

EMBARGOED FOR RELEASE UNTIL JANUARY 13, 2016

Contacts: Robert Johnston, 703 508-9848, [robert@thehatchergroup.com](mailto:robert@thehatchergroup.com)  
Allison Rizzolo, 212-686-6610, ext. 148 [arizzolo@publicagenda.org](mailto:arizzolo@publicagenda.org)

## Learners, Educators and Policymakers Tell the Story of Competency-Based Higher Education

*Report describes CBE ecosystem based on two years of collaboration and research*

WASHINGTON, D.C. – January 13, 2016 – A report released today provides the most detailed and accurate description to date of what competency-based education (CBE) looks like from the perspectives of learners, higher education professionals, policymakers and others involved in this rapidly expanding movement. The report gives everyone involved in CBE programs a baseline understanding and common language to guide the development of high-quality programs.

CBE, a learning model in which progress toward degree is determined by student demonstrations of learning rather than seat time, is not new. But the recent explosion of interest in building CBE programs expressed by more than 500 schools is redefining CBE. This report reflects the outcomes of nearly two years of community-based, qualitative research that included the analysis of existing materials, interviews, surveys and focus groups.

*The Competency-Based Education Ecosystem Framework* is part of a multipronged effort led by Public Agenda, with support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and Lumina Foundation. This effort responds to calls from higher education for more resources to so support planning and decision-making around competency-based degrees.

“The *Ecosystem Framework* provides common reference points that tell the story of where CBE is today,” said Laurie Dodge, co-chair of the Competency-Based Education Network, whose 30 institutions and four public systems collaborate to address CBE design and implementation challenges. Dodge also is the Vice Provost at Brandman University. “This framework will help strengthen and support anyone who is committed to building high-quality CBE programs.”

*The Ecosystem Framework* summarizes and defines core relationships and activities, which it calls organizing frames, from the perspectives of learners and higher education professionals, as well as from within CBE programs. The five organizing frames are:

1. **Core People or Programs** who administer or participate in CBE programs;
2. **Settings** or places where CBE is designed, delivered and demonstrated;
3. **Higher Education Institutions and Communities** that offer CBE programs;
4. **Supporting Organizations** or companies involved, but not offering or funding CBE programs; and
5. **Funding and Governing Groups** that set policies, fund and promote or prohibit CBE programs.

“Everything we do in this report is for the learner. But depending on who you are, your experience looks different,” said Stephanie Malia Krauss, lead coordinator of the *Ecosystem Framework* and senior fellow with the Forum for Youth Investment. “The CBE landscape involves a lot of players, and this framework shows us what different relationships look like and what matters most to quality CBE programs.”



“Modern forms of CBE have emerged in higher education as viable and needed alternatives to traditional postsecondary credentialing programs where time and place are fixed,” added Dodge. “While these frameworks provide a baseline understanding of the CBE ecosystem, we also know that these descriptions will change as the ecosystem evolves.”

A companion document, *Shared Design Elements and Emerging Practices of Competency-Based Education Programs*, is [available here](#).

####

**Public Agenda** is a nonprofit organization that helps diverse leaders and citizens navigate divisive, complex issues. Through nonpartisan research and engagement, it provides people with the insights and support they need to arrive at workable solutions on critical issues, regardless of their differences. Since 1975, Public Agenda has helped foster progress on K-12 and higher education reform, health care, federal and local budgets, energy and immigration. Find Public Agenda online at [PublicAgenda.org](http://PublicAgenda.org), on Facebook at [facebook.com/PublicAgenda](https://facebook.com/PublicAgenda) and on Twitter at [@Public Agenda](https://twitter.com/PublicAgenda).