

SCHEDULING FOR

PERSONALIZED  
COMPETENCY-BASED  
EDUCATION



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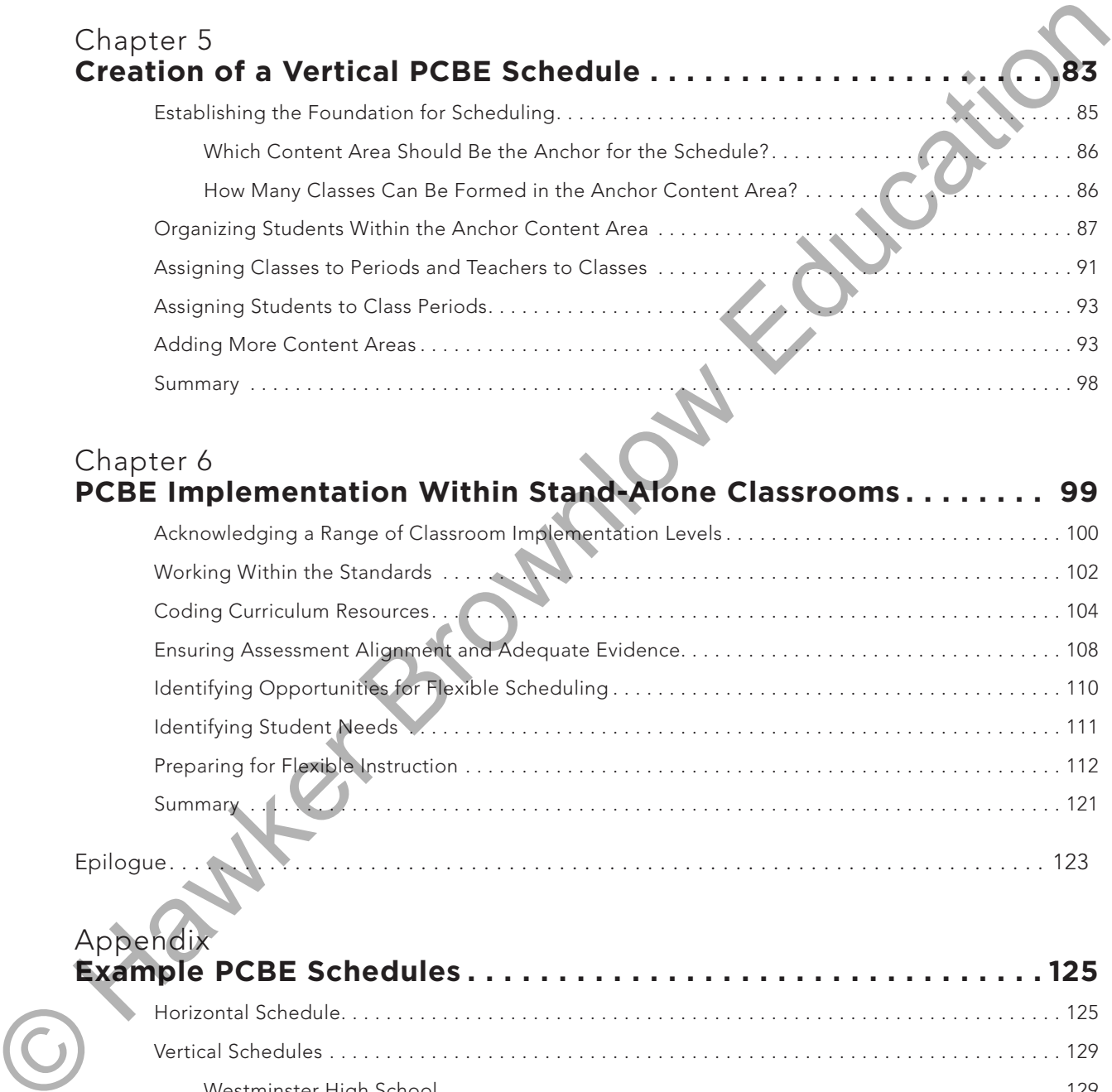
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# Introduction

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## The Transition to Personalized Competency-Based Education

Personalized competency-based education (PCBE) is a model of schooling that blends the tenets of competency-based education and personalized learning. The characteristics of PCBE, as defined in *A Handbook for Personalized Competency-Based Education*, are as follows:

- Students move on to the next level within a subject area only after they have demonstrated proficiency at the current level.
- Students learn content at their own pace, so time is not a factor in judging their competencies.
- Students have multiple opportunities and ways to learn specific content.
- Students have multiple opportunities and ways to demonstrate proficiency with specific content.
- Students develop agency (a central focus, in addition to proficiency with academic content).
- Students have a voice in the teaching and learning process.
- Students have choices in the teaching and learning process. (Marzano, Norford, Finn, & Finn, 2017, p. 6)

As the preceding list outlines, PCBE is rooted in a reimagining of the traditional educational grouping and pacing framework. Traditionally, districts and schools group students into age-based classrooms called *grades*. These students move on from their grade's content requirements on a yearly school schedule, regardless (in most cases) of their academic proficiency on the grade-level expectations. PCBE shifts the focus from an education schedule in which *time* determines how a student moves through the grade levels to one in which the student's *acquired learning* becomes the determining factor for progress. Thus, schools need to design schedules that support such a system of flexibly paced, mastery-based learning.

## Why This Book Is Needed

When Robert J. Marzano and Jennifer S. Norford invited us to coauthor *A Handbook for Personalized Competency-Based Education* (Marzano et al., 2017), we understood that some aspects of the PCBE approach might need additional detail and clarification beyond what we could present in the handbook. In our work with districts all over the United States as they explore and implement the PCBE approach, we are continually asked to help organize students' movement through the scope and sequence of learning expectations—that is, districts seek help with scheduling. This book expands on the handbook's chapter on scheduling to better assist schools and districts in this transition.

We recommend that readers seeking a full overview of all the components of PCBE read *A Handbook for Personalized Competency-Based Education* (Marzano et al., 2017) before reading this book. This book is set up to give readers a brief background understanding of PCBE, but it does not share a complete discussion of all aspects of this approach. The PCBE definitions and model are consistent between this book and the handbook.

Support for many aspects of PCBE has been growing since the early 2000s, as school districts have moved toward state, provincial, or national content standards; more accurate and reliable grading practices; and student-centered approaches to teaching and learning. But the foundational components and mindset changes required by a shift from traditional educational systems to PCBE systems create a variety of sticking points. A challenge at the heart of PCBE is grouping and scheduling students according to their learning needs rather than their age. Schools trying to shift to a PCBE model often miss the elements of flexible pacing and the scope and sequence of learning that PCBE requires. Many schools instead try to personalize standards-based instruction within an age-based classroom. This, in turn, creates an unsustainable structure for educators: it requires them to address all students' individual zones of proximal development, which, within an age-based classroom, involves a wide span of academic content. Though it is more targeted in terms of individual instruction, this partial implementation creates the same types of gaps that are so difficult to address in traditional classrooms.

The professional literature on PCBE has not previously provided a deep dive into the foundational components of grouping and scheduling students as they move through a PCBE system. This has left educators to attempt the transition with little guidance. Without clear guidelines for how to effectively schedule learning, most schools and districts attempting this transition have gotten stuck in both worlds, essentially straddling the divide between the traditional system and the PCBE system, two frameworks that are neither fully compatible nor easily overlaid. With this book, we seek to deepen understanding of PCBE scheduling so school leaders and educators may develop systems to fully integrate all the aspects of PCBE within their classrooms, schools, and districts.

## How This Book Is Organized

The first chapter of this book gives an overview of the challenges of the traditional educational system and the reasons for shifting to a PCBE system. Again, this book provides only a brief review of the aspects of PCBE other than scheduling. Readers should consult *A Handbook for Personalized Competency-Based Education* (Marzano et al., 2017) to establish a comprehensive understanding of this model.

Chapter 2 describes a very important part of beginning the PCBE scheduling process: understanding the different sets of student data needed to successfully implement a PCBE schedule. Because information about individual students and their learning relative to standards drives the decisions within a PCBE system, gathering standards-based data and analyzing them are foundational components of scheduling. PCBE scheduling relies on two sets of student data: (1) grade-level data, which support schools' broader grouping of students into classes, and (2) specific standards data, which support the placement of individual students within each of the classes. Both are used in conjunction to develop the most accurate PCBE schedule. These areas are critical to the success of implementing a PCBE system, as creating a schoolwide schedule and assigning students to groups and classes within it require that schools accurately gather and utilize these data. To illustrate these concepts, we introduce a sample school and mock data that will appear throughout the remaining chapters.

Chapter 3 gives an overview of a PCBE approach to scheduling, introducing the concepts that underpin both horizontal and vertical scheduling options. This chapter further discusses placement strategies for grouping students, including fine-tuning and reorganizing groups based on student needs. Knowing the inherent challenges before undertaking these large-scale transitions is important.

Chapter 4 explores horizontal PCBE schedules in depth; chapter 5 does the same for vertical PCBE schedules. These chapters provide educators and administrators with greater clarity on designing and implementing each scheduling option. The detailed information will assist them with deciding which option is better for a specific school site.

Chapter 6 features ideas of how to enact some aspects of PCBE scheduling within a single classroom setting. These ideas will benefit individual teachers who are interested in PCBE but who work in schools that are not necessarily implementing all or part of this framework.

Finally, the book ends with an appendix that provides extended examples of PCBE school schedules. Throughout the book, we use the terms *teacher* and *educator* to signify any individual who instructs, assesses, or supports students in their academic needs. The terms *scheduling team* and *schedulers* denote anyone involved in the scheduling process. This may and should include teachers, special education staff, support staff, administrators, and district office staff. Scheduling teams may also be broken up into smaller subgroups for efficiency and more targeted decision making for subgroups of the student population.

With a full transition to PCBE, students progress through school based on their learning—not based on the simple passage of time. This certainly benefits the students, but it benefits the teachers as well because they do not have to meet the myriad of student learning needs in an age-based classroom. The PCBE model is at its core a student-centered model. But because educators are the ones who make learning happen for young people day after day, the success of PCBE, like any initiative or system change, hinges not only on teacher understanding and buy-in but also on sustainability of practice. For these critical reasons, we recommend a transition to *all* aspects of PCBE—including grouping students according to their learning needs and creating a schoolwide schedule to match. This book provides the necessary information to assist schools in doing just that.

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