

**SOUTH DAKOTA BOARD OF TECHNICAL EDUCATION  
PROPOSED BOARD POLICY CHANGE**

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**BOARD POLICY:**

306.1. Competency-Based Education – Definitions and Requirements

**PROPOSED CHANGE**

- ☒ Adoption of new policy
- ☐ Amendment to existing policy
- ☐ Repeal of existing policy
- ☐ Other:

**SUMMARY**

Purpose: Establish definitions and requirements of approved competency-based education (CBE) academic programs.

Scope: Specific to CBE academic programs.

Summary: This new policy establishes a consistent operational framework for all CBE programs across the technical college system. The key requirements formalized in this policy include: credit hour equivalency, one-credit course structure for each competency, mastery-based grading, and standardized naming conventions. These requirements ensure federal compliance while maintaining consistency and flexibility.

**COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION**

The proposed change was reviewed by the Committee on Academic Affairs and Institutional Effectiveness on 7/18/2025. The Committee recommends approval.

**COMMENTS INVITED**

The Board of Technical Education invites comments on this proposed change before the Board takes final action at its meeting on 7/31/2025. Those wishing to provide public comment and/or testify are asked to register at least two business days prior to the meeting via e-mail to [Scott.DesLauriers@state.sd.us](mailto:Scott.DesLauriers@state.sd.us). Testifiers should provide their full name, entity representing (if applicable), city of residence, and which agenda item the testifier will address.

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POLICY MANUAL**

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**SECTION:** 306. Competency-Based Learning  
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**A. PURPOSE**

This policy establishes definitions and requirements of approved competency-based education (CBE) academic programs.

**B. DEFINITIONS**

The Board of Technical Education (“Board”) and technical colleges shall follow the definitions outlined in Appendix A of this Board Policy.

**C. POLICY STATEMENT**

**1. APPROVED CBE ACADEMIC PROGRAM**

- 1.1. An approved CBE academic program follows the CBE approach defined in this Board Policy, has received formal Board approval as a designated CBE program under Board Policy 303.2., and leads to a program award specified in Board Policy 301.1.

**2. COMPETENCY-TO-CREDIT EQUIVALENCY METHODOLOGY**

- 2.1. A technical college offering an approved CBE academic program shall ensure that the learning associated with one competency is reasonably equivalent to the learning associated with one credit hour, as defined in 34 CFR 600.2.<sup>1</sup>

**3. COURSES**

- 3.1. A technical college shall create a unique, one-credit course for each competency in a CBE program’s competency framework.
- 3.2. The executive director may grant an exemption to Section C.3.1 when an external requirement or exceptional circumstance prevents implementation.<sup>2</sup>

**4. SATISFACTORY ACADEMIC PROGRESS**

- 4.1. A technical college shall establish and publicly disclose a policy outlining the institution’s requirements for satisfactory academic progress, as defined in 34 CFR 668.34<sup>3</sup>, in a CBE program.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-34/subtitle-B/chapter-VI/part-600>

<sup>2</sup> Examples include, but are not limited to, compliance with specific standards established by accrediting bodies; regulatory entities impose requirements that conflict with the one-credit structure; professional certification or licensure requirements necessitate alternative credit structures.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-34/subtitle-B/chapter-VI/part-668/subpart-C/section-668.34>

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**5. GRADING CATEGORIES AND SCALE**

5.1. A technical college shall categorize levels of mastery using the following structure:

5.1.1. Developing;

5.1.2. Developed; and

5.1.3. Highly Developed.

5.2. When determining grade equivalents in CBE programs, a technical college shall apply the following:

| <b>CBE Grading Scale</b> | <b>Traditional Grading Scale</b> | <b>Pass or Fail Grading Scale</b> | <b>GPA</b> |
|--------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|------------|
| Highly Developed         | A                                | P                                 | 4.00       |
| Developed                | B                                | P                                 | 3.00       |
| Developing               | F                                | F                                 | 0.00       |
| Incomplete               | I                                | I                                 | *          |

**6. DEMONSTRATION OF MASTERY**

6.1. A technical college shall require a student to demonstrate at least a "Developed" level of mastery to successfully complete a competency.

6.2. If a student does not demonstrate at least a "Developed" level by the end of the enrolled term and does not qualify for an "Incomplete" under Section 8 of this Board Policy, a technical college shall assign a grade of "Developing" (or its equivalent) on the student's transcript for that term. The student may re-enroll in the competency in a subsequent term, and the technical college shall charge full tuition and state fee rates for the re-enrolled competency.

6.3. If a student enrolled in a CBE program takes a non-CBE course, the student is not required to achieve a "B" (equivalent to "Developed") in the non-CBE course. A technical college may apply its standard grading scale and policies for non-CBE courses and programs.

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**7. CO-REQUISITE COMPETENCIES**

- 7.1. A technical college may require a student to initially enroll in two or more co-requisite competencies within the same term.
- 7.2. If a student enrolled in co-requisite competencies demonstrates at least a "Developed" level in some, but not all, of the enrolled co-requisite competencies, a technical college shall not require the student to re-enroll in the successfully completed competency or competencies. A technical college shall only require the student to re-enroll in the co-requisite competency or competencies the student did not successfully complete.

**8. INCOMPLETE GRADES**

- 8.1. A technical college may grant an "Incomplete" for a competency when circumstances beyond a student's control prevents the student from completing the competency within the original enrollment term. If granted, a technical college shall provide the student with additional time to complete the competency and shall not charge the student additional tuition and state fees.
- 8.2. A technical college shall establish and publicly disclose a policy outlining the institution's requirements for granting an "Incomplete" in a CBE course or program.
- 8.3. If a student demonstrates at least a "Developed" level within the incomplete period, the technical college shall record the competency's final grade on the transcript for the original term of enrollment.
- 8.4. If a student does not demonstrate at least a "Developed" level by the end of the incomplete period, the technical college shall record the competency's grade as "Developing" (or its equivalent) on the transcript for the original enrollment term. The student may re-enroll in the competency in a subsequent term, and the technical college shall charge the student the full tuition and state fees for the re-enrolled competency.
- 8.5. Once the "Incomplete" status is resolved and the competency is assigned a final grade ("Developing," "Developed," or "Highly Developed"), the technical college shall recalculate satisfactory academic progress for the completed term to reflect the updated grade.

**9. NAMING CONVENTION FOR COMPETENCIES AND COURSES**

- 9.1. A technical college shall assign each competency a primary prefix, primary number, and primary name.
- 9.2. Co-requisite competencies:
  - 9.2.1. Co-requisite competencies must share the same primary prefix, primary number, and primary name.

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9.2.2. In addition, a technical college shall assign each co-requisite competencies a sub-prefix and sub-number as follows<sup>4</sup>:

9.2.2.1. Sub-Prefix: Each co-requisite competency must be assigned a “C” sub-prefix.

9.2.2.2. Sub-Number: Each co-requisite competency must be assigned a unique one-digit sub-number.

9.3. A competency and its associated course must have the same primary prefix, primary number, primary name, and, if applicable, sub-prefix, and sub-number.

**D. PROCEDURES**

The executive director, or designee, shall promulgate procedures needed to implement this policy.

**E. POLICY HISTORY**

Adoption: July 31, 2025 (Proposed); Effective: July 31, 2025.

**F. REFERENCES**

1. SDCL: 13-39A-14
2. ARSD: N/A
3. Other: N/A

**G. APPENDICES**

1. Appendix A – Definitions

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<sup>4</sup> For example, “ENGL 101: Composition I” may include three co-requisite competencies: Competency 1 is ENGL 101-C1; Competency 2 is ENGL 101-C2; Competency 3 is ENGL 101-C3. While these three co-requisite competencies share the same primary prefix (ENGL), primary number (101), and primary name (Composition I), each co-requisite competency has a unique sub-prefix and sub-number (e.g., C1, C2, C3).

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**APPENDIX A - DEFINITIONS**

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**GENERAL**

**Competency-Based Education**

Competency-based education (CBE) combines an intentional and transparent approach to curricular design with an academic model in which the time it takes to demonstrate competencies varies and the expectations about learning are held constant. Students acquire and demonstrate knowledge and abilities by engaging in learning experiences that align with clearly defined programmatic outcomes. Students receive proactive guidance and support from faculty and staff. Learners earn credentials by demonstrating mastery through multiple forms of assessment, often at a personalized pace.<sup>5</sup>

The Board shall recognize and follow the same definitions of the three types of CBE programs, as determined by the Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions, and if applicable, federal regulation or guidance from the U.S. Department of Education:<sup>6</sup>

1. Course-/Credit-Based
2. Direct Assessment<sup>7</sup>
3. Hybrid

**Credit for Prior Learning**

Credit for prior learning (CPL) is a practice used by educational institutions to grant academic credit to a student for a competency the student mastered through a learning experience that is not directly facilitated by the institution.

Types of CPL include, but are not limited to:<sup>8</sup>

1. Standardized examinations (e.g., AP, IB, CLEP);
2. Challenge or departmental exams;
3. Portfolio assessment;
4. Credit for military training and service;
5. Credit for corporate or other external training;

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<sup>5</sup> Adapted from: Competency-Based Education Network [C-BEN]. (Fall 2022). *CBE lexicon*.

<sup>6</sup> Council for Regional Accrediting Commissions. (2015). Regional accreditors announce common framework for defining and approving competency-based education programs.

[https://download.hlcommission.org/C-RAC\\_CBE\\_Statement\\_6\\_2\\_2015.pdf](https://download.hlcommission.org/C-RAC_CBE_Statement_6_2_2015.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> As of 2/22/2024, direct assessment is the only type of CBE program defined in federal regulation (34 CFR 668.10).

<sup>8</sup> Adapted from: Klein-Collins, R., Taylor, J., Bishop, C., Bransberger, P., Lane, P., & Leibbrandt, S. (2020). *The PLA boost: Results from a 72-institution targeted study of prior learning assessment and adult student outcomes*. Revised. Council for Adult and Experiential Learning [CAEL] and Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education [WICHE]. <http://www.cael.org/pla-impact>

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6. Institutional review of external training, licenses, or certifications;
  7. Apprenticeships and other work-based learning experiences;
  8. Open-source learning and other independent study.

CPL is also known as prior learning assessment. For the purposes of this definition, CPL is the same as and can be used interchangeably with prior learning assessment. Although not formally required by Board Policy, a technical college is highly encouraged to use CPL terminology to create a shared language within the technical college system.

**Credit Hour**

The Board shall follow the same definition for credit hour as defined in 34 CFR 600.2.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-34/subtitle-B/chapter-VI/part-600>



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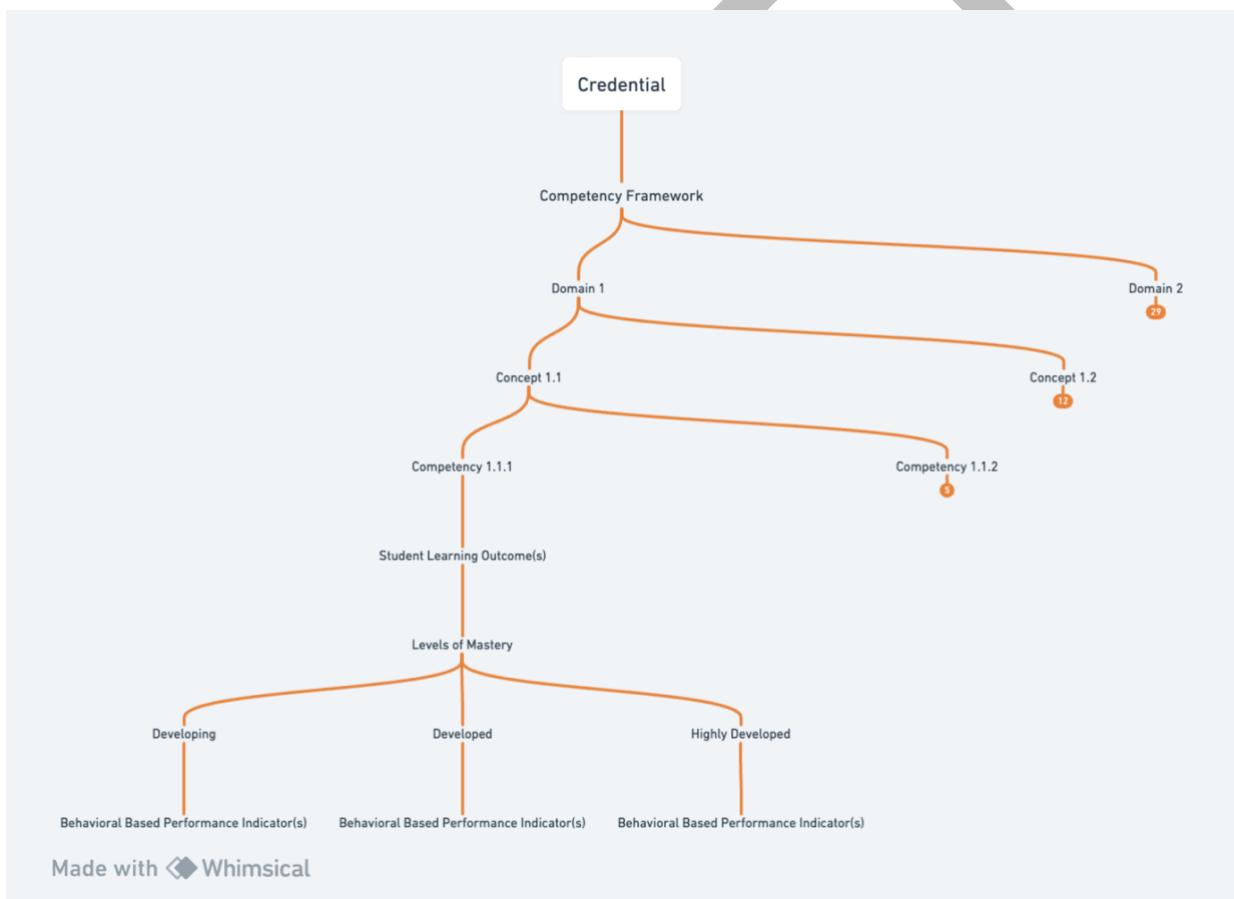
## **COMPETENCY AND LEARNING OUTCOMES**

### **Competency Framework**

A competency framework is a defined collection of competencies that, when taken together on the credential-level, have been identified as essential for successful performance in a given context (e.g., industry, field, discipline).

A competency framework is comprised of six elements: (1) Domain; (2) Concept; (3) Competency; (4) Student Learning Outcome; (5) Levels of Mastery; (6) Behavioral-Based Performance Indicator

A visual representation of a competency framework can be found below.<sup>10</sup>



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<sup>10</sup> This figure uses Competency 1.1.1 as an example to demonstrate the “full” structure of a competency framework; however, the same structure and relationships would exist for all domains, concepts, competencies, etc., in a competency framework.

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### **Domain**

A domain is a broad and distinguishable area of competence that, when considered together with other domains, forms a competency framework.<sup>11</sup> A domain is the broadest section of a competency framework and is a collection of similar concepts.

### **Concept**

A concept is a collection of similar competencies.

### **Competency**

A competency<sup>12</sup> is a specific combination of knowledge and ability—what a person knows and can do. It consists of two interdependent elements:

1. Knowledge – What do I know? Knowledge refers to the information a person possesses. It may be general or specific to a discipline, field, or industry.
2. Ability – What can I do? Ability refers to how a person applies their knowledge. For the purposes of this definition, ability includes behaviors, dispositions, and skills—both general (often referred to as soft skills) and technical.

Although not required by Board Policy, a technical college is strongly encouraged to develop competency statements using the 2001 revision of Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives<sup>13</sup> to promote a shared language across the technical college system.

### **Student Learning Outcome**

A student learning outcome is a clear, meaningful, and measurable statement that defines the outcome of a learning experience. A student learning outcome can be defined at the level of the institution, programs, courses, learning modules, or in other types of groupings. A student learning outcome is the statement that specifically defines the knowledge and ability a student will develop and demonstrate because of the associated learning experience.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Adapted from: American Association of Colleges of Nursing. (2021). *The essentials: Core competencies for professional nursing education*. <https://www.aacnnursing.org/Portals/0/PDFs/Publications/Essentials-2021.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> Adapted from: Competency-Based Education Network [C-BEN]. (Fall 2022). *CBE lexicon*. AND Alabama Governors Office Education/Workforce, Competency-Based Education Network [C-BEN], & EBSCOed. (September 2023). Alabama talent playbook: Issue 06: Competency ontology. <https://www.talentplaybook.org/issue-06-competency-ontology>

<sup>13</sup> Anderson, L.W., and Krathwohl, D.R., eds. 2001. A taxonomy for learning, teaching, and assessing: A revision of Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives. New York: Addison Wesley Longman, Inc.

<sup>14</sup> Adapted from: Competency-Based Education Network [C-BEN]. (Fall 2022). *CBE lexicon*. AND Everhart, D., Sandeen, C., Seymour, D., & Yoshino, K. (2014). *Clarifying competency based education terms: A lexicon*. Blackboard. <https://bbbbb.blackboard.com/Competency-based-education-definitions>

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### ***Levels of Mastery***

Levels of mastery are a communication tool that transparently describes what successful performance looks like to key stakeholders, such as learners, payors, employers, and others. Levels of mastery are progressive and increasingly sophisticated performance expectations. A level of mastery is comprised of a set of behavioral-based performance indicators.<sup>15</sup>

### ***Behavioral-Based Performance Indicator***

A behavioral-based performance indicator is a discrete description of the specific behaviors that will be used to assess a student's level of mastery of a competency. Each level of mastery has a defined set of behavioral-based performance indicators describing mastery at that specific level.<sup>16</sup>

### **Competency Leveling**

Competency leveling is an administrative and curricular practice used to ensure that a competency is appropriately aligned with the learning required to achieve mastery. The leveling process considers three main factors: size, scope, and sequencing.

1. **Size:** The first consideration is the size of a competency, primarily determined by the anticipated amount of student work required to achieve mastery. The workload must be reasonably equated to and aligned with the federal definition of a credit hour, as outlined in 34 CFR 600.2.
2. **Scope:** The second consideration is the scope of learning associated with a competency, including factors such as content coverage, rigor, complexity, and depth.<sup>17</sup>
3. **Sequencing:** The third consideration is the placement of a competency within a competency framework and a student's program of study. Sequencing determines the order in which competencies must be mastered, ensuring prerequisite competencies are completed before advancing to higher-level competencies.<sup>18</sup> The sequencing of a competency ensures a student's learning is intentionally scaffolded.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Adapted from: Competency-Based Education Network [C-BEN]. (Fall 2022). *CBE lexicon*.

<sup>16</sup> Adapted from: Competency-Based Education Network [C-BEN]. (Fall 2022). *CBE lexicon*.

<sup>17</sup> Adapted from: LeBlanc, P. (2022). *Students first: Equity, access, and opportunity in higher education*. Harvard University Press.

<sup>18</sup> Latham, N. I., Ernst, J. D., Freeze, T., Bernoteit, S., & White, B. R. (2023). *Using a competency development process model in higher education*. Routledge.

<sup>19</sup> For example, a faculty team may sequence a set of three competencies from “understand” to “analyze” to “evaluate.” In this example, the student would master the understand competency before the analyze competency, and then master the analyze competency before proceeding to the evaluate competency.

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**ASSESSMENT**

**Assessment Strategy**

An assessment strategy includes all formative and summative assessments that will be administered for each competency in a credential's competency framework. Formative and summative assessments work together, as the purpose of a formative assessment is to prepare the student for the successful completion of a summative assessment.<sup>20</sup>

**Evidence of Learning**

Evidence of learning encompasses a variety of materials, which are tangible works created by students, such as test results, papers, portfolios, presentations, and other work products. These materials validate a claim of a student's level of mastery.<sup>21</sup>

**Formative Assessment**

A formative assessment is used as a teaching and learning tool, creating a feedback loop to improve student and program performance. A formative assessment is used to benchmark learner progress, provide the learner with safe practice opportunities to receive meaningful feedback, and provide continuous improvement data at the individual student and program levels. A formative assessment is sometimes referred to as "assessment for learning."<sup>22</sup>

**Rubric**

A rubric is an evaluation tool containing the criteria used to assess a student's demonstration of mastery.<sup>23</sup>

**Summative Assessment**

A summative assessment is evaluative in nature and refers to the use of assessment results by instructors or coaches to determine a student's level of mastery for a competency. Each competency must have an associated summative assessment. Summative assessment is often referred to as "assessment of learning."<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Adapted from: Competency-Based Education Network [C-BEN]. (Fall 2022). *CBE lexicon*.

<sup>21</sup> Everhart, D., Sandeen, C., Seymour, D., & Yoshino, K. (2014). *Clarifying competency based education terms: A lexicon*. Blackboard. <https://bbbbb.blackboard.com/Competency-based-education-definitions>

<sup>22</sup> Adapted from: Competency-Based Education Network [C-BEN]. (Fall 2022). *CBE lexicon*.

<sup>23</sup> Everhart, D., Sandeen, C., Seymour, D., & Yoshino, K. (2014). *Clarifying competency based education terms: A lexicon*. Blackboard. <https://bbbbb.blackboard.com/Competency-based-education-definitions>

<sup>24</sup> Adapted from: Competency-Based Education Network [C-BEN]. (Fall 2022). *CBE lexicon*.

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**LEARNING EXPERIENCES AND INSTRUCTION**

**Co-Requisite Competency**

A co-requisite competency is a competency that is taken concurrently with one or more other competencies. In these cases, one competency complements, supports, or reinforces another.

**Course**

A course is an administrative unit in which students enroll.

**Pre-Requisite Competency**

A pre-requisite competency is a competency that must be successfully completed prior to a different competency. In such circumstances, the learning associated with the pre-requisite prepares a student for learning associated with another competency.

**Program of Study**

A program of study is an organized set of learning experiences designed to develop and validate a student's demonstration of mastery of all competencies within a CBE academic program's respective competency framework.<sup>25</sup> A program of study is designed on the credential-level.

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<sup>25</sup> Adapted from: Competency-Based Education Network [C-BEN]. (Fall 2022). *CBE lexicon*. See also: Definition of "educational program" in 34 CFR 600.2. <https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-34/subtitle-B/chapter-VI/part-600>