Provides new information about the students being served in competency-based education programs and how their success compares to similar students in traditional programs.
- Creates new accountability for competency-based education programs by requiring an institution's accreditation agency to set standards for competency-based education programs.
- Establishes a Competency-Based Education Council to continue studying the ongoing innovation and development of competency-based education.