Pam Wicks opened the meeting at 5:30 p.m. with an overview of the topic to be discussed (competency-based education, or CBE).

Assistant Superintendent Donna Palley summarized the history of competency education in New Hampshire, in Concord School District and at Concord High School.

In 2013, the NH Board of Education created an expectation that schools provide learning opportunities to enable students to achieve the District’s graduation competencies aligned to the skills, knowledge and work-study practices required for success in college and careers; and allow students to demonstrate achievement of additional competencies aligned to student interests in elective courses, career and technical education courses or extended learning opportunities.

Competency education includes measurable standards-aligned learning competencies connected to learning progressions, multiple and varied assessments that provide students with opportunities to apply learning and timely, differentiated support based on individual learning needs.

In Concord schools, educators have been “unpacking” standards, developing aligned common summative assessments and developing common curricula based on standards. Competencies include explicit, measurable, transferable learning objectives that empower students. Learning outcomes emphasize competencies that include application and transfer of knowledge, skills and understandings.

Ms. Palley reminded the Committee that we are in the fourth year of PACE (Performance Assessments of Competency Education), an alternative State accountability system that involves a reduced level of standardized testing with locally developed common performance assessments, and the NH Statewide Assessment System/SAT given once in elementary school, once in middle school and once in high school (three grades instead of seven). In all other years, students are given common and local performance assessments developed by teacher teams and validated at the state level. PACE offers an integration of assessments with students’ day-to-day work, emphasizing meaningful content and deep
student engagement. It involves educators in designing and implementing the accountability system; and supports approaches to instruction, learning and assessment that are competency-based. PACE includes professional development and support from the NHDOE for local districts involved in this initiative, including calibration.

Ms. Palley also showed a more traditional assessment tool and an assessment that would be considered a performance-based assessment tool with connections to a rubric and competency skill development. She shared a copy of the elementary report card that uses a competency-aligned means for assessing student skill development.

Mr. Sica provided an overview of how students’ competency development is leveraged by using several graphics.

Mr. Sica also referenced a work habit practices slide that highlighted communication, self-direction, collaboration and creativity.

Mr. Sica outlined five components of effective grading:

1. The primary purpose of a competency-based grading system is to clearly, accurately, consistently, and fairly communicate learning progress, achievement and work study practices to students, families, postsecondary institutions and prospective employers.

2. An effective grading system measures, reports, and documents academic progress and achievement separately from work habits, character traits, and behaviors.

3. The grading system ensures that students, families, teachers, counselors, advisors, and support specialists have the detailed information they need to make important decisions about a student’s education.

4. The grading system measures, reports, and documents student progress and competency against a set of clearly defined cross-curricular and content-area standards and learning objectives collaboratively developed by the administration, faculty, and staff.
5. The grading system ensures consistency and fairness in the assessment of learning, and in the assignment of scores and proficiency levels against the same learning standards, across students, teachers, assessments, learning experiences, content areas, and time.

As decisions about grading purposes are made at CHS, other critical issues about the form of the report card, as well as issues related to broader grading and reporting policies and practices, will be easier to address and resolve.

Mr. Crumrine reviewed the history of grading at the high school level. He referenced percentages, numbers, and letter grades. He spoke to research done in this area by Tom Gusky and Bob Marzano, who have examined differences in grading processes between two teachers who may be grading the same test or the same paper. In competency education, competencies are deconstructed into smaller learning targets, giving parents, students, and teachers more detailed information to identify areas of growth and to celebrate skills mastered.

Steve Rothenberg showed two slides that included a high school transcript that reflects competency assessment of learning. In competency education, grades are fair and accurately reflect student learning over time; grades communicate a student’s progress; and grades are based on robust summative evidence from multiple forms of assessment. Behaviors, work habits, and personal qualities are separately assessed in a competency format. The newest evidence of learning is weighted more heavily. Scores and grades provide the opportunity for targeted re-instruction. Students are held accountable to meet competencies; they do not move forward with deficits in learning.

Jim Corkum addressed the topics of re-teaching and reassessment at CHS. In several classrooms, re-assessments are built-in; a FLEX Model (1:1, co-teaching, regrouping, small-group re-teaching) is used, after-school tutoring is provided, as well as Individual Learning Plans, Learning Labs, Diploma Academy, competency-based summer school and online learning.

Mr. Corkum showed a list “real world” areas in professions, where reassessments are very common so that people may reassess and demonstrate their skills. In competency education, students are taught and expected to participate in re-learning and re-assessment to ensure they are college- and career-ready.

Mr. Rothenberg showed several current rubrics. He highlighted the work by CRTC teachers on competency development. In competency education, NH Work Study Practices are emphasized, measured, and reported, in conjunction with competencies, providing a refined picture of a student’s overall performance as well as their relative level of CCR (college- and career-readiness).

Chali Davis addressed common concerns of students and parents regarding applications to competitive colleges or universities. The CHS team hosted a panel discussion with representatives from several colleges and universities last spring. They all confirmed they are reviewing a variety of different types of transcripts from high schools across the country, and many have already instituted procedures for accepting a wide variety of
transcripts. Colleges look for a robust school profile that speaks to the richness of the 
school’s academic experience. Colleges want to know if students have availed themselves 
of all the opportunities within their educational community. Standards-based grades and 
transcripts are acceptable, if not preferable.

Mr. Rothenberg spoke about grade point averages, class rank and Latin honors. The 
migration to a robust CBE model also elicits deep questioning of the appropriateness of 
the class rank model; specifically, whether the Latin system is more appropriate. 
Regardless, the class rank model can function with CBE in place; they are not exclusive of 
each other. Ultimately, a system that celebrates and promotes success and informs future 
college, employer, and military decision-makers of a student’s relative performance is 
desired.

Ms. Palley wrapped up the presentation by outlining what is not changing. Students will 
strive to reach rigorous and robust learning targets. Students will have opportunities to 
excel. Students will receive report cards and transcripts that reflect the values of 
competency education. Rubrics will be used to determine grades. Grades will be 
calibrated to ensure reliability. Grade point averages and ranking will be determined. 
Academic excellence will be recognized. Opportunities for competency recovery, re-
learning and re-assessing will be provided.

An additional presentation to the Instructional Committee will include an overview of the 
“roll-out” process, software options to support this work and a plan for communication 
across the community.

Ms. Wicks thanked the high school administrators for their presentation and for 
developing a clearer understanding of competency education. Tom Croteau asked how 
easily teachers are finding content to support their work in competency development. Mr. 
Sica shared professional development opportunities for teachers. Ms. Palley spoke to how 
teachers have been purchasing fewer texts, but more “stuff” to support their work. The 
District has purchased technology to support teachers also. Nancy Kane asked how much 
of this work has been implemented. Mr. Sica said that the challenge for teachers is that 
they have a “foot in both worlds,” as they are working with a four-point scale and are also 
working in a one-hundred-point scale.

Jim Richards said that he has heard from students, parents and teachers that they are not 
supportive of this move overall; he likened it to what would happen if the District 
discontinued varsity athletics. He said he was very concerned about this going forward. 
Tom Crumrine spoke to the calculation processes and his review.

Jennifer Patterson spoke to her experience as a member of the Board and what she has 
learned over the years on a variety of critical topics. She requested that a follow up 
presentation be offered soon so that the Board and the community may understand the 
direction that is being recommended to change grading at the high school level. Ms. 
Patterson said that it was helpful to have the college admissions officers offer their forum.

Ms. Palley informed the Board of several articles in their online committee notebook to 
support their understanding of this topic. She drew their attention to an article,
“Admissions Document,” that highlights 75 New England colleges and universities that are supportive of performance-based report cards as not disadvantaging students on college applications.

Danielle Smith shared a story from her high school experience where she asked a teacher what she could do to earn two more points on her grade; her teacher simply erased her grade and increased it by two points. She said has always felt uncomfortable about that incident and understands the subjectivity of grading. She asked whether students would be able to take work home to continue their work. Ms. Palley responded affirmatively that students’ assignments would continue to be available for them to work on at school and at home.

Mr. Richards suggested a list of high schools in the region that are using a four-point competency-based education reporting system. Ms. Wicks encouraged the committee to continue the conversation and to invite the college admissions counselors back to a parent forum. Mr. Croteau spoke to his respect for the CHS team and their skills.

Mr. Sica noted that there will be a strong, professional level of commitment present as the high school team of administrators and teachers move forward with this work. He also reminded everyone that colleges are not solely interested in a grade point average (GPA); they are looking for a robust transcript and engaged learners who have been part of balanced learning opportunities.

Ms. Wicks asked for a motion to adjourn.

The Committee voted 4-0 to adjourn (motioned by Liza Poinier, seconded by Danielle Smith).

The meeting adjourned at 7:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Pam Wicks, Chair
Terri Forsten, Recorder