

This document is adjusted from the resources created for the State of Maine from GSP, with the support of our GSP coach. The following steps—all outlined with free resources—can support work in our district. Find this document with live links to all original resources here: <http://greatschoolspartnership.org/proficiency-based-learning/planning-guide>.

Proficiency Design Team Implementation Elements

1. Identify Content Area Standards + Performance Indicators
2. Develop Scoring Criteria
3. Assess the Elements of the Portrait of a Graduate
4. Align Performance Indicators
5. Develop a Reporting System which separates habits of work.
6. Communicate with Families
7. Engage in a Redesign of Organizational Structures + Strategies
8. Develop Assessments + Units
9. Revise the Student Transcript

1 Identify Content Area Priority Standards + Performance Indicators

Identify common graduation standards and performance indicators for each core content area. Schools and districts can start this step by using the exemplar standards on the Great Schools Partnership (GSP) website. Priority standards reflect the broad, integrated concepts of each discipline. Performance indicators break down the more comprehensive proficiency standards into learnable and measurable targets.

2 Develop Scoring Criteria

Collaboratively develop, adapt, or adopt scoring criteria for each performance indicator. Scoring criteria defines expected levels of student performance regarding a specific performance indicator, and importantly, are constructed prior to the development of either assessments or curriculum, enabling the scoring criteria to be used with a multitude of student evidence. Developing high quality scoring criteria is fundamental to ensuring equity and opening multiple learning pathways to students. If scoring criteria are written well and are applied consistently, assessment of true learning will be accurately measured, and will validate the system. As student performance data from performance indicators are used to certify achievement of a graduation standard, it is critical to use scoring criteria that assess the depth of knowledge and understanding, not quantity of work done, attitudes or behaviors, or student-to-student comparisons. To implement this process timely, schools may adopt or adapt scoring criteria developed by other schools for common performance indicators.

When teachers work collaboratively to score student work using common performance indicators and scoring criteria, the result is greater consistency across the school and common language regarding the meaning of proficiency. Scoring criteria are used by teachers both formatively (clarifying what students need to learn to guide instruction and inform supports) and summative (e.g. end-of-unit assessment). Thus, students will be assessed many times on any given performance indicator and in multiple courses.

3 Assess the Element of the Portrait of a Graduate

Develop graduation standards aligned with the POG, write performance indicators, and develop scoring criteria for each indicator, a process similar to that used to select and assess content area standards.

Developing a way to adequately assess the POG is a difficult task as the Principles are not content or discipline specific and are often viewed as “hovering above” the day-to-day work of the classroom. After identifying the standards and performance indicators that will be used to assess the POG, schools can then decide where these will be assessed

within existing courses and learning experiences. For example, students in a social studies class examining the relative success of specific state or federal legislation are demonstrating Informed Thinking. Biology students researching the evolution of Lyme disease in the deer population and reporting key findings are also demonstrating Clear and Effective Communication. Some schools require a senior capstone project as a culminating assessment to demonstrate achievement of the Guiding Principles. GSP recommends establishing a system where students assemble evidence, over time, of their proficiency in the Guiding Principles as they engage in learning in each content area.

4 Align Performance Indicators to POG

Align performance indicators with curriculum and course-based units of study to ensure collection of an adequate body of evidence over four years of high school that will certify each graduation standard has been met. All common courses should share the same set of foundational performance indicators although individual students may engage in learning that goes beyond these expectations. In most cases, performance indicators will appear in several courses within or across content areas to assess student depth and sophistication of learning, ensuring there are sufficient opportunities for students to demonstrate their learning. Over time, teachers will adapt and develop new units, further refine assessments of performance indicators, and implement elements of a personalized, equitable learning system.

5 Develop a Reporting System Which Separates Habits of Work

Collaboratively develop a reporting system that reflects proficiency-based practices. Parents want to see report cards or progress reports they can understand. They want to know that their child is “on track” with learning expectations. They want to have confidence that their child’s college applications will not be disadvantaged in any way due to changes in grading practices. As districts create and implement their systems, it’s important to keep in mind the audience for achievement reports and student transcripts.

Even though districts may choose to maintain their current grade reporting model (i.e., A–F or percentages) during their initial implementation, shifting to a proficiency-based reporting system will require significant community engagement and involvement. Once schools and districts implement proficiency-based learning, they will need to change how course grades are calculated. Beyond course grades, the system must be able to aggregate student scores on performance indicators to determine achievement of the Maine Learning Results as required by state law. Rather than grade averaging, schools should investigate various mathematical trending formulas that weigh more recent scores more heavily than earlier scores—acknowledging that proficiency is about where you end up, not where you started.

Other data considerations include indicating the number of times a student attempted the assessment, noting which assessments also include some component of the Guiding Principles, and perhaps also indicating assessments scored by Career and Technical Education (CTE) or other external programs.

6 Communicate with Families

Conduct public forums to engage parents and the community in authentic dialogue about the planned proficiency-based learning system. Parents need information and reassurance that moving to a proficiency-based system will not disadvantage their child in any way, including the college admissions process. Articulating a clear alignment of the grading and grade reporting processes and recognizing academic honors and other exemplary achievement is essential. It’s important to underscore, however, that such recognition must be based on achievement of standards rather than on comparisons to other students.

On a deeper level, schools need to address any long-standing dynamics in the community that limit participation by less-advantaged demographic groups. Authentic engagement means developing shared community-school values among all stakeholders.

Being proactive in briefing the media regarding the intended changes in the system will keep the district out in front of the media and help build a base of support.

7 Engage in a Redesign of Organizational Structures + Strategies

Review school organizational structures and strategies that support proficiency-based learning in a personalized learning environment, including grade level and content-based teaming, common planning time, shared leadership teams, team teaching, heterogeneously grouped core courses, and an inclusion model for special needs students. Refine school schedules to support extended learning time and engagement in both individual and collaborative projects, and offer teachers time to consult with students, adjust strategies to help them meet learning targets, and to retake assessments. In addition to allowing for increased student voice and choice in the classroom, the system becomes more adaptable to personalized learning experiences beyond the classroom, such as internships with career professionals, field research projects, or service projects.

Create and implement supports and intervention systems to address the learning needs of all students. Response to Intervention (RTI) and other support strategies at all levels become far more impactful and efficient in a proficiency-based system. Beginning with data from the earliest formative assessments, educators implement multiple opportunities for students to demonstrate proficiency with classroom supports and interventions. Supports and interventions outside of the classroom are provided if students continue to struggle after multiple demonstrations of learning.

8 Develop Assessments + Units

Revise and develop units and assessment tasks within each course that are in direct alignment with performance indicators and graduation standards. Building from common scoring criteria, units allow students to demonstrate learning progress and achievement in multiple ways through differentiated assessment tasks, personalized learning options, or alternative learning pathways. Students who are empowered to make key decisions about how they will demonstrate proficiency are less likely to become bored or discouraged. Further, students with special needs particularly benefit from diverse ways of demonstrating achievement.

9 Revise the Student Transcript

Collaboratively redesign the student transcript to reflect achievement of courses, graduation standards, the Guiding Principles, and habits of work. The high school transcript is the official student academic record and must clearly communicate academic accomplishment to colleges and future employers. The transcript design ideally includes the varied student learning experiences: courses, independent learning, internships, capstone experiences, and early college courses and other special programs. The transcript also lists the unique achievements and particular skills of the student. Transcript revision is best accomplished by a team consisting of teachers, counselors, school administrators, and at least one member of the school board. Because it is critical that the reader be able to fully interpret and understand the transcript, schools should engage in a collaborative review process, perhaps including a college admissions officer, before rolling out their new transcript.