



## Why is proficiency-based learning important?

A critical goal for [proficiency-based learning](#) is the elimination of persistent achievement and opportunity gaps. Proficiency-based learning can provide [equitable](#), relevant, and rigorous learning opportunities that engage all students and foster the skills, knowledge, and habits of work necessary to be successful in the 21st century. Students live in a global society where technology puts information at their fingertips and allows them to interact with others around the world in an instant. Today's educational systems are responding to this ever-changing world by providing learning opportunities that require students to communicate effectively, engage in creative problem-solving, collaborate virtually and face-to-face, and apply critical thinking skills. Across the nation, our educational systems have not met the needs of all students. Vermont has joined with a number of other states to do something different.

A [proficiency-based educational system](#) requires transparent expectations for learning where time is the variable and learning is the constant. This system includes explicit, measurable, and transferable [learning targets](#) that can clarify expectations necessary to demonstrate [proficiency](#). Students and educators document student progress; academic strengths and challenges are noted. Strategies and supports for meeting those challenges are identified and put into place.

### **Equity for Each and Every Student**

A proficiency-based education system benefits all by allowing students to progress at their own pace and creating the space and time to do so. Students are given sufficient time to finish assignments and meet learning targets. Educators respond to individual learning needs by providing timely, [differentiated feedback](#) and support. If students do not initially meet expectations for proficiency, they are given additional opportunities to demonstrate proficiency without penalty. Those who progress quickly might dig deeper into the content or move onto learning new concepts. Students eligible for special education services are expected to meet the same requirements as their nondisabled peers in an accommodated and/or modified manner. Proficiency-based learning must exist in a learning environment that fosters strong social and emotional development and encourages high achievement for each and every learner.

### **Student Engagement**

Proficiency-based learning systems provide opportunities for students to be the drivers of their educational experiences, increasing engagement as well as intrinsic motivation. Engagement is also enhanced by relevant, real world learning opportunities that require problem solving, creative thinking, and leadership. There is an expectation for struggle as a productive part of the learning process. In a proficiency-based system, transparent learning targets can allow for greater [personalization](#) so students can pursue learning in the contexts of their passions. Learning opportunities can be connected to students' interests and areas of expertise in order to support a well-rounded education. There is greater flexibility for where, when and how students learn. Student voice and choice are valued and acted upon.

## **Moving Beyond High School**

A well-educated citizenry is essential for the health of a democratic society regardless of the paths students follow after graduation. A focus on [transferable skills](#) in proficiency-based systems improves students' abilities to be successful in college and career settings. Additionally, more and more colleges and universities are moving away from the clock and embracing a model of proficiency-based education where credit is earned by the ability to apply knowledge and skills in a variety of settings. Although colleges and universities have always accepted a diversity of transcripts, [sixty-nine public and private institutions of higher education](#) from across New England have provided statements committing to the acceptance of proficiency-based transcripts and narratives for college entrance. These institutions recognize that the ability to demonstrate and apply learning is essential for success in our world today.

### **Resources:**

[Looking Under the Hood of Competency-Based Education: The Relationship Between Competency-Based Education Practices and Students' Learning Skills, Behaviors, and Dispositions](#) by Erin Haynes, Kristina Zeiser, Wendy Surr, Alison Hauser, Lauren Clymer, Jill Walston, Catherine Bitter, and Rui Yang, American Institutes for Research, June 2016.

[Reaching the Tipping Point: Insights on Advancing Competency Education in New England](#) by Chris Sturgis, Competency Works, October 2016.

[What is proficiency-based education?](#) by Chris Sturgis & Susan Patrick, Competency Works, February 2013.

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## Proficiency-Based Learning Glossary

### **Act 77**

[Act 77](#) became law in July of 2013, and can be seen as the result of many years of work on the part of many Vermont citizens, educators, and policy-makers to create a policy environment designed to foster a system of public education in which every student graduates, and every graduate is college and career ready; key attributes include flexible pathways, personalization, work-based learning, dual-enrollment, virtual/blended learning and early college.

### **Artifact**

An object created by a learner as evidence of learning in order to make their thinking visible and display their knowledge.

### **Assessment**

A formative or summative evaluation of student performance which is meaningful, accurate and fair and is administered with the purpose of providing feedback on learning for both the teacher and student; summative assessments should be both reliable and valid.

### **Badging**

A digital badge is an online representation of a skill you have earned. Digital [badging](#) is an assessment and credentialing mechanism that is housed and managed online. Badges are designed to make visible and validate learning in both formal and informal settings, and hold the potential to help transform where and how learning is valued.

### **Benchmark**

A point of reference against which a learner's level of proficiency can be measured.

### **College, Career & Civic Life Framework for Social Studies State Standards**

The College, Career and Civic Life Framework ([C3](#)) is centered on an Inquiry Arc of compelling and supporting questions which provides structure for students to develop inquiries, apply disciplinary concepts, use evidence and evaluate sources to communicate conclusions and take informed action; content is determined locally.

### **Differentiated Instruction**

Instructional strategies designed to help students meet proficiency that is based on individual learning needs and styles. The learning goals are the same, yet the teacher provides choice and exercises flexibility in methods of support, feedback, assessment, grouping, and instruction to create the best learning experiences for all students.

## **Education Quality Standards**

The [Education Quality Standards](#) (EQS) are rules enacted to ensure that all learners in Vermont public schools are afforded educational opportunities that are substantially equal in quality, and enable them to achieve or exceed the standards approved by the State Board of Education.

## **Equity**

Equity requires that each and every learner has access to the knowledge, skills, and learning opportunities necessary to be contributing members of a rapidly changing global society, regardless of factors such as race, gender, sexual orientation, ethnic background, English proficiency, immigration status, socioeconomic status, or disability.

## **Evidence-Based**

[Evidence-based](#) refers to any concept or strategy that is derived from or informed by objective evidence—most commonly, educational research or metrics of school, teacher, and learner performance. Common applications include evidence-based decisions, evidence-based school improvement, and evidence-based instruction.

## **Feedback**

An instructional strategy that provides information to learners during the learning process in order to identify strengths and areas in need of improvement.

## **Flexible Pathways**

Any combination of high-quality expanded learning opportunities, including academic and experiential components, which build and assess attainment of identified proficiencies and lead to secondary school completion, civic engagement, and postsecondary readiness. Flexible pathways allow students to apply their knowledge and skills to tasks of personal interest as part of the personalized learning planning process.

## **Formative Assessment**

The use of [formative assessment](#) is an intentional practice by teachers to monitor progress, provide ongoing feedback, and modify instruction to meet the needs of learners. Learners use formative assessment to identify strengths as well as areas in need of improvement. Since the goal of formative assessment is to improve learning during the learning process, these assessments are not graded.

## **Learning Progressions**

Learning progressions are pathways that describe developmental progressions towards proficiency in a specific domain.

## **Learning Targets**

[Learning targets](#) identify the goals for a lesson and are framed from a learner's perspective. They clarify what to learn, how deeply to learn it, and how to demonstrate evidence of new learning.

## Local Comprehensive Assessment System

A Local Comprehensive Assessment System (**LCAS**) is a coordinated and comprehensive system that assesses the standards approved by the State Board of Education; employs a balance of assessment types, including but not limited to, teacher-or learner-designed assessments, portfolios, performances, exhibitions and projects; includes both formative and summative assessments; enables decisions to be made about progression and graduation, including measuring proficiency-based learning; informs the development of Personalized Learning Plans and support; provides data that informs decisions regarding instruction, professional learning, and educational resources and curriculum; and reflects strategies and goals outlined in the district's Continuous Improvement Plan.

## National Core Arts Standards

The [National Core Arts Standards](#) (NCAS) are the preK-12 Fine Arts learning standards which include five arts disciplines: Visual Art, Theatre, Music, Dance, and Media Arts. The standards emphasize four artistic processes: creating, performing, responding and connecting.

## National Health Education Standards

[SHAPE](#) (Society of Health and Physical Education) America's National Health Education Standards (NHES) were developed to establish, promote and support health-enhancing behaviors for learners in all grade levels—from pre-Kindergarten through grade 12. The NHES provide a framework for teachers, administrators, and policy makers in designing or selecting curricula, allocating instructional resources, and assessing achievement and progress.

## National Physical Education Standards

[SHAPE](#) America's National Standards & Grade-Level Outcomes for K-12 Physical Education define what a learner should know and be able to do as result of a highly effective physical education program. States and local school districts across the country use the National Standards to develop or revise existing standards, frameworks and curricula. The goal of physical education is to develop physically literate individuals who have the knowledge, skills and confidence to enjoy a lifetime of healthful physical activity.

## Next Generation Science Standards

The [Next Generation Science Standards](#) (NGSS) are science standards adopted by Vermont that reflect what learners should know and be able to do in core ideas, scientific and engineering processes, and cross-cutting concepts.

## Open Education Resource

[Open educational resources](#) (OER) are freely accessible, openly licensed documents and media that are useful for teaching, learning, assessing and research.

## Performance Assessment

A performance assessment is any learning opportunity or assessment that asks learners to *perform* or demonstrate knowledge, understanding, or skills. Performance assessments yield a tangible product and/or performance that serves as evidence of learning. Performance assessments present situations that require learners to apply their learning to a new context and can be designed by the learner or teacher. Performance assessments are sometimes referred to as performance tasks.

## **Performance Indicators**

Performance indicators describe or define what learners need to know, understand, and/or be able to do to demonstrate proficiency related to standards. Performance indicators are measurable and allow learners to demonstrate proficiency over time.

## **Personalization**

A collaborative learning process built on an understanding that tapping into unique student interests, backgrounds, strengths, and needs drives student learning. Students, teachers, and the community work together to make this learning process rigorous, relevant, and authentic.

## **Personalized Learning Plan**

A [Personalized Learning Plan](#) (PLP) is developed on behalf of a student by the student, a representative of the school, and, if the student is a minor, the student's parents or legal guardian, and updated at least annually. The plan shall be developmentally appropriate and shall reflect the student's emerging abilities, aspirations, interests and dispositions. Beginning no later than in the seventh grade, the plan shall define the scope and rigor of academic and experiential opportunities necessary for the student to successfully complete secondary school and attain college and career readiness.

## **Proficient**

Proficient means that a learner has demonstrated competence in relation to knowledge and/or a set of skills related to identified standards.

## **Proficiencies**

Proficiencies include explicit, measurable, learning objectives based on standards and measure a learner's knowledge and skill demonstrated in a consistent manner, in various settings over time. Proficiencies are also referred to as competencies.

## **Portfolio**

A learner's portfolio is a compilation of academic work and other forms of educational evidence assembled for the purpose of evaluating coursework quality, learning progress, and academic achievement; determining whether the learner has met standards; helping the learner reflect on their academic goals; and creating an archive of academic work.

## **Proficiency-Based Education**

Proficiency-based education is a standards-based system of instruction, assessment, and reporting that requires learners to demonstrate competence in targeted knowledge, skills, and/or abilities before moving onto the next level or challenge. Proficiency-based education may also be referred to as mastery or competency-based education.

## **Proficiency-Based Learning**

[Proficiency-Based Learning](#) (PBL) is any system of academic instruction, assessment, and reporting that is based on learners demonstrating proficiency in knowledge, skills, and abilities they are

expected to learn before progressing to the next level or challenge. Proficiency-based learning may also be referred to as mastery or competency-based learning.

## **Proficiency-Based Reporting**

[Proficiency-based reporting](#) systems require clear expectations for what will be learned; a shared understanding of the depth of learning necessary to demonstrate proficiency; strategies for documenting and reporting learning over time; a transparent method of communicating with learners, parents, and guardians where learners are along a continuum; and opportunities, when necessary, for learners to retake assessments in order to progress towards proficiency.

## **Project-Based Learning**

[Project-based learning](#) is an approach to education in which learners explore real-world problems and challenges to address learning targets.

## **Proficiency-Based Graduation Requirements**

[Proficiency-Based Graduation Requirements](#) (PBGRs) are the locally-delineated set of content knowledge and transferable skills connected to state standards that, when supplemented with any additional locally-developed requirements, have been determined to qualify a student for earning a high school diploma.

## **Proficiency Scales**

A criterion-based assessment tool that is task neutral and includes explicit performance expectations for each possible rating.

## **Rubric**

An evaluation tool used to assess performance against a set of criteria. Rubrics clearly define academic expectations for learners and help to ensure consistency in the evaluation of academic work from learner to learner, assignment to assignment, or course to course.

## **Scoring Criteria**

Criteria that define what you will look for in a learner's response to determine whether or not they are progressing towards meeting a learning target(s).

## **Self-Assessment**

Self-assessment includes the comparison of one's own performance against established criteria, change in performance over time, and/or a description of current performance. Learners are given the opportunity to identify areas for improvement and revise accordingly. Self-assessment can promote learning if it is used while the learning is taking place.

## **Single Point Rubric**

A [single point rubric](#) allows for critical analysis of a performance to determine which criteria have been met as well as those that require additional work. A single point rubric breaks down the components of an assignment, but only describes the criteria for proficiency. Performances that exceed proficient provide evidence that expands upon proficient.

## **Standards-Based Grading**

[Standards-based grading](#) systems involve measuring learners' achievement level in relation to well-defined learning targets. Both letter grades and grade point averages are still reported. Some overlap exists between proficiency-based reporting and standards-based grading, but there are also some significant differences.

## **Summative Assessment**

An assessment that is used to evaluate the degree of learning, skill acquisition, and academic achievement at the conclusion of a defined instructional period—typically at the end of a project, unit, course, semester, program, or school year. The assessment results are reported and are evaluative, rather than diagnostic.

## **Transferable Skills**

[Transferable skills](#) are a broad set of knowledge, skills, and abilities that are believed to be critically important to success in today's world, particularly in collegiate programs and modern careers. Transferable skills include communication, collaboration, creativity, innovation, inquiry, problem solving and the use of technology.