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State Board of Education Inquiry About Proficiency-Based Learning

Greeting / introduction

Key Takeaways/Main Points of Presentation

I have tremendous enthusiasm for proficiency-based learning and fully support its continued implementation. Proficiency-based learning fosters and encourages best practices in teaching and learning. Three of the most significant shifts in my own practice and experience have been:

1. Increasing Clarity: Proficiency-Based Learning has improved my own, our social studies department's and our school's clarity about **what matters most in learning**. We continue to develop clarity about our proficiencies and are able to start our curriculum and instruction with what matters most.
 - a. Excellence:
 - i. Ability to focus on the most important skills across content areas supports high quality learning (higher order thinking, evaluation, analysis)
 - ii. Ability to focus on the most important skills within content areas and students are practicing them over four years (or more as K-12 becomes more coherent). Students are recognizing the skills and are used to practicing them in social studies. Reference historical thinking skills, claim and evidence, perspectives, causation.
 - iii. My colleagues and I design instruction around the idea that practice predicts performance and students have multiple opportunities to practice
 - b. Equity:
 - i. Instruction is focused and builds over time with a clear and coherent organization. This helps all learners but especially students who are struggling to see the big picture and make connections across classes and learning experiences.
 - c. Efficiency:
 - i. When I think about efficiency I think about how much more quickly new teachers are able to learn their craft with these scales already articulated. It brings them right to the heart of what matters most and join in on the conversation with their colleagues. This reduces staff turnover and increases teacher understanding.
2. Articulating the Skill at a Variety of Cognitive Complexities: PBL has forced us as educators to define, clarify, and design instruction and explicitly state feedback around what each of the proficiencies looks like at a range of cognitive complexities, a range of learning levels from novice to expert.
 - a. Excellence:

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- i. Differentiation and working on a skill at a variety of levels in the classroom with similar and/or different content. We have developed clear language that allows us to coach more easily; we are more clear about what we are trying to teach. We have increasing amounts of clear models to show learners to help them understand what the finished work looks like.
 - b. Equity:
 - i. Students at all levels can engage with common content, rather than excluding novice learners based on perceived cognitive complexity.
 - ii. Teachers can forget difficulty learning something they are used to teaching; this is known as an “expert blind spot”. Practice with articulating what a skill looks like during emergent learning and what it looks like at higher levels allows us to recognize exactly where students are in their learning. This amplifies learning and clarity for students, especially students who are novice in a skill area.
 - iii. Consistent, clear and ongoing feedback is available because of how clear I am about what the skill looks like. The conversation is ongoing with learners as they examine the scale in relation to their work. As I get better at scales and design I have models of work to share with students to help them learn.
 - c. Efficiency:
 - i. Professional development investment is concentrated, ongoing and is documented and ready for next iterations.
3. Establishing a clear and essential relationship between proficiencies, a variety of ways to demonstrate skills, and personalization.
 - a. Excellence:
 - i. The elements of choice and differentiation inherent in PBL support learner engagement. Share examples of choice and differentiation in my class.
 - b. Equity:
 - i. When learners can demonstrate their learning in a variety of ways, this fosters choice and engagement. Engagement increases student positive affinity for school and student motivation. Re-engages students academically and socially at risk of disconnection from learning and school.
 - ii. The goal of knowing our learners fosters positive relationships, which is a foundation for risk-taking and academic success for all learners.
 - c. Efficiency:
 - i. It is much more efficient to teach interested learners who bring energy and commitment to learning!
 - ii. Collaborative work in this area in our district has inspired an in-house professional development model in this area. This reduces the need for cost of outside expertise and builds our in-house capacity.
4. Act 77 and the related Educational Quality Standards provide the right policy muscle and while we are still working to perfect this and there are questions, of course we will continue with this work; it is the right work.

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My experience with proficiency-based learning began when my graduate study focused on the topic. I studied models of PBL excellence in social studies after Act 77 passed. I spent 2014 and 2015 interviewing and observing teachers in Vermont who were identified as excellent social studies teachers using proficiency-based learning.