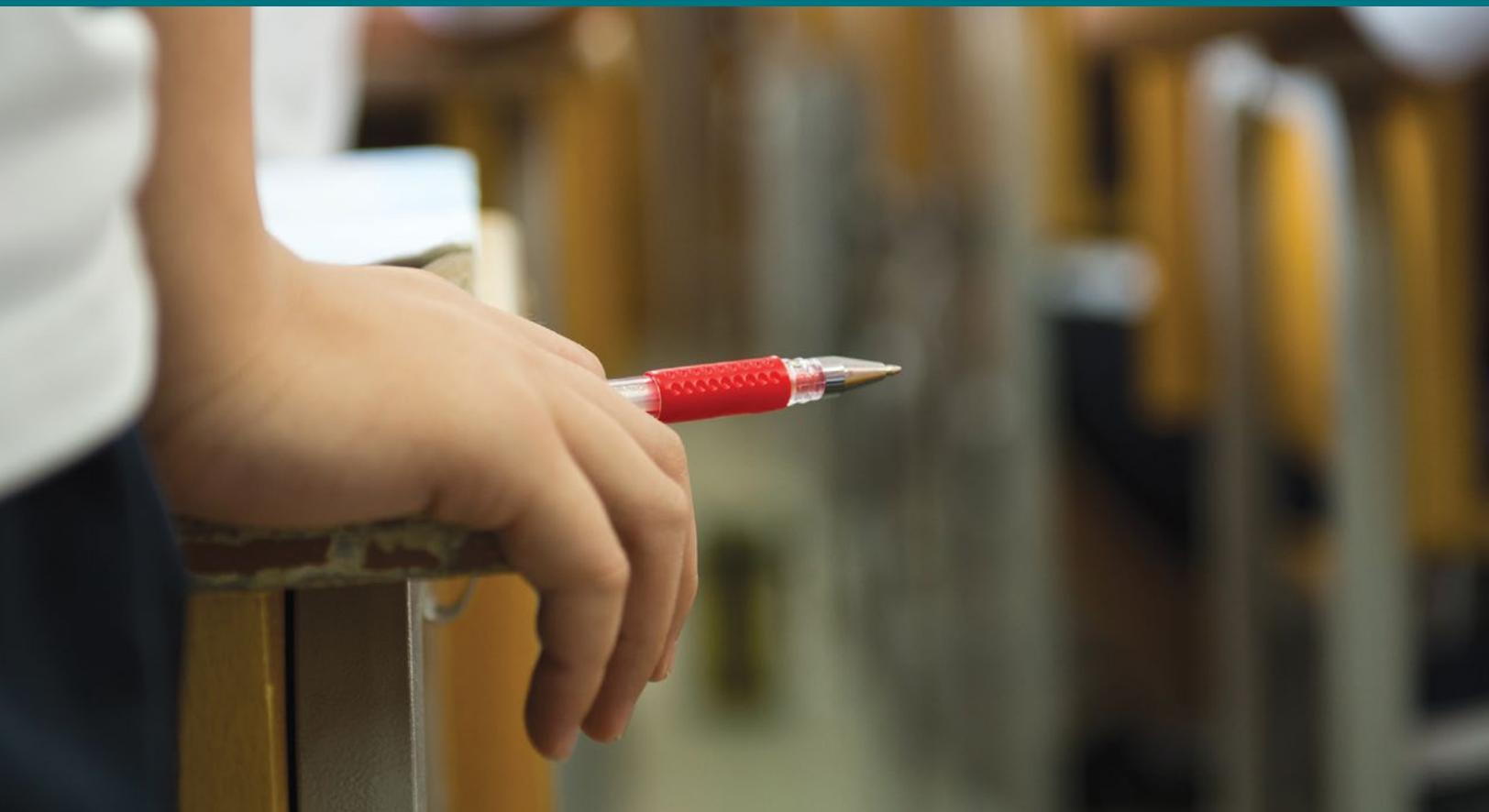


# KNOW → DO → UNDERSTAND

Development of competencies in Canada's schoolchildren



# CANADA WEST FOUNDATION

The Canada West Foundation focuses on the policies that shape the West's quality of life. Through our evidence-based research and commentary, we provide practical solutions to vexing public policy challenges. For more than 40 years, we have been a passionate advocate for western Canada.

This report has been prepared for The Counselling Foundation of Canada. The report was written by Janet Lane, Director of the Centre for Human Capital Policy, and Naomi Christensen, Policy Analyst at the Canada West Foundation.

As always, the authors endeavoured to be as accurate as possible in our analysis of the information provided. We wish to thank the education ministry officials across the country who responded so generously to our requests for information and verification of our reporting. It is the understanding of the authors that the information is substantially correct. However, we request the indulgence of the ministries involved as, in the interests of brevity and clarity, we were unable to include all the nuances of each jurisdiction's move to include competencies in their curriculum.

Any errors or omissions are the sole responsibility of the authors. The opinions expressed in this report are those of the authors and are not necessarily those of the Canada West Foundation's Board of Directors, advisers or funders.

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The Centre for Human Capital Policy focuses on the economic importance of a skilled and productive workforce to Canada's current and future prosperity and supports policies that will enable western Canadians to reach their potential.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Canada's education systems are joining the global movement towards a shift from standard knowledge-based credentials to demonstrated competencies – what people know, can do and understand. Credentials based on competencies provide individuals with assurance that they can actually do the jobs they are applying for, and are transforming the way employers hire and promote employees.

To inform its work with third-sector agencies that offer youth-focused, capacity-building initiatives, The Counselling Foundation of Canada asked the Canada West Foundation to determine whether K-12 school systems in Canada have moved towards adopting competency-based learning approaches.<sup>1</sup> The investigation also examined whether or not any of the competency frameworks in use, being implemented or targeted for implementation, employ relatively similar approaches and terminology.

Not surprisingly, in a country with 13 similar yet distinctly different K-12 systems, the answers are yes, and no.

A scan of Canada's education systems shows that:

→ provinces and territories are moving towards a competency-based approach to teaching, learning and assessment;

→ they are moving at different paces, using different language and with different levels of commitment but the competencies are not different;

→ some jurisdictions are incorporating competencies across the curriculum, while others are only using the concepts in their career education program; and

→ the largest difference is in the commitment to, and speed at which they adopt assessment based on competencies. Figure 1 (below) classifies the provinces and territories by their degree of adoption.

Canada's youth are becoming aware of the importance of building competencies for success in life and work. Agencies working with youth can include competency awareness in their programs without being in conflict with what is going on in schools. What is more, such a move will cement and advance the work of most school jurisdictions by promoting the understanding of career competencies. The expected result is young Canadians who better appreciate the relevance of education and are better equipped to navigate the complex career pathways of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

**FIGURE 1: INCORPORATION OF CAREER COMPETENCIES INTO K-12 CURRICULA**

GROUP	DESCRIPTION	JURISDICTIONS
1	Career competencies are fully incorporated into curriculum and assessment.	Quebec
2	Career competencies will be fully incorporated into curriculum and assessment.	British Columbia, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland & Labrador, Nunavut
3	Career competencies will be fully incorporated into curriculum. Assessment plans vary.	Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Alberta, Ontario
4	There are plans to incorporate career competencies into curriculum.	Yukon, New Brunswick
5	Career competencies are incorporated only into career development courses.	Northwest Territories, Prince Edward Island

Source: Ministry websites and interviews

## INTRODUCTION

Change is coming to the way our children learn. This reflects a broader shift from credentials to competencies.

Employers are realizing that credentials do not necessarily translate into the ability to perform jobs well and are increasingly looking for competencies when they hire and promote employees. Employers want all their employees to have basic career competencies – thinking, communication, personal and social management, literacy and numeracy. Education systems are incorporating some of the same competencies across their curricula, although most do not call them “career competencies.” They are also being incorporated into learning outcomes in post-secondary institutions.

Competencies are the skills, knowledge and attributes needed to know, do and understand. In the workplace, competencies are task related and stacked together into frameworks for the various occupations. Pathways between competency frameworks enable individuals to understand which additional competencies they need to move between occupations. Basic career competencies – such as critical thinking, problem-solving, personal management and communication – form the base of these frameworks.

In our schools, competencies can be:

- built right into learning outcomes for curriculum in individual subjects,
- cross-curricular – necessary for success throughout the various subjects,
- focused in career education programs, or
- all of the above.

Cross-curricular competencies developed in school are the same basic competencies needed for success in life and work.

A move towards competency-based education and training and the related assessment and credentialing is happening around the world. The Counselling Foundation of Canada (the Foundation) is considering launching a Career Competencies Awareness program with a two-pronged approach. The first element would be to promote the use of Memorial University Newfoundland’s (MUN) Career Integrated Learning Approach in post-secondary institutions. The Foundation supported MUN in the development of the approach. The Foundation also funds some of the impactful work of various youth-serving agencies which offer capacity-building programs. A few of the agencies funded by the Foundation are also considering incorporating competency awareness into their programming. The Foundation is interested in supporting this work which would develop awareness of career competencies in the youth they serve.

The Foundation’s goal is that its support for agencies working with youth should not be in conflict with what is going on in schools. The Foundation asked the Centre for Human Capital Policy at the Canada West Foundation to explore the extent to which school systems in each of the provinces and territories are making the change towards a competency approach. The Foundation also asked that the research identify if the competency frameworks in use, being implemented or targeted for implementation, use relatively similar approaches and terminology.

The Canada West Foundation is a non-partisan, non-profit think tank that has for more than 40 years brought thoughtful research to policy discourse. Its Centre for Human Capital Policy published two papers about competencies in 2015. One, *Competence is the Best Credential*, recommends that Canada catch up with the rest of the world and move to competency-based workforce development. The second paper, *Building Blocks: Modular Competencies for Canada’s Trades*, recommends that Canada quickly incorporate a competency-based approach into training people working in trades. This research fits with the focus for the centre in 2016.

With the competency-based approach happening all around them, young people may need help to bridge the gap between the competencies they are learning in school and the way they relate them to their lives beyond the classroom. Students will use their career competencies and the associated language for the foreseeable future. Their transition to post-secondary programs and their careers will be facilitated by a common understanding of the career competencies they need.

With this in mind, The Counselling Foundation of Canada's proposed two-pronged approach of building career competency awareness for youth in schools and promoting a career competency framework for use in post-secondary programs is vitally important. A project that builds on the research done for this paper will bring the awareness of these competencies and how to build them in youth to capacity-building agencies, parents, counsellors and the youth themselves. This will help youth appreciate the value of school-based training, assist in their transition from school and assist Canada to improve its education and workforce development systems. Ultimately, Canadians will be better able to reach their full potential.

One of the provincial ministry key informants interviewed for this project framed the need for the move to competency-based education like this:

*Education systems in Canada were created in an industrial era. The goal of high schools was to sort for and identify the students who would most succeed in university and other post-secondary programming. The sorting process removed those destined for a life in the trades and other less academic occupations. It was an assembly line approach and we have come a long way since the assembly line. It's time to find a different way to engage and assess learners. The move to competencies offers that new approach.*

## METHODOLOGY

Our research spanned the 10 provinces and three territories. Research focused on:

- Which, if any, general or career competencies are incorporated into K-12 systems.
- Whether, and how, career courses incorporate career competencies.
- How teachers are being prepared for the change to the curriculum.
- Whether there are any links between competencies in K-12 systems and those in the post-secondary system.

Research was conducted during the first six weeks of 2016. Information was gathered primarily through a literature review of education department documents publicly available online. These included annual education plans, education policy and strategy documents, and individual career course curriculum guides. Telephone interviews were conducted with officials from the following jurisdictions: British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland & Labrador, and Nunavut. Our interim findings were sent to each jurisdiction for review; additional information was gathered through follow-up telephone interviews and written responses from key informants in Manitoba, Ontario, Newfoundland & Labrador, Alberta and Saskatchewan. Key informants were directly involved in either leading or managing the development of career and cross-curricular competencies for their province.



## FINDINGS

### SCHOOL SYSTEMS ARE NOT EXPLICITLY TALKING ABOUT 'CAREER COMPETENCIES'

Generally, there is little use of the wording “career competencies” within school systems. The exception is Saskatchewan, Manitoba and the Northwest Territories, which use the *Blueprint for LifeWork Designs*. This document is a resource for public and private agencies to help children, youth and adults develop career competencies. Developed in the late 1990s, the Blueprint was produced in partnership with the U.S. Department of Education, Human Resources Development Canada, and two Canadian non-profit organizations. The three Canadian jurisdictions incorporated the Blueprint’s 11 “career development competencies” into their career education course curriculum in the early 2000s.

### THE LANGUAGE VARIES, BUT THE COMPETENCIES DO NOT

As can be expected when looking at 13 separate systems, the language used to identify competencies within different jurisdictions varies. Despite the variance in language and the lack of direct references to competencies as career competencies, the same types of competencies are being incorporated in K-12 curricula across the country. A review of the competencies that education systems are identifying shows that although most include a smaller number of competencies, they are generally the same as the career competencies laid out in Memorial University of Newfoundland’s (MUN) Teaching and Learning Framework.<sup>2</sup>

**THE TEACHING AND LEARNING FRAMEWORK** is a product of MUN’s Career Integrated Learning Project, which was developed with support from The Counselling Foundation of Canada. The project helps MUN students articulate the competencies they gain through their coursework and links these competencies to success in life after university. For the purpose of this paper, career competencies are considered to be those laid out in the MUN Framework.

This framework states that MUN graduates should:

- Be knowledgeable and competent in their field
- Be critical and practical thinkers
- Be responsible citizens
- Demonstrate ethical, moral and intellectual integrity
- Appreciate diversity and promote equity
- Be creative and responsive problem solvers
- Have enthusiasm for learning
- Be supportive collaborators with particular regard to diversity of interests
- Communicate effectively with others
- Be passionate and industrious individuals

Appendix 1 details how we categorized the 10 MUN competencies into the groups most often used by the K-12 systems across Canada. As mentioned above, it is uncommon for school systems to frame their competency approaches in the context of preparing students for careers. That being said, the competency frameworks employed are readily applicable to meeting the needs of future employment and career aspirations. It is therefore accurate to use the term “career competencies” when referring to the competency models in place across Canada.

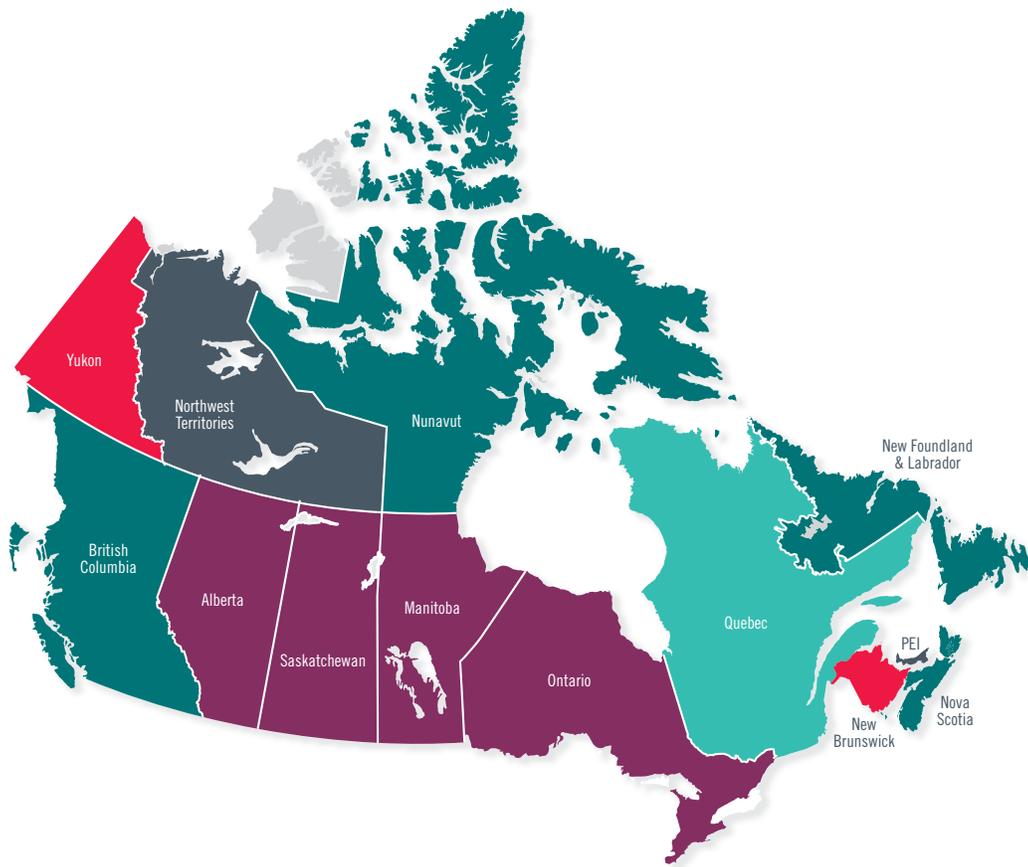
### CANADA’S SCHOOL SYSTEMS ARE INCORPORATING CAREER COMPETENCIES INTO CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT IN DIFFERENT WAYS

While the majority of jurisdictions are aware of competencies, the extent to which competencies – particularly the assessment of competencies – are incorporated into curriculum varies. They are grouped in Figure 1.

**FIGURE 1: INCORPORATION OF CAREER COMPETENCIES INTO K-12 CURRICULA**

GROUP	DESCRIPTION	JURISDICTIONS
<b>1</b>	Career competencies are fully incorporated into curriculum and assessment.	Quebec
<b>2</b>	Career competencies will be fully incorporated into curriculum and assessment.	British Columbia, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland & Labrador, Nunavut
<b>3</b>	Career competencies will be fully incorporated into curriculum. Assessment plans vary.	Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Alberta, Ontario
<b>4</b>	There are plans to incorporate career competencies into curriculum.	Yukon, New Brunswick
<b>5</b>	Career competencies are incorporated only into career development courses.	Northwest Territories, Prince Edward Island

Source: Ministry websites and interviews



## THE MAJORITY OF PROVINCES ARE MOVING TOWARDS COMPETENCY-BASED CURRICULUM

While the five jurisdictions in Groups 1 and 2 are in different places along the spectrum of implementing competencies into every subject and grade, they are all moving to a competency-based approach.

In several jurisdictions, including Manitoba and New Brunswick, the primary focus of education system renewal is on improving student outcomes in the areas of literacy and numeracy with cross-curricular or career competencies being a more secondary focus.

Northwest Territories and Prince Edward Island are planning career competencies within K-12 curriculum but do not yet have them.

Details of the competencies landscape in individual K-12 systems are organized into the five groupings laid out in Figure 1.

### GROUP 1

#### JURISDICTIONS HAVE FULLY INCORPORATED CAREER COMPETENCIES INTO CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT

Of all Canadian jurisdictions, Quebec is a leader and early adopter by incorporating competency-based learning into the entire provincial education system. Quebec has incorporated both the teaching and assessment of competencies into curriculum in every subject and grade.

In 2005, the province fully implemented its Education Program for the Secondary Cycle – curriculum that is organized to develop students' competencies. Categories are intellectual, methodological, personal and social, and communication-related competencies. These cross-curricular competencies are closely related to what we consider to be career competencies. Subject-specific competencies – the knowledge required for each subject – are also integrated into course curricula.

Quebec is also farthest ahead in assessing competencies. It provides educators with evaluation criteria for each competency as well as benchmarks identifying the stages in the development of competencies. Its evaluation framework takes into account the assessment of competencies when determining subject grades.<sup>3,4</sup>

### GROUP 2

#### JURISDICTIONS WILL FULLY INCORPORATE CAREER COMPETENCIES INTO CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT

The jurisdictions in this group are all incorporating competencies into all subjects and grades. Where they are on the spectrum of implementation varies, and they are not as far down the road as Group 1.

##### Nova Scotia and British Columbia

Nova Scotia and B.C. are in the midst of designing and implementing new curriculum that places a greater focus on competencies. Nova Scotia implemented new curriculum for the early grades this school year (2015-16), and will revise the remaining grades by 2018-19. In B.C., new K-9 curriculum was available for use in fall 2015, and will be mandated for the 2016-17 school year. New high school curriculum will be available for use in 2016-17, and fully implemented by 2017-18.

Both provinces are moving towards assessment of learning outcomes and the cross-curricular competencies. For example, in its new curriculum, Nova Scotia's education department articulates what each competency will look like at each grade, aligns indicators with each competency, and identifies specific skills that fall under each competency. At the same time, the number of course outcomes has been reduced. In the past, there were more than 900 outcomes in Grades 4-6; in the new curriculum, there will be fewer than 300. With the new curriculum, teachers assess and report on both competencies and content.

Nova Scotia's new Primary-Grade 3 curriculum identifies six curriculum competencies.<sup>5</sup> These are similar to what we consider to be career competencies. Similar to Quebec, B.C.'s curriculum identifies two types of competencies. There are six cross-curricular core competencies, such as thinking and communication, which run through all subject areas. There are also curricular competencies specific to particular subjects, such as math and science. A notable element of the redesign of B.C.'s education system is the development of principles to guide future curriculum development so that it is "competency driven."<sup>6</sup>

To assist teachers with the transition to new, competency focused curriculum, B.C. allocated extra non-instructional hours for teachers to receive additional professional development for this school year. While changes have not been made to the training of pre-service teachers, B.C.'s post-secondary education faculties appear to be aware of, and interested in, the changes occurring within the secondary school system.

### **Newfoundland & Labrador**

In 2010, Newfoundland & Labrador began revising its curriculum. The new curriculum incorporates “learning skills for the next generation.”<sup>7</sup> Many of these skills relate to career competencies, such as collaboration, communication, creative and critical thinking and social and cross-cultural skills. Newfoundland’s implementation strategy differs from other jurisdictions. It is introducing new curriculum by subject: first math, then language arts, and soon science curriculum. The government runs a professional learning website for teachers; a new section under development will include resources for the implementation and assessment of the learning skills.

### **Nunavut**

Nunavut’s education curriculum borrows elements from a variety of jurisdictions, including NWT, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba. Its eight cross-curricular competencies are based on Inuit traditional knowledge and societal principles, known as *Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit* (IQ). Competencies centre on preparing students for life in the North. The education department’s intent is that report cards will reflect competency assessments; there is still work to do before this is in place.

## **GROUP 3**

### **JURISDICTIONS WILL FULLY INCORPORATE CAREER COMPETENCIES INTO CURRICULUM; ASSESSMENT PLANS VARY**

In this group, two jurisdictions – Saskatchewan and Manitoba – have incorporated competencies similar to career competencies into curriculum. Two others – Alberta and Ontario – are in the process of doing so. Assessment within the group also varies. Saskatchewan and Manitoba assess competencies in some grades and subjects. Alberta and Ontario plan to be competency-*focused* rather than *-based*, meaning learner outcomes will not include competencies.

#### **Saskatchewan and Manitoba**

Saskatchewan began curriculum renewal in 2007-08, incorporating four cross-curricular competencies into all subject areas in all grades. As in other jurisdictions, these cross-curricular competencies (thinking, identity and interdependence, literacies and social responsibility) are related to career competencies. Saskatchewan also continues to incorporate the *Blueprint for LifeWork Designs* career development competencies in career courses.

Manitoba identifies four “foundational skills” within its curriculum, which are similar to what other jurisdictions refer to as cross-curricular competencies – literacy and communication, problem solving, human relations and technology.

Competencies are assessed in some subjects and grades in Saskatchewan. For example, new K-Grade 2 French Immersion curricula released in 2015 includes subject specific competencies that teachers teach to and assess. In Manitoba, teacher assessments in various grades include reporting on the competencies of personal and social management. For example, in Grades 1 through 8, teachers report on student learning outcomes, such as communication, critical thinking and problem solving (among others). While some of the core curriculum in early grades in Manitoba include assessment of “key competencies,” the competencies considered are more related to subject specific content and literacy and numeracy than to career competencies.

## Ontario and Alberta

In Ontario, an emphasis is being placed on incorporating “higher-order skills” into existing curriculum.<sup>8</sup> This is flowing from the province’s latest Education Strategy, released in April 2014. Input from employers on the skills they are looking for in Ontario graduates was gathered while the plan was developed. Alberta’s Inspiring Education initiative, launched in 2009, has been shifting the focus of the education system towards competencies. The process has been slowed, however, by the changing political climate, as there have been five premiers since 2011.

Competencies in Ontario are not learning outcomes. Rather, they are incorporated into the knowledge and skills students are expected to learn. Since it is up to school boards and individual teachers to develop teaching approaches, assessment of the higher-order skills is likely to vary throughout the province.

Alberta Education is working on redesigning curriculum to more explicitly incorporate the 10 competencies a 2013 ministerial order specified must be incorporated into all subjects and grades. Although the curriculum will be competency-focused, learner outcomes are not expected to be based on competencies. The province does not have a timeline for full implementation of the curriculum revisions.

The Alberta School Board Association has noted the province does not yet have a framework in place for the assessment of competencies.<sup>9</sup> There are, however, some requirements for student self-assessment of competencies within career courses, such as in the mandatory Grade 11 Career and Life Management course.

## GROUP 4

### JURISDICTIONS PLAN TO INCORPORATE CAREER COMPETENCIES INTO CURRICULUM

The two jurisdictions in this group plan to incorporate competencies into curriculum but it is not yet clear when the process will be complete, or if or how competencies will be assessed.

#### Yukon and New Brunswick

Yukon, because of its very small student enrolment, follows B.C.’s programs of study. It plans to adopt B.C.’s new curriculum, with modifications to include a Yukon

context and First Nations culture. Yukon intends to have an implementation plan in place by June 2016; it will include training for teachers.

New Brunswick’s curriculum does not reference competencies. The province is in the early stages of developing a 10-year education plan; the discussion paper it is using for public consultations acknowledges the development of competencies as being a necessary outcome of the K-12 education system. Several years ago, under a different government, New Brunswick began developing a 21<sup>st</sup> century learning model focused on 21<sup>st</sup> century competencies. The initiative, however, was not implemented.

## GROUP 5

### JURISDICTIONS INCORPORATE CAREER COMPETENCIES ONLY INTO CAREER DEVELOPMENT COURSES

In these jurisdictions, competencies are isolated in career development courses.

#### Northwest Territories and Prince Edward Island

NWT refers to its Career and Technology Studies (CTS) courses in high school as competency-based curriculum. Courses are organized by levels as opposed to grades, and are related to specific career choices. For example, courses are available in occupational areas, such as business, trades, manufacturing and health.<sup>10</sup> NWT uses the use the Blueprint’s 11 career development competencies in CTS.

P.E.I.’s high school co-op education curriculum incorporates the Conference Board of Canada’s “employability skills.”<sup>11</sup> Essential graduation learnings of the curriculum include technology competency, problem solving, communication and personal development.

P.E.I. appears to be moving towards incorporating competencies into all curriculum, stemming in part from the Atlantic provinces’ recent decision to change *The Atlantic Canada Framework for Essential Graduation Learnings to the Framework for Essential Graduation Competencies*.<sup>12</sup> P.E.I. is re-examining all curriculum and, while the desire within the education department seems to be to move towards competencies, it is too soon to determine the role competencies will play.

## REGIONAL INITIATIVES

The **Atlantic Framework for Essential Graduation Learnings in Schools** was developed by the four Maritime provinces. Seven essential graduation learnings (EGL's)\* provide a common framework for curriculum development throughout Atlantic Canada. Recently, a decision was made to revise the framework into the **Atlantic Framework for Essential Graduation Competencies**; the updated document is not yet public.

The **Western and Northern Canada Protocol for Collaboration in Education**, established in the early 1990s, includes the four western provinces and three territories. It is a forum for education ministries to collaborate on projects, including curriculum development. The *Guiding Principles for WNCPE Curriculum Framework Projects*, released in 2011, contains five principles, with the fourth being “Competencies unite learning.” The document discusses identifying cross-curricular competencies to include in curriculum, and “designing assessment procedures to assess students’ performances of understanding and growing competence to examine their performances and progress.”

\*The seven Atlantic EGL's are closely related to career competencies. They are: Aesthetic Expression, Citizenship, Communication, Personal Development, Problem Solving, Spiritual and Moral Development and Technological Competence.



## SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL COMPETENCIES

In the United States, an emphasis is being placed on ensuring students have “social and emotional competencies,” along with other competencies. The Chicago-based *Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning* (CASEL) identified a set of five interrelated social and emotional core competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. The move towards ensuring attention is given to social and emotional competencies in Canada is underway. Within some jurisdictions, “personal and social management” competencies already reflect these. For example, Saskatchewan teaches students to “understand and care for oneself intellectually, emotionally, physically, and spiritually.” As a key informant with Nova Scotia’s Department of Education put it – today’s students are more afraid of making mistakes than previous generations, and teachers are noticing higher levels of anxiety in kids. The classroom learning environment should be one where kids feel comfortable taking risks and learning from mistakes.

## CULTURAL COMPETENCE

Cultural competence, such as recognition of and respect for diversity, is an attribute employers look for in potential employees. Within the provinces and territories, school systems recognize the importance of teaching cultural competence. Some jurisdictions, such as Ontario, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland & Labrador and Yukon, identify cultural competence as a standalone goal of the education system. Many other jurisdictions include some form of cultural competence within their personal and social management types of cross-curricular competencies.

## THERE ARE NO FORMAL LINKS TO POST-SECONDARY INSTITUTIONS

We did not learn of any formal links to the competencies being used at the K-12 level, and those incorporated into teaching at the post-secondary level. However, at least in some jurisdictions, post-secondary institutions are keeping abreast of the changes in the K-12 system. All of our interviewees acknowledged they include in their competency-based curriculum, language about how competencies are for learning and work and therefore will be used in their post-secondary learning.

## PREPARATION FOR COMPETENCY-BASED TEACHING IS DONE THROUGH PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

All of the interviewees in jurisdictions involved in making the change to their curriculum acknowledged they are providing more tools and professional development (PD) to their in-service teachers. As examples: B.C. is providing an increased amount of PD time this year as it implements its new competency-based curriculum; Nova Scotia said that it has online resources available for teachers; Newfoundland is building a web-based tool for teachers to assist it in the transition to the new approach. The professional associations of teachers in each province are also vested in the in-service training of their members.

If faculties of education have incorporated the use of competency-based approaches into their teacher pre-service program curricula, they do not talk about it in their course descriptions. Some may already be doing so. Ministry officials in the jurisdictions we were able to talk to directly are in contact with pre-service program developers with, we learned, the intent of encouraging pre-service programs to prepare teachers directly for the new approach.

## IMPLEMENTATION PRACTICE AFFECTS TEACHER RESPONSE

We heard in our key informant interviews that some teachers are responding to a focus on competencies very positively. Although the level of commitment to a competency-based approach varies, when incorporated well, this kind of approach to learning allows teachers to

use more professional expertise. The jurisdictions that are moving to a true competency-based assessment approach are reducing the number of curriculum outcomes demanded by the curriculum, thereby providing time for teachers to delve more deeply into areas of student interest and develop better understanding of fewer curriculum points. The response can be somewhat less positive for teachers who experience this new curriculum focus as something added onto an already-full curriculum load.

### WHAT THIS MEANS FOR TEACHERS:

In Nova Scotia, in K-3, the way children are taught has changed completely. The competencies are identified, and the level of those competencies that is appropriate for grade level has been clearly laid out in the curriculum guides. Teachers still have key concepts that they must teach, but the number of curriculum outcomes has been decreased substantially. In the past, the content was the primary goal, with the doing and understanding taking a backseat to the knowing. Now, teachers are teaching the competencies through the content. And they are assessing both the competencies and the knowledge. Learning can be more activity-based and understanding and application focused. Learners, especially boys, are more engaged in their learning. Lesson planning can be more generative.

## CONCLUSIONS

The research shows that many of the provinces are already quite far along the continuum of competency awareness and most are incorporating competencies in some way into at least a portion of K-12 curriculum. While some jurisdictions are incorporating competencies across the curriculum, others are only using the concepts in their career education program. However, the linkage between school-based competencies and those used in post-secondary systems is not yet fully apparent. The move towards competency awareness building in youth-serving agencies will not be in conflict with what is going on in schools. What is more, it will cement and advance the work of most jurisdictions through expanding understanding of career competencies. In jurisdictions where competencies are incorporated already, emphasis is understandably on the development of competencies within the school curricula. Across Canada, students will benefit from learning or reinforcing their understanding of the fact that the competencies they are developing in school will be the same ones they will need to use throughout life, post-secondary education and work.

## APPENDIX 1: HOW WE CATEGORIZED THE MUN TEACHING AND LEARNING FRAMEWORK'S CAREER COMPETENCIES

CAREER COMPETENCY	SUBJECT AREAS	THINKING	PERSONAL/ SOCIAL MANAGEMENT	COMMUNICATION
Be knowledgeable and competent in their field	√			
Be critical and practical thinkers		√		
Be responsible citizens			√	
Demonstrate ethical, moral and intellectual integrity			√	
Appreciate diversity and promote equity			√	
Be creative and responsive problem solvers		√		
Have enthusiasm for learning			√	
Be supportive collaborators with particular regard to diversity of interests			√	
Communicate effectively with others				√
Be passionate and industrious individuals			√	

Source: Ministry websites, interviews, and MUN Teaching and Learning Framework

### ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> This study examined the K-12 systems in the provinces and territories but not First Nations reserve-based education.
- <sup>2</sup> Memorial University of Newfoundland, The Career Integrated Learning Project, accessed January 2016, <https://www.mi.mun.ca/departments/academicandstudentaffairs/careerintegratedlearningproject/>.
- <sup>3</sup> Evaluation of Student Learning, Government of Quebec, last modified 2013, [https://www7.mels.gouv.qc.ca/dc/evaluation/index\\_en.php](https://www7.mels.gouv.qc.ca/dc/evaluation/index_en.php).
- <sup>4</sup> Government of Quebec, *Quebec Education Program*, 2001, <http://collections.banq.qc.ca/ark:/52327/bs41449>, p.9
- <sup>5</sup> Nova Scotia's six curriculum competencies are: citizenship, personal career development, communication, creativity and innovation, critical thinking, and technological fluency.
- <sup>6</sup> B.C. Ministry of Education, "Exploring Curriculum Design," January 2013, [http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/irp/docs/exp\\_curr\\_design.pdf](http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/irp/docs/exp_curr_design.pdf), p.3
- <sup>7</sup> Newfoundland's Learning Skills for the Next Generation is made up of: Learning and Innovation Skills (collaboration, communication, creative and critical thinking), Literacy skills (information and communication technology literacy, numeracy, reading and writing) and Life and Career Skills (flexibility and adaptability, initiative and self-direction, leadership and responsibility, productivity and accountability, and social and cross-cultural skills).
- <sup>8</sup> Ontario's higher-order skills are: creativity and critical thinking, innovative problem solving, and effective communication and collaboration.
- <sup>9</sup> Alberta School Boards Association, "Measuring Up: Student Assessment in Alberta," 2013, p.12-14
- <sup>10</sup> Government of North West Territories, Career and Technology Studies, last modified 2015/02/02, <https://www.ece.gov.nt.ca/early-childhood-school-services/school-services/curriculum-k-12/career-technology-studies>.
- <sup>11</sup> Employability skills are the skills, attitudes and behaviours necessary to get, keep and progress a job. They are broken down into Fundamental Skills, Personal Management Skills, and Teamwork Skills.
- <sup>12</sup> The Essential Graduation Competencies document is not yet publicly available.



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