MEMORANDUM

TO: The State Board of Education
FROM: Pat Fitzsimmons, Program Manager; Jess DeCarolis, Division Director
SUBJECT: Proficiency-Based Graduation Requirements
DATE: May 8, 2019

2017 Report: The Status of Proficiency-Based Graduation Requirements in Vermont Schools

In 2017, there was a wider degree of variation in the quality and the depth of content PBGRs when compared to PBGRs for the Transferable Skills. PBGRs for Transferable Skills generally demonstrate a strong alignment to the AOE Sample Transferable Skills. The variation among content PBGRs could be due to information being omitted from the materials that were submitted to the Agency as well as a reflection of the local control nature of the state. A deeper look into the work of some SUs/SDs could clarify the actual components that schools have in place.

1. **Fall 2019 Proficiency-Based Graduation Requirements Survey**

   2020 is the state goal for students graduating in a proficiency-based system. It is expected that all high schools should have proficiency-based graduation requirements (PBGRs) in place. A follow-up survey is planned for the Fall of 2019 to allow schools to refine PBGRs. The following information will be collected:

   a) Proficiency-Based Graduation Requirements and related Performance Indicators; and
   b) Learning Targets associated with Performance Indicators, if they are available.

   Some challenges that the AOE has identified include not only the variability across schools, but challenges in balancing the sheer volume/number of graduation proficiencies and concerns around equitable access. Some schools have identified over 100 PBGRs that must be met, and in other high schools the PBGRs are anchored to specific courses making it difficult for students in need of additional supports or those following flexible pathways to demonstrate proficiency and meet graduation requirements. It is essential that PBGRs and expectations for proficiency are readily available to all students, and transparent to students, families, and community members. If not, this could potentially be a violation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

   Recommendation: Update the Status of Proficiency-Based Graduation Requirements and share the report with the State Board of Education in January 2020.

Recommendation: Develop a Portrait of a Graduate as a tool for schools to articulate priority goals for teaching and learning that can be easily communicated to students, parents, faculty, and staff to align their collective efforts. This Portrait can be used as a lens to revisit graduation requirements and create more equitable expectations across Vermont. Currently, PBGRs range from one hundred sixty requirements to seven.

Recommendation: Provide more targeted technical assistance and guidelines for development and refinement of PBGRs.

2. **Transfer Student and Proficiencies**

   Another concern that has surfaced relates to how schools are translating proficiencies and graduation requirements for students who transfer in or out of their system, as well as from flexible pathways. Questions for systems to consider include:

   a) What process(es) have been established to assist in appropriate scheduling and academic decision-making?

   b) What documents are used to inform these decisions (e.g., course syllabi, reporting tools, grade level assessments, portfolios, national assessments, etc.)?

   c) Are content educators included in the process? How do schools validate proficiencies from another school or entity that were earned through flexible pathways (career tech, work-based/community-based learning, dual enrollment, etc.)?

   d) Who makes final decisions?

   Staff from the Student Pathways Division have been working with partners at the regional and national level, and conducting research, to surface promising practices and exemplars.

   Recommendation: Survey Vermont schools re: existing or past practices; convene Vermont educators to develop a sample process.

3. **Proficiency-Based Grading and Transcripts**

   Do Proficiency-Based Grading and Transcripts create a disadvantage for students**?**
   Some parents are concerned that a proficiency-based system of grading that is not based on the traditional A, B, C, D, F system puts their children at a disadvantage with applications to colleges and scholarships.

   Response: No
   The focus of proficiency-based learning (PBL) is on students' demonstration of desired learning outcomes. Students not only gain the skills, abilities, and knowledge required in an area of study, but more importantly, those necessary to be successful in college, career, and civic life. PBL is designed to identify the skills and dispositions students need to be successful in the 21st Century and the equitable learning opportunities that ensure they meet these expectations. This contrasts with traditional systems that advance students based on seat time.

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As educators move forward with the implementation of personalized, proficiency-based systems, new grading systems that communicate where a student is along a continuum of learning are being designed. These decisions regarding grading are made at the local level considering research, community need, and transition timelines. The goal is to create grading systems that accurately convey what students have learned in relation to learning expectations.

Transcript Example: Mill River currently uses a transcript that includes both a proficiency-based component as well as a more traditional information.

Recommendation: Continue to post resources and exemplars on the Proficiency-Based Learning website related to proficiency-based grading and transcripts.

4. **Managing Change: Vermont Stories**
   Educators can't create what they can't imagine. The videos below are stories from schools and districts regarding implementation of the Education Quality Standards across Vermont.

   a) **[Student Voice and Choice at Shelburne Community School: Curriculum is a Conversation](#)**
      Sam Nelson, 6-8th grade teacher, and his students share the practices they have engaged in to increase student agency in the learning process, including forming a Student Planning Committee that advises on curriculum.

   b) **[Leading Change at Hazen Union School: The Power of Iteration](#)**
      Former Principal Mike Moriarty and former Associate Principal John Craig of Hazen Union School in Hardwick discuss the philosophy that informs their work and the school-wide practices they have encouraged to support proficiency-based learning, including professional development and communication strategies.

   c) **[Lamoille Union High School: Using Engaged Days to Reflect Flexible Pathways Vermont Stories](#)**
      At Lamoille Union High School, students created 25 career interest groups for areas as diverse as cosmetology, medical fields, construction, and dance. In weekly collaborative groups students explored these interests, often with experts joining them. These efforts culminated in an all-school Engaged Day, during which every student spent time on site or in teams "actually doing the thing" (to quote one student) that they were trying to learn about.

   Recommendation: Continue to build on this work and create a web page that highlights "bright spots" in Vermont.