



# Feds Drop Experiment on Competency-Based Ed

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The U.S. Department of Education has discontinued [experiments](#) on the disbursement of federal aid in competency-based education programs and ones that are a hybrid of competency-based and traditional academic programs. In a [letter to a participating college](#), the department said it ended the experiments because enough information had been collected to "support conclusions and policy decisions."

Created in 2015, the [experiments](#) under the experimental sites initiative allowed for waivers of certain federal rules with a goal of generating data that could inform policy on competency-based education, a delivery method centered on what students know and can do rather than conventional grading. Yet, as has been the case with many such federal experiments, sources said the competency-based education project had not generated many helpful results.

The department also said the expansive federal [negotiated rulemaking](#) completed earlier this year will lead to clarifying regulations on competency-based education. In the letter the feds cited forthcoming rules for

financial aid in direct assessment programs, an aggressive form of competency-based education that is completely untethered from the credit hour standard.

"As part of the negotiated rulemaking process concluded in April 2019, the department reached an agreement with non-federal negotiators to create a new disbursement process for subscription-based direct assessment programs," the department wrote. "This agreement was based, in part, on what the department learned from the CBE experiment, and would not have been possible without participation by institutions like yours."

Even so, several experts who work on the increasingly popular form of higher education said they were disappointed by the department's decision to end the experiments, a move they said could hurt programs offered by participating colleges.

"In my conversations with experimental site institutions, they were caught off-guard and were disappointed to learn of the cancellation of the CBE/hybrid disbursement," Charla Long, executive director of the competency-based education network, said via email. "Many have expressed concern about learners in their program and how they can effectively serve these learners without the freedoms provided by the experimental sites. One program specifically stated the abrupt cancellation would likely end their program, which had been yielding positive outcomes for an underserved group of learners."

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