

Personalized, Competency-Based Education

Case Study #1: EPIC North High School

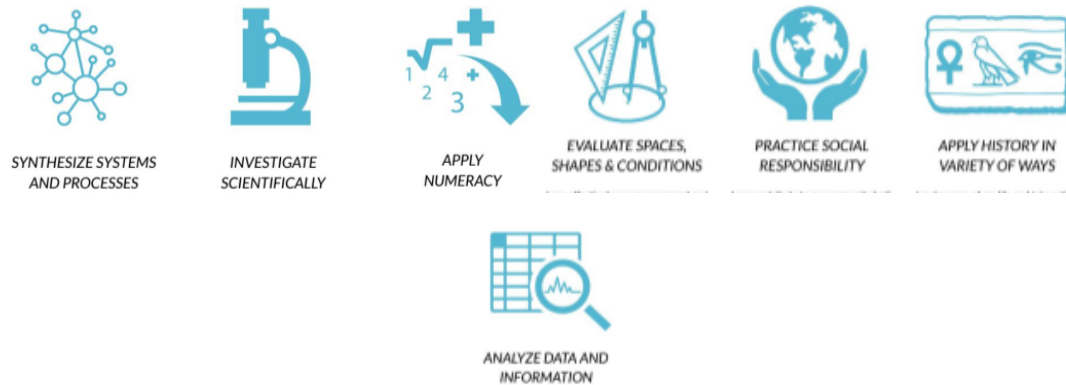
Based on articles originally published at CompetencyWorks

EPIC North High School was developed as part of an initiative to increase achievement of Black and Latino students, especially young men. The model was developed with four features: competency-based, culturally responsive, holistic/integrated, and human-centered. Below are a few of the highlights of the school design:

Summer Bridge is a two-week session before school starts for students transitioning from middle school to high school. Designed around leadership development, Summer Bridge includes community-building activities; introduction to mastery-based learning with two performance tasks; and a future focus, including a college visit. One student explained, “I learned that college isn’t a game. If you want to do something, you have to start now and reach for your goals.”

A competency framework describes what EPIC North wants for their students upon graduation, including spirituality, community, relationships, and success in college and careers. They have identified nineteen competencies (see the icons) that are aggregated skills, including read analytically; write effectively; evaluate spaces, shapes, and conditions; practice social responsibility; and manage my relationships. Within these competencies are sixty-five more granular attainments that have been cross-walked with the Common Core and the CASEL social-emotional framework.





John Clemente, one of the designers of the EPIC model, explained, “If it became too granular, learning would be more rote and simplified. We were not getting at critical thinking. We needed a structure that was less fine-grained than standards and would enable performance-based assessments for each unit. After narrowing the list of attainments, we worked with the Center for Collaborative Education to develop rubrics for each one.”

Learning Experiences: The courses are designed to actively engage students in their learning. Discussions use the Socratic method and other inquiry-based strategies, with students exploring topics together. Projects are developed in most, if not all, courses. Students are able to co-design projects or have choice in how they demonstrate their learning using the competency framework. For example, ninth graders were involved with a project on contagions that drew from science, mathematics, and civics, while the tenth graders worked on a project explaining nature vs. nurture that included selecting a topic, designing an experiment, and running a social media campaign.

Tuning: EPIC requires students to demonstrate their skills and abilities by completing rich performance tasks: multi-part demonstrations of learning that are tuned in advance to ensure certain qualities and components like cultural relevance and real-world transfer. EPIC schools tune the design of the instructional cycle and content as well as assessment. EPIC recognizes that creating rich learning experiences is a highly sophisticated process requiring teams of people bringing their expertise together. The “tuning criteria” helps teachers think deeply about how they are designing the cycle of learning. The criteria are:

- Opportunities to problem-solve
- Opportunities to revise and reflect on work
- Opportunities for rigorous, individualized learning
- Inclusion of scaffolds
- Integration of technology
- Mastery-based assessments of learning
- Real-world transfer of learning
- Project-based teaching and learning
- Literacy skill development
- Integrated domains and depth of competencies

- Cultural relevance

Social & emotional skills, agency, and positive identity are supported through two mechanisms. CORE is a daily advisory program for students where they focus on youth development issues, college and career goal planning, social-emotional learning, and general academic advising. The weekly Rites of Passage program provides students with “an opportunity to explore their ideas, identity, and future among peers, with the support and guidance of their immediate elders.”