

**1. A boots-on-the-ground view: Vermont has a compelling vision for personalized, proficiency-based education.**

- The policy package of Act 77 (2013) and Education Quality Standards (2014) sets a vision for Vermont education that creates a bridge between factors that are often opposing in education policy; those factors are flexibility and accountability. In this vision, students have choice, voice, and ownership over their learning opportunities (personalized flexibility). At the same time, all students, teachers, and parents know what knowledge, skills, and dispositions students are graduating with (accountability for proficiency). The vision is compelling, challenges the ways schools have looked and operated for decades, and empowers school change for improved student outcomes.

**2. The State vision/policy has entered into the instructional core of schools, positively impacting student opportunities, the teacher/student relationship around learning, and a focus on outcomes at Woodstock Union High School and Middle School.**

- As of 2017, Woodstock UHS created a Center of Community Connections. This center connects students with work-based learning opportunities, internships, virtual learning, dual enrollment, independent studies, student teaching, and other new ways to earn credit upon demonstrated proficiency (personalized flexibility).
- Teachers now focus on working with students to help them attain proficiency in standards of learning. And, once proficient, teachers are working collaboratively with students to create engaging and meaningful ways to help students excel beyond proficiency. Student/Teacher conversations no longer sound like this: “how do I get more points?” Instead they sound like this: “can you help me better understand how to develop a fair counterclaim?” Students are involved in decision-making around how they demonstrate their learning (accountability for proficiency).
- Our district now focuses on how to get the best student outcome data in the hands of teachers. This includes investments in STAR 360, resources to help teachers create standards-based class assessments, MTSS supports, and data on graduate success rates at the post-secondary level (accountability for proficiency).

**3. Implementation can be messy, foundational systems can be challenged, and equity can be impacted in the process of getting things right in each locality.**

- At Woodstock UHSMS, poor foundational systems for communication with the public led to a lack of understanding about theory, process, and the timeline for proficiency implementation.
- The very common and accepted practice of rapid iteration in the computing world meant grading software companies provided our school with “least viable products” for iteration and improvement. These companies had no idea of how iteration isn’t always accepted by the public in the education world, especially with student grades. As we shifted our grade books again and again, students and parents became confused and frustrated. We found the families with the largest amount of time, investment in their child’s education, and working computer systems at home would begrudgingly attempt to keep up, while families with less of these types of capital felt it was a form of marginalization.
- The impact of decision-making on proficiency by neighboring schools and districts was unanticipated. Woodstock is located within driving distance of schools that have not made the proficiency shift. Families with the awareness of this and the means to transport or pay can choose to leave Woodstock and drive to these other schools. The potential removal of traditional-looking grades and GPA was enough to make some families consider other options, furthering an ever-widening economic gap. As population drops statewide, public schools are engaged in a battle for students. Thus, competition influenced decision-making around proficiency.

**4. Getting things right meant our district retained letter grades and GPA in its shift to proficiency.**

- The Woodstock UHSMS community is clear on what it values: grades that reflect student growth in the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that we value, AND a transcript that includes a GPA easily understood by the post-secondary world, including the most traditional institutions. The Windsor Central board wrote a grading policy informed by teachers, students, parents, and administrators making this clear. The grading question around proficiency is settled for us, and we are moving on to much more exciting and meaningful work for our students and community, as outlined in our district's strategic plan.
- Clarity around proficiency only came after students, parents, school board members, teachers, and administrators made their positions clear through surveys, focus-groups, policy meetings, and collaboration.

**5. The Education Quality Standards paint a portrait of what high quality education looks like for all students in the State of Vermont. Legislative action to make proficiency optional unnecessarily drags proficiency into law and confounds the State's vision of high quality education.**

- State-level policy was necessary for WUHSMS to begin considering a shift to a more personalized, proficiency-based system. WUHSMS now has a hybrid grading policy that meshes what the community feels are the best aspects of both proficiency and traditional learning/grading systems.
- Measuring student achievement against standards is a highly reliable way to determine student success, and is an appropriate inclusion in the Education Quality Standards for equitably improving student outcomes.
- Legislating proficiency as a choice will open the door to other legislated changes to the State Board of Education's vision for high quality education, risking the loss of other important equity factors.

**6. There is a revised definition of competency (proficiency) based education from the Aurora Institute that encompasses all Woodstock Union High School and Middle School values about proficiency.**

- Students are empowered daily to make important decisions about their learning experiences, how they will create and apply knowledge, and how they will demonstrate their learning.
- Assessment is a meaningful, positive, and empowering learning experience for students that yields timely, relevant, and actionable evidence.
- Students receive timely, differentiated support based on their individual learning needs.
- Students progress based on evidence of mastery, not seat time.
- Students learn actively using different pathways and varied pacing.
- Strategies to ensure equity for all students are embedded in the culture, structure, and pedagogy of schools and education systems.
- Rigorous, common expectations for learning (knowledge, skills, and dispositions) are explicit, transparent, measurable, and transferable.

**Witness Information:**

- My name is Jennifer Stainton. I am a building-based Curriculum Coordinator at WUHSMS, a school of 493 students in grades 7-12 serving the towns of Barnard, Bridgewater, Killington, Plymouth, Pomfret, Reading, and Woodstock. During 2017-2019, my work focused on proficiency implementation. I worked with teachers, administrators, and school board members to develop an understanding of the theory and best practices surrounding proficiency. Prior to 2017, I taught high school science for 17 years. I hold a doctorate in Education Leadership and Policy from the University of Vermont, capped with a qualitative dissertation exploring the ways high school principals were just beginning to lead school change during the time shortly after the implementation Act 77 and the Education Quality Standards (roughly 2015-16).