

It's About Time!

A Framework for Proficiency-based Teaching & Learning

Business Education Compact

September 2011

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Construct 3

TEACH/ LEARN the Standard

Teach (Teacher) Learn (Student) Rubrics

Teachers use the language of the standards when they TEACH students. They focus on the learning targets or *I Can* statements and establish a learning environment in which each student works hard, uses all of his talents to “show what s/he knows,” and buys into the expectation that achieving proficiency is a learning goal. When appropriate, teachers uses graphic organizers to help students understand the connections between the learning concepts and to remember critical relationships. Teachers work hard to facilitate learning in the classroom and empower students to own their learning and to engage in dialogue and activities with others that expands what students know and can do.

Teachers recognize that time is a variable and that the clock and the calendar do not dictate the only span of time available for learning to occur. Teachers provide appropriate levels of interventions to students who need a double-dose of instruction or extended practice in order to reach proficient levels. In addition, they create a range of learning activities that are appropriate for students whose formative assessment results indicate they are already at a proficient level of knowledge and skill. Teachers help students move from proficient to an expert level of knowledge and skill by engaging in enrichment and accelerated activities that advance them to the next learning targets to be covered or engages them in deeper research.

Students LEARN at a pace that is challenging and appropriate for them. They develop and display a high level of buy-in regarding their personal learning plan and keep track of their growth. Students engage in dialogue with one another and look for partners in the classroom that can help them understand concepts that are troubling or those who can answer questions to help them reach proficient levels. Together with the teachers, students self-monitor their learning and expect that an ongoing assessment system will help them reach proficiency. They expect to work hard and to take advantage of intervention and enrichment opportunities when offered.

Construct 3

TEACH the Standard

Teacher Rubrics

What does my student-centered classroom look like?				
Teacher Rubrics	Level of Performance			
	Beginning <i>Initial exposure to the concept, routine or expectation; at the novice level, with undeveloped talent or skills</i>	Emerging <i>Understands the concept, routine, or expectation, and has even tried it; received feedback and input on how to improve but is not yet proficient</i>	Proficient <i>Has adequate training in the concept, routine or expectation to make it a common practice; uses the procedure successfully in daily teaching and learning with confidence and skill</i>	Masters <i>Has advanced training in the concept or routine; uses the procedures with high level of skill, including making effective and efficient adjustments instinctively; has ability to help others reach proficient level and to model successful implementation</i>
Avoids extensive teacher-directed learning, opting, instead, to have students take on an intentionally high level of ownership in their learning	Teacher uses group instruction and all-class activities/assignments as the primary method for learning.	Teacher occasionally allows choice and student-created learning opportunities.	Teacher minimizes “teacher talk,” and, instead, develops learning opportunities that allow students to create their own learning through student choice and cross-student engagement.	Teacher expects each student to generate his/her own learning opportunities by taking on the role of explorer and seeker of knowledge. Teacher provides guided facilitation when necessary.
Provides individual and small group “reteach” opportunities to help students reach proficient levels of performance	Teacher does not reteach concepts.	Teacher is willing to reteach important concepts when the student brings the need to his/her attention.	Teacher provides many “loop-back” learning opportunities so that each student can reach proficiency in each standard.	Teacher encourages students to step up and help one another and create opportunities for students to support one another’s learning.
Recognizes time as the variable and learning as the constant; adjusts classroom environment to meet students’ rate and level of learning	Teacher provides instruction based on all students learning at the same pace and moves ahead without checking to make sure each student is proficient.	Teacher expects all students to learn material at the same pace but is willing to reteach when the student brings the need to his/her attention.	Teacher paces instruction, adjusting to meet the needs of those not yet meeting the standards and those exceeding the standards.	Teacher and student develop a personalized learning plan that reflects an individual pathway to reaching and exceeding proficiency in all standards.

Construct 3

LEARN the Standard

Student Rubrics

How can I reach a proficient level and higher?				
Student Rubrics	Level of Performance			
	Beginning	Emerging	Proficient	Masters
Demonstrates a high level of ownership in learning, as reflected in a personal commitment to challenge himself to meet or exceed proficiency	Student is not yet able to pursue intervention/relearning opportunities without strong input from the teacher.	Student reluctantly follows teacher requests to participate in intervention/relearning opportunities.	Student is committed to meeting or exceeding proficiency. Student seeks out intervention/relearning opportunities and reflects a personal commitment to engagement in the learning process.	Student wants to exceed proficiency and creates opportunities to do this with teacher support and guidance. Student communicates frequently about his intent to reach a high level of knowledge and skill.
Participates in opportunities to revisit what the standard requires a student to know/do in an effort to meet or exceed proficiency	Student does not yet engage in opportunities to revisit what the standard requires in order to meet or exceed proficiency.	Student reluctantly participates in interventions or relearning opportunities in order to meet or exceed proficiency.	Student participates in interventions or relearning opportunities provided. Student regularly communicates with the teacher about the progress s/he is making to meet or exceed proficiency.	Student needs infrequent interventions or relearning opportunities to meet or exceed proficiency. Student is eager to participate in all learning experiences and reflects a personal commitment to work to the highest level the student can achieve.
Learns in a continuous learning model that allows for acceleration and remediation, as needed, without regard to arbitrary reporting periods	Student has been learning in a traditional “batch” system so long that it is uncomfortable for a student to stick with a learning goal until s/he is proficient. Student wants an activity completed quickly to move on to the next activity.	Student is willing to work to meet proficiency in whatever learning model teacher creates and supports.	Student understands some concepts take more time to learn than others. Student is willing to work hard to meet or exceed proficiency with steady and committed progress.	Student is highly motivated to exceed proficiency and looks for opportunities to pursue acceleration or enrichment. Student approaches learning with a strong commitment for excellence and a personal challenge to meet learning goals.

Strategic and Systemic Implementation of Proficiency

In Oregon it is the teachers who are advancing the implementation of proficiency in K-12 classrooms. Some say it is an initiative that is teacher generated and administrator supported. In order to ensure that proficiency is a sustainable practice in a district, a number of important elements need to be addressed.

One cannot ignore the confusion that exists as a result of the broad array of terms currently used across the United States to define this set of instructional strategies and assessment practices. Several years of collaboration with teachers across Oregon has taught us that, while policy makers may not be confused about what we call this emerging initiative, as long as teachers are confused, it must be addressed. Paramount to successful implementation is the need to either decide on a term or to define the practice. This framework is intended to define the essential elements that teachers and students exhibit in a classroom that successfully uses proficiency-based teaching and learning.

Among those terms currently found in policy and research are the following: competency-based, performance-based, standards-based, personalized learning, proficiency-based, etc. While it is a worthwhile task to crosswalk similarities among all of these terms, they all have one goal in common: Improved student achievement. And, we are learning that teachers believe that the use of these strategies significantly improves their teaching as well. Many interviews with teachers have ended with them espousing proficiency practices as something that they wish they had learned earlier in their teaching careers and affirming that they will never return to the more traditional ways of teaching that had them working independently in their silos, being regimented content delivery specialists who measured student learning against a calendar or clock.

Well-intentioned teachers understand that their classrooms are standards-based. Classrooms have reflected this focus since states began defining their curriculum and linked content to state assessment results. Robert Marzano makes a significant distinction between standards-referenced and standards-based. It is important to understand the difference so we don't become idle instructors who let the standards-referenced environment just exist, expecting that acknowledging that standards are in place is enough to "make something happen." Students advance through a standards-referenced system based on their grade level (Marzano), moving from one grade to the next in batches dictated by their date of birth (Sir Kenneth Robinson). Time is flexible in a standards-based system and students advance based on identified criteria that reflects a proficient level of knowledge and skill in identified areas. Available interventions and guidelines that spell out performance levels are integral in helping teachers make decisions that lead to students making optimum academic gains. A standards-based classroom environment significantly increases a student's opportunity to master material and sustain knowledge over a longer period of time.

Proficiency-based teaching and learning occurs in a standards-based classroom. The standards are clearly the instructional targets and teachers are purposeful about holding students accountable for them. In a proficiency-based classroom, however, standards are broken down into achievable chunks of learning that, collectively, reflect the selected standards. Clear criteria is in place that students understand, and often help write, that spells out the minimum level of knowledge and skill they are expected to reach. Interventions and support services ranging from mini-tutorials to full-scale double-dosing are in place for students who need additional time to reach proficiency. Students can advance to a deeper level of learning or to the next standards without regard for the date on the calendar that indicates whether it is

the end of the term or not. In addition, teachers measure and report student academic performance separately from personal management skills, frequently called career-readiness skills. As a result, students and parents know a student's true academic ability and, while we appreciate hard-working students who have been labeled "teacher pleasers," these attractive behaviors do not cloud the true picture of a student's academic ability.

Teachers report that implementing proficiency practices is most successful when they work with a team from their department, grade level, school, even across the district. Working as a single teacher delivering the entire scope of, let's say, math content, in a small rural school, creates inherent problems with sustainability. While initial efforts to implement proficiency might be successful, sustainability requires a team effort. Teachers and principals must collaborate to develop policy and practices that are in the best interests of students and support all students achieving high standards. When a parent whose "A" student suddenly comes home with a "C" on a report card, there needs to be a clear and consistent message from the school that addresses what the grade stands for and how it was earned. When a district rolls out proficiency district-wide, teachers appreciate that the critical work of designing instruction with clear targets and well-structured assessments, as well as measuring and reporting student achievement in line with state and district standards, is a shared mission. Together, teacher teams and administrators align their proficiency work and are in agreement in all critical areas that improve student academic performance.

So where does a district begin to tackle the strategic and systemic issues that support successful implementation of proficiency practices? Let's take a look at a few of them and how they relate to the day-to-day operations of a district.

Creating a Mindset for Change

Districts who want to undertake a K-12 reform effort to implement proficiency-based practices in each classroom must first ask whether everyone is onboard and ready to undertake a multi-year shift in thinking about how best to serve students. Districts can undertake a strong campaign to make something happen, but without the support of a significant number of staff, nothing happens that is sustainable. What we're proposing is making a permanent change in how we design and deliver instruction, as well as how we grade, assess, evaluate, and report student achievement. This involves shaking up the fundamental core of education and moving forward in areas where we are now able to make significant changes to improve student achievement. A district's ability to make such a shift depends on establishing a strong culture of routinely looking at all available data. This includes studying student performance on formative and summative assessments in order to make effective changes in planning and instruction practices that support improved student success.

There are four critical questions that districts must be able to answer:

- What do our students know?
- How do we know that they know it?
- What do we do if they don't know it?
- What do we do if they already know it?

Implementing proficiency-based teaching and learning provides teachers, students, and parents the answers to these most fundamental questions. Creating a mindset for change allows this implementation to occur.

School Board

The school board sets district policy. They need to be informed of major changes in instruction and assessment and mitigate any conflicts that would prevent the district from moving forward with proficiency-based practices. This may result in the need to revise current policy or to create new policies. Together with district specialists, board members can ask the tough questions that help lay a solid foundation with the community at large. This is important when it comes time to consider going to the community for funding. Two major areas appear to need careful consideration by school boards, with research-based input from district leadership and community. These include the school calendar and grading practices.

In a proficiency-based environment, the calendar does not dictate measuring what students know and can do. While arbitrary dates are set for teachers to mark report cards and provide parents information about student learning, the window of time is flexible and allows for more time if needed, while also offering advancement to students who demonstrate proficient or higher levels of achievement earlier than expected. When time is flexible, and learning continues as a fluid continuum of instruction, intervention, and advancement, parents understand that their student is given all of the support needed to reach optimum levels of student achievement.

When teachers are clear about learning targets and levels of achievement, they collect information about student performance differently. No longer do they typically add up student points and find the average to determine a student's grade. Abandoning this practice comes at the expense of throwing out conventional grading practices and opting for new, clearer, improved agreements that are transparent to both students and parents. Frequently the old report card doesn't fit the new grading paradigm. In fact, it feels like trying to fit a square peg into a round hole. Teachers report that such a struggle usually occurs because district-adopted electronic grading systems do not support these improved grading practices. As a result, board members may face inconsistencies with current grading policies and what is actually happening in classrooms where teachers are using proficiency. When this occurs, it is important to investigate what other states and districts are doing, what their policies say, and how they are implementing proficiency. Oregon's new HB2220 is an example of how policy could significantly change practice. This new legislation addresses teachers reporting progress students are making in being proficient at grade-level standards. Furthermore, it positions districts to move forward in developing a reporting system that informs parents about the progress students are making in reaching proficient levels of knowledge and skill.

Resources: Personnel, Time, Buildings, Finances

How districts use their resources says a lot about the quality of their decision-making. Particularly in lean economic times, creativity in resource allocation is a must. So, what implications are there for how districts use personnel, time, buildings, and finances when they set out to implement proficiency-based practices?

Personnel

The district's strongest resource is their personnel, the people who actually spend time working with students. If the teachers and classroom assistants believe all students can learn, then all will learn; if they believe all will achieve high academic standards, then all will make great individual growth. Such a commitment to student success depends on strong professional development. Activities should meet staff where they are and address areas that need to be improved or strengthened. Training should be supported through on-the-job collaboration and frequent updating. District, building, and classroom

leaders must engage in a collaborative discourse about whether they are ready to embrace new changes, evaluate current practices with an eye towards improvement instead of finger pointing, and to understand that emerging student data supports proficiency-based practices as improving learning for all students.

Budget

District resources must be reallocated to support the implementation of proficiency-based teaching and learning. Funds for ongoing collaboration and document development are critical. Teachers must have time to talk about important issues that require them to be on the same page about what their standards mean, to have common definitions of what it means to be proficient, and to establish fair and consistent grading practices. In addition, they need time and training in routinely using data to make instruction and evaluation decisions. Together with colleagues, they should establish fair and consistent grading practices, and design and use effective assessment practices. Seldom do these critical issues get resolved in after-school meetings when teachers have just finished the hard work of serving their students' needs.

Many districts create proficiency coaching positions. These positions are filled with master teachers, frequently splitting their time between classroom instruction and professional development responsibilities. If districts select the right person for such a position, even the most resistant teacher can make inroads in embracing proficiency practices. A coach is seen as a colleague, a resource, someone who is not going to run to the administration every time a discouraging word is said or when lack of improvement results. Slowly, through providing resources, modeling lessons, co-teaching, and generating ideas, a team attitude builds and teachers are willing to take the risk. Over the years districts have created a variety of other positions to help provide services to students. They include TAG coordinators, Special Education facilitators, reading coaches, and others. Nothing is more critical than the basic responsibility of teaching our students to be the most well-informed and talented they can. It's time to put our resources to good use and focus on this fundamental need: coaching our teachers to use effective instructional design and delivery strategies every day with every student.

Time

Time has long been the culprit that held learning back. There are policies on how long the school year should be, how many minutes of instruction students should get, how many days in a grading period, how many minutes in a class period, etc. These are frequently set without regard for what is best for students. Instead, they are set and regulated by state policies and implemented with varying levels of fidelity by well-intended districts. So how can a district restructure time?

Consider the following possibilities:

- Implement a credit by proficiency policy that allows students to earn credit both inside or outside the classroom when they demonstrate proficiency in defined standards. This frees up how students' lives are regulated by the master schedule and offers flexibility in the use of building personnel.
- Create an expectation that students may enter some classes at times other than when the trimester or semester breaks. Instead, provide them a temporary "double dose" in an intervention course that focuses on the standards for which they have not yet achieved a proficient level. Grade their time in the class they enter late in a proficiency-based format, preventing them from being able to earn high marks simply because they were not attending the class on the first day of a new term.

- Create a climate among all personnel that expects all students to make high academic achievement. Promote this among coaches and advisors. Engage them in a professional discussion about how to create flexible after school time to help make this happen. Engage them in developing an after school schedule that allows students who engage in athletics and activities to show up for after school practices and meetings late or to start practices and meetings late at least twice a week. Make sure that these late starts are not on game days or days set aside for other competitions. Coaches and advisors have a special and highly valuable relationship with their student athletes and leaders. Together, these groups can promote high academics among all students in the school.
- Train teachers on how to provide mini-tutorials on some of the learning targets that students are struggling to understand. Create a cadre of proficiency-based teacher leaders who can model this for others in the building/department.
- Research and explore a walk-to-learn model at the elementary level that allows for instruction in grade-level learning targets without regard for calendar dates, time of day, and grade in which the student is registered.
- Consider hiring elementary teachers like we do middle school and high school teachers. Hire them to teach the leveled standards in identified areas. For example, instead of hiring a second grade teacher who is bound to have a wide range of abilities in a heterogeneous classroom, consider hiring a primary teacher who is responsible for delivering instruction in the first and second grade standards in reading, math, and science. Her colleague next door might be assigned to teach the first and second grade standards in social studies, wellness, art, and music. When this type of teaching assignment becomes part of a building's overall master schedule, it creates a very flexible use of time and generates significant professional dialogue about student grouping and placement.

Buildings

For the most part, school buildings are still used in the compartmentalized way they were originally designed. Teachers have assigned rooms in which learning happens. Students are assigned to rooms to take part in those activities. In a standards-based environment when a teacher is using proficiency practices, the bell might ring and students are still learning, instruction is still going on. What happens? The clock says learning is done and it's time to go to the next learning site. This is an efficient method of delivering instruction at the secondary level. At the elementary level, a structure for content instruction helps the day run smoothly and allows for the anticipated interruptions that are always part of an elementary classroom. What would happen if buildings were used differently to support a fluid, non-time based learning system?

Imagine an elementary building where students travel to gain instruction in standards based on their developmental level. For example, Jane reaches a proficient level of reading in the second grade standards and is now ready for instruction in the third grade standards. Without even knowing that the instruction is a little more challenging or the material is more difficult, Jane's learning continues on a pace that is meeting her appropriate rate and level. She may move to another classroom for instruction in the third grade standards; she may stay in the same room she has been attending for instruction in a blended setting. Regardless, room assignments are made based on what happens there, not based on a grade level dictated by how many times students have enrolled in school. In lean times when, sadly,

classroom numbers are large due to lay-offs, and empty rooms exist, consider making one room an intervention setting where students can gain tutorial help in exclusively the learning targets in which they need reinforcement or continued practice. Or, consider creating a place where students can pursue group projects, team building activities, or do enrichment or research.

Secondary buildings can be transformed from compartmentalized hallways of silos into classrooms of learning labs where students gain primary instruction in the learning targets for a particular content area and then have access to open labs where assistants help them gain additional instruction in learning targets they have not yet mastered. This can be done in a computer lab or on laptops issued to students by accessing department-created wikis that hold review lessons. These electronic lessons are created by teachers on interactive white boards and capture white board notations and problems as well as the teacher's voice. In fact some schools are creating an open learning space, similar to a media center/ library where staff is accessible before and after school to provide intervention assistance to students who still need to reach proficiency in some learning targets. For example, Monday and Wednesday tutorial help might be provided by math and science teachers; Tuesday and Thursday tutorials might be with English and social studies teachers. Departments are responsible for rotating coverage in the tutorial lab and all teachers who show up on a scheduled day can access information about which learning targets students may need help in as well as resource material aligned to the learning targets off of the department server.

Consider whether all staff needs to start school at the same time. Could you create learning labs that are open earlier in the morning or later in the afternoon or evening if you staggered staff hours? This type of flexibility is hard to create when we are "doing the work of school." It is similar to that adage about repairing the plane while flying it. Student-centered use of space can only be created through a free-flowing conversation with staff about how to think outside the box, how to do their job differently, how to serve the students' current needs in an environment more in line with what they need instead of having their needs fit the services we have too long provided.

Use of Data

Whether districts are struggling to find enough revenue to sustain existing programs, or whether they have no budget woes, it is important to base decisions that affect the learning environment of students on all available data. There is a public call for equity and a focus on the achievement gap that clearly requires that all data be considered when making changes in how students are served.

Teachers are collecting classroom data, as well as student performance data on state assessments, in order to design personalized learning. They collaborate as part of building or department teams to learn whether each student has access to every resource needed to be successful. When teachers are using proficiency-based practices, new data points surface and need to be collected, studied, and used to improve the learning environment. As part of collaborative teams, they learn which students are proficient in identified standards, which students need scaffolded interventions to reach proficient levels of knowledge and skill, and which students are ready for advanced coursework. Through a close review of programs and services, teachers may discover that not all services are available to every student. This discovery creates a need to redesign or adjust the instructional delivery model.

Like teachers, districts use data to make changes that lead to increased student achievement. Studying what the data says is especially critical when districts take on implementing proficiency district-wide. Recognizing that the gap is widening between low and high-achieving students is frequently at the center

of implementing proficiency-based practices. A close review of why this is happening requires dedicated time for district and building leaders, as well as teachers and support staff, to come together to discuss what the data says, reflect on what needs to be done, and make decisions that lead to improved learning environments for each student. After a short period of time, and involvement in reviewing data regularly, teachers become continuous learners, and districts make solid progress in helping each student reach proficient levels or higher.

Holding Students Accountable

One of the most important cultural shift that occurs when districts implement proficiency-based teaching and learning is the important K-12 practice of holding students accountable. This far-reaching practice affects everyone, from the school board and district office to the classroom, students, and parents. No longer will students pass simply because they have accumulated enough points to kick their grade up from an F to a D. Or, move their B grade up to an A. From one teacher to another, one content area to another, everyone expects students to reach for high levels of learning, to work hard, to do their best, to take advantage of all opportunities to learn, and to understand that school is not a place where one can get by on just good behavior or a strong athletic profile. When a district expects students to demonstrate high levels of knowledge and skill in adopted standards, and creates an educational environment that supports this culture, a powerful thing happens: people think it can actually happen! Students want to succeed; parents want to know that the grade students earn is not clouded with other non-academic factors. And community members feel part of a hard-working team that expects all students to learn.

When teachers include student behavior factors in the evaluation of student learning, parents receive an artificially skewed report of what the student knows and can do. There are eight identified areas of personal management that teachers frequently consider, and occasionally assign points to, when determining a student's grade in a class. They include the following: attendance, attitude, behavior, do-overs, efforts, extra credit, late work, and homework. While these components of school success are important, they can be measured and reported separately on the report card and transcript. Instead of diluting the true picture of what students know and can do, teachers must help each student reach proficient levels of knowledge and skill and measure their progress through the use of well-developed formative and summative assessments. These assessments should align to the standards being measured, and be constructed in a way that allows the teacher to measure a continuum of learning. In this way, teachers know which students are not yet proficient and which students are ready for enrichment, advanced work, or even ready to move to the next set of standards and different course. Solid, well-constructed formative and summative assessments provide a clear picture of student learning and reduce the dependence on the calendar as the unit by which we determine if a student is "on track."

Hope for the Future

So, what factors do districts who take on this level of system-wide academic accountability face? First, districts need to celebrate their successes. While some schools have moved to proficiency-based practices because their academic data reflected poor achievement results, all districts have many things they can point to that they do well. And, students have been learning and graduating from their schools for many years. So, why would successful districts take on a change to proficiency-based practices? To improve even more! Proficiency-based teaching and learning clears away all the layers of confusion about what students need to learn and how well they need to learn it. Holding students accountable to demonstrate proficiency in content standards and process skills creates a transparent academic bar that most students can reach with hard work and access to the interventions districts create and offer.

Districts must also develop and nurture strong partnerships with the parent and business communities. Embracing a solid proficiency-based teaching and learning environment requires effective dialogue with those who don't understand the shift to standards and what it means to hold students accountable for reaching proficient levels of knowledge and skill. Parents understand what they know, and, while even the strongest advocate and high school alum can sing a district's praises, confusion still exists over changes that they don't understand. Administrator and teacher teams can develop information sessions to be shared frequently in a variety of venues. Parents and students need to see compelling data from other districts, to hear administrators, teachers, and particularly students and parents from other districts tell their story and share their successes. While many educational initiatives have come and gone, some with even some short-term positive results, how we deliver school has been stagnating for decades. Systemic and sustaining change only comes about through genuine partnerships that embrace all concerns, looks at all data and research, and clearly has students' best interests at the heart of every decision.