

How Standards and Competencies **DIFFER**

The table below captures some fundamental distinctions between standards and competencies. Note that there are different approaches to competency design in the field; this particular table reflects our perspective at **reDesign** on some of these key distinctions.



STANDARDS		COMPETENCIES
Organized by time		Organized by evidence of learning
Teacher-facing : Typically not used by students to drive their own learning		Learner-facing (e.g., I can...): Used by students to: self-assess, set goals, monitor, measure and reflect on progress, make decisions about learning needs
Describe learning outcomes in terms of discipline-specific skills and knowledge		Describe learning outcomes in terms of transferable skills and processes that span disciplines ; may include both academic (e.g., Engage in Inquiry) and SEL/efficacy outcomes (e.g., Navigate Conflict)
Constructed as grade-based performance levels , derived from college/career expectations		Constructed as developmental performance levels detached from grade levels, designed to articulate a vertically aligned K-12+ skill trajectory
Establishes a consistent target for teaching . In practice, there is no specific commitment that all learners achieve the target—they may be promoted to higher levels whether demonstrably proficient or not		Establishes a consistent target for all learners . In practice CBE uses a distinctive positive youth development framework that reinforces a belief that all students can achieve at high levels, and provides a visible asset-based progression of skill development
Learning evaluated using categorical rating system (proficiency scales by grade level)		Progress is assessed using a continuous rating system (single, stable learning progression enabling longitudinal growth measures)
Failure is an option embedded into the standards-based system		In a true competency-based system, making mistakes, revising, rethinking, feeling frustrated and ineffective, are ALL signs of pushing up against one's zone of proximal development (ZPD). Failure is NOT an option —learners are only moving towards increased competency.



Standards and competencies serve different purposes—but they're not in conflict. Standards define what's essential to learn; competencies clarify how learners grow through and apply that learning. Here's how they align in practice:

