



# Proficiency-based Learning 101: A Vermont Primer

Vermont Agency of Education  
2018

# Table of Contents



- I. Overview (2-4)
- II. Proficiency-based Learning in a Personalized System (5-12)
- III. Equity Focus (13-15)
- IV. Standards and Proficiencies (16-24)
- V. Curriculum and Instruction (25-30)
- VI. Assessment and Reporting (31-39)
- VII. Structure, Organization and Scheduling (40-43)
- VIII. Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) (44)
- IX. Acronym Glossary and Resource Bibliography (45-46)



# How and Why to Use this Resource

- If you are a teacher, and you want to learn about proficiency-based learning in Vermont, review these slides. To learn more, access the resources and links.
- If you are a principal, superintendent, or district-level staff, consider using this as a resource for faculty in your district.
- Receiving professional development hours for reviewing this resource is a local decision. Contact your principal or district administration.



# Vermont Agency of Education: Education Quality Standards and Act 77

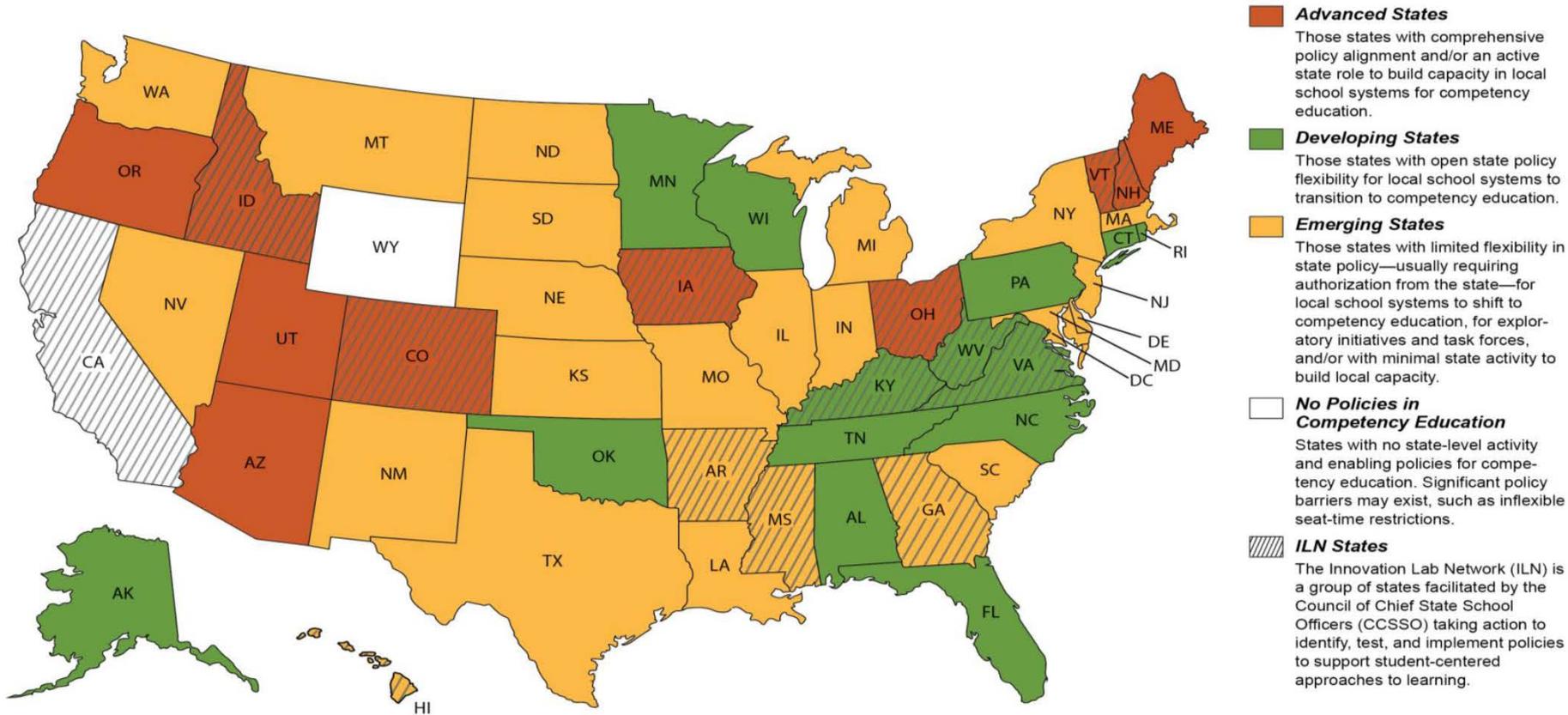
- The [Education Quality Standards](#) (EQS) are the Vermont State Board of Education's manual of requirements and expectations.
- “[Act 77](#) became law in July of 2013 and...fosters a system of public education in which every student graduates and every high school graduate is college and career ready.”
- Act 77 is the driving force behind many of the current educational shifts in Vermont, including personalization, flexible pathways, and proficiency-based learning.



# What is 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.

# A Snapshot of K-12 Proficiency-based Learning





# What is Personalized Learning?

Personalization is a “learning process in which schools help students assess their own talents and aspirations, plan a pathway toward their own purposes, work cooperatively with others in challenging tasks, maintain a record of explorations, and demonstrate their learning against clear standards in a wide variety of media, all with the close support of adult mentors and guides.” – *National Association of Secondary School Principals*



# Personalized Learning Plans and Flexible Pathways

- Personalized learning plans, expanded learning, and flexible pathways are all part of a personalized system.
- Learn more about these different components on the next slides.



# What are Personalized Learning Plans?

- Personalized Learning Plans (PLPs) are plans that reflect a student's goals, abilities, aspirations and interests.
- They are created by the student, parent/guardians, and teachers, and outline learning opportunities to support the student's path.
- PLPs are required starting in seventh grade by both statute and board rules.



# What are 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.



# Flexible Pathways

Vermont's flexible pathways to graduation increase equity of access to college and careers. For example, the Dual Enrollment program includes up to two college courses for eligible Vermont high school students.

Click any box to learn more.





# How do Personalization and Proficiency-based Learning Fit Together?

- Proficiencies can be attained in various learning environments including expanded learning and flexible pathways.
- Through personalized learning and the PLP development process, educators and schools develop a better understanding of student goals and strengths, as well as the unique supports and opportunities that can help students be successful.



# Equity Focus: Every Student Succeeds Act

- Proficiency-based Learning is designed to identify and address gaps to provide equitable learning opportunities for every student.
- “A high priority for the Vermont Board of Education and our community is ensuring equitable outcomes for all of our students.” [\(Every Student Succeeds Act \[ESSA\] Vermont State Plan, page 69\)](#)



# Equity Focus: Multi-Tiered System of Supports

- All Vermont schools use a [Multi-tiered System of Supports \(MTSS\)](#) framework for academic, behavior, and social-emotional learning for all students.
- The MTSS framework supports equitable access and engagement in core instruction, with supplemental supports as needed, for all students.



# Equity Focus: Special Education

- Vermont has a robust [special education system](#), which places a great deal of emphasis on inclusion and equity for all students.
- The goal of special education is for students with disabilities to access the general education curriculum to the greatest possible extent.

# Standards and Proficiencies: What are They?



- Standards identify the essential knowledge, skills and behaviors that should be taught and learned in school at each grade level. They are not a curriculum, and are usually national in nature.
- 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.
- Proficiency-based Learning can also be referred to as competency-based or mastery learning.



# Standards and Proficiencies: Vermont Content Standards

The following standards, adopted by the Vermont State Board of Education, are used by supervisory districts/supervisory unions to develop proficiency indicators.

- [Arts](#)
- [Career and Technical Education](#)
- [Driver Education](#)
- [English Language Arts](#)
- [Family and Consumer Sciences](#)
- [Financial Literacy](#)
- [Global Citizenship](#)
- [Health Education](#)
- [Mathematics](#)
- [Physical Education](#)
- [Science](#)
- [Technology](#)



# Standards and Proficiencies: Local Lens

- Note that, because of Vermont's strong tradition of local control, schools and supervisory unions/supervisory districts (SUs/SDs) approach proficiencies through different lenses.
- You may see a range of terminologies and approaches as to how students attain content and skill proficiencies, as well as how they are measured and reported.
- All of these variations are still based on the same, state-adopted standards.



# Standards and Proficiencies: Transferable Skills

- Enshrined in the Education Quality Standards, [transferable skills](#) are the broad set of knowledge, skills, work habits, and learning dispositions 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.



# Standards and Proficiencies: Transferable Skills

- Students in Vermont are expected to become proficient in transferable skills.
- Each SU/SD may define transferable skills that align with expectations in the [Education Quality Standards](#).
- You can review sample transferable skills [here](#) and [here](#).



# Standards and Proficiencies: Proficiency-based Graduation Requirements

These Proficiency-based Graduation Requirements (PBGRs) are the “locally-delineated set of content knowledge and 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.”



# Standards and Proficiencies: Proficiency-based Graduation Requirements

- Beginning with the class of 2020, all students in Vermont will graduate by demonstrating a range of proficiencies as defined by their SU/SD.
- More information can be found in [EQS, 2120.7](#), page 7.



# Standards and Proficiencies: Putting the Pieces Together

- SUs/SDs use standards to determine what proficiencies students need to demonstrate for graduation. These “proficiency-based graduation requirements” include both content and transferable skills.
- For example, a student must be proficient in math content as well as in communication skills in order to graduate.

# Standards and Proficiencies: Sample PBGRs



## Snapshot of PBGRs from Franklin Northeast Supervisory Union

### **Transferable Skills**

#### **1. Communication**

*Use written and oral communication effectively for a variety of audiences and purposes.*

#### **2. Self-Direction**

*Manage my academic and personal responsibilities.*

#### **3. Problem Solving**

*Apply a variety of strategies to solve problems.*

#### **4. Citizenship**

*Contribute to my communities, working to develop a multi-faceted understanding of myself and of others.*

#### **5. Thinking**

*Consider information carefully and use reason to make decisions and apply knowledge.*

#### **6. Collaboration**

*Work effectively in diverse groups.*

### **Artistic Expression**

#### **1. Creating**

*Conceive and develop new artistic ideas and work.*

#### **2. Performing/Presenting/Producing**

*Realize artistic ideas and work through interpretation and presentation.*



# Curriculum and Instruction: Vermont's Pedagogical Culture

- Educators have high expectations for all students.
- *Each and every* students can attain proficiency.
- An emphasis is placed on growth mindset for all learners, including students and educators.
- More information can be found in [2120.6 of EQS](#), page 6.



# Curriculum and Instruction: Vermont's Pedagogical Culture

- Curriculum is a collaboration between leaders, educators, and students.
- Students, peers, and community members are viewed as sources of knowledge.
- Learning is a social enterprise, and relationships are essential.
- Education is culturally and socially relevant, and emphasizes real-world concepts and applications.
- [Click the link](#) to learn more.



# Curriculum and Instruction: Vermont's Pedagogical Culture

- Students are encouraged to learn deeply and authentically within a content area. This is in contrast to traditional systems, where teachers are expected to cover a wide range of content in a specific amount of time.
- Learning is the constant, time is the variable.
- [Universal Design for Learning \(UDL\)](#) informs teaching and learning.
- There is an emphasis on interdisciplinary learning.
- [Click on the link](#) to learn more.



# Curriculum and Instruction: The Students' Role

- Educators deliver frequent feedback that helps learners apply what they've learned to new contexts.
- Students can work at different levels on proficiency progressions.
- Student agency is valued, and drives instructional decisions and student learning.



# Curriculum and Instruction: Student Agency

Students take on an active role in designing, monitoring, and ensuring success of their learning experience. Students:

- can be active participants in defining their strengths, needs, and interests.
- can be active co-designers of their personalized learning plans.
- can take greater ownership over monitoring their progression through learning activities, identifying when to ask for help, and when they're ready to demonstrate proficiency.
- can [take charge of their own learning in the PLP process.](#)



# Curriculum and Instruction: Student Agency

In addition, students:

- can make choices about what content to learn when, or what type of learning experience they want to engage in to practice a skill or to demonstrate proficiency.
- can communicate with teachers about their PLP and how to strengthen it.
- can build long-term self-regulation skills to keep themselves on track for learning because of their increased autonomy.



# Assessment

- Assessment and reporting in Vermont focuses on content knowledge, skills, and understanding, as well as on transferable skills.
- Assessment can take various forms, such as performance assessments, benchmarking, diagnostics, interim, summative, and formative assessments.



# Assessment

- In a PBL system, feedback is frequent, timely, and used to inform student learning and instructional decisions.
- Self-assessment is a key piece of proficiency-based learning. Students practice self-assessment and reflect on their learning.



# Assessment:

## State Summative Assessments

- Vermont uses the [Smarter Balanced yearly summative exams](#) (SBAC) to [report out](#) on math and English.
- Other state assessments include [Vermont Physical Education Assessment](#) and the [Vermont Science Assessment](#).



# Assessment:

## Local Comprehensive Assessments

- SUs/SDs are expected to complement state assessments with their own K-12 [local comprehensive assessment systems](#) (LCAS).
- These local systems will have a focus on performance- and curriculum-embedded assessments, as well as on formative assessment practices to ensure that students know where they need to show growth.



# Reporting

- As required in [16 V.S.A. §165\(a\)\(2\)](#), each school shall report student and system performance results to the community at least annually in a format selected by the school board.
- In other words, reporting practices are a local decision.
- While proficiency-based grading and reporting is not a board or state requirement, you can learn more [here](#).



# Reporting

- PBL report cards provide an opportunity to reflect progress and achievement with greater specificity.
- Content knowledge and understanding is assessed and reported separately from behavior or transferable skills.



# Reporting

- Proficiency levels show where a student is, and where they need to grow.
- On-going reporting allows students and families to track progress over time.
- Here is a sample math proficiency level visual from Washington Central Supervisory Union.

## WCSU LEVELS OF MATH PROFICIENCY

### LEVEL 1 ~ BEGINNING

#### INTUITIVE

The student shows knowledge of the key prerequisite skills and language (and/or notation) necessary to access the concept.

### LEVEL 2 ~ DEVELOPING

#### CONCRETE & PICTORIAL

All of Level 1 and: The student shows they can visualize the concept (using concrete models and/or diagrams) to find and justify solutions.

### LEVEL 3 ~ PROFICIENT

#### ABSTRACTION, APPLICATION & COMMUNICATION

All of Level 2 and: The student can use multiple representations (including visual and symbolic models) flexibly to solve real-world problems and communicate Theoretical understanding of the concept (addressing why rather than simply, how).

### LEVEL 4 ~ ADVANCED

#### TRANSFER & CONNECTION

All of Level 3 and: The student has a deep understanding of the concept that they can explain to others using multiple representations (visually, symbolically and in words) and can apply the concept flexibly in a myriad of mathematical and complex and/or unfamiliar real-world contexts.



# Reporting

- College and universities are aware of the movement toward proficiency-based transcripts.
- These transcripts should not impact a student's admission prospects. Read more about [proficiency-based transcripts and college](#).



# Reporting

“The cynicism of [these] college admission offices about grades is well-warranted, as grades do not typically represent student achievement but rather an amalgam of achievement, behavior, compliance, and test-taking skill.”

-“Gearing up for FAST Grading and Reporting,” Ken O’Connor, Lee Ann Jung, and Douglas Reeves 1



# Structure, Organization, and Scheduling

- Leaders support structural changes necessary for the success of a personalized, proficiency-based system.
- School day structures allow collaborative meeting time for educators.
- Time is embedded during the school day for general and special educators to collaborate on instruction and assessment.



# Structure, Organization, and Scheduling

- The school day should be scheduled so that students can access all levels of support, as needed.
- Learning is the constant, time is the variable.
- Classrooms are organized in a way that supports personalization of learning.
- Technology is leveraged to support these changes.



# Structure, Organization, and Scheduling

- A range of technology platforms can support a PBL system.
- These include personalized learning plan platforms, as well as assessment and reporting systems.



# Structure, Organization, and Scheduling

- Professional learning for educators is personalized, relevant, active, collaborative, sustainable, and allows for feedback and reflection.
- School systems may use a personalized learning plan format for educators' professional learning.



# Frequently Asked Questions

- Are there any [misconceptions](#) about proficiency-based learning (PBL)?
- What are the [advantages](#) of PBL over traditional approaches?
- What are the [challenges](#) of implementing PBL?



## Frequently Asked Questions

July 25, 2016 by [Chris Sturgis](#)

[Pittsfield School District](#) asked me to be interviewed on video. And I was nervous, as I've never done that before. And I know I make faces when I think about something. I was way, way, way out of my comfort zone. So I did a lot of preparation and wrote thorough notes for myself. As these questions are some of the same ones we hear over and over again, I thought I'd publish them here in case they are helpful to you. And as always, we would love your thoughts about how to answer the questions





# Acronym Glossary

- AOE (Agency of Education)
- C3 (College, Career, and Civic Life Framework for Social Studies State Standards)
- CCSS (Common Core State Standards for Math and English Language Arts)
- CTE (Career and Technical Education)
- ELO (Expanded Learning Opportunity)
- ESSA (Every Student Succeeds Act)
- LCAS (Local Comprehensive Assessment System)
- MTSS (Multi-tiered Systems of Support)
- NCAS (National Core Arts Standards)
- NGSS (Next Generation Science Standards)
- PBGR (Proficiency-based Graduation Requirements)
- PBL (Proficiency-based Learning)
- PLP (Personalized Learning Plan)
- SBAC (Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium)
- SD/SU (Supervisory District, Supervisory Union)
- SHAPE (Society of Health and Physical Educators Standards)
- UDL (Universal Design for Learning)



# Resource Bibliography

- [Act 77](#)
- [Education Quality Standards \(EQS\)](#)
- [Flexible Pathways](#)
- [Key Characteristics of a Proficiency-based System](#)
- [Local Comprehensive Assessment Systems](#)
- [Multi-tiered Systems of Support \(MTSS\)](#)
- [Personalization Glossary](#)
- [Personalized Learning](#)
- [Personalized Learning Plan](#)
- [Proficiency-based Graduation Requirements](#)
- [Proficiency-based Learning](#)
- [Proficiency-based Learning Glossary](#)
- [Smarter Balanced State Assessments](#)
- [Vermont Special Education](#)
- [Universal Design for Learning](#)
- [Vermont's ESSA Plan](#)



# Thank You

Acknowledging support received in the creation of this document from: Pat Fitzsimmons (Proficiency-based Learning Team Lead), Sigrid Olson (Personalized Learning Coordinator), John Spinney (Post-Secondary Transition Coordinator), Tracy Watterson (Multi-tiered System of Supports Program Manager), Susan Yesalonia (Health and Physical Education Specialist), and members of the Special Education, Proficiency-based Learning, Personalized Learning and Multi-tiered Systems of Supports Vermont Agency of Education teams .

A special thank you to Franklin Northeast and Washington Central Supervisory Unions for the use of their resources.

Sarah Birgé (English Language Arts Specialist) and Martha Deiss (Global Citizenship Specialist)