

**BUILDING UNDERSTANDING AND SUPPORT FOR PROFICIENCY-BASED LEARNING**

# **STORIES** on the Road to **PROFICIENCY**

# **DIALOGUE GUIDE**



**Why is Vermont moving to proficiency-based learning?**

**How are teachers experiencing this change?**

**How are students experiencing this change?**

**What does it look like when students and teachers partner  
in the design and implementation of proficiencies?**



Unleashing the Power of Partnership for Learning

**“There is no power greater than a community discovering  
what it cares about.”**

*—Margaret Wheatley*

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## **WITH SPECIAL THANKS TO THE VERMONT FOLKLIFE CENTER**

for partnering on this initiative, and to

- ✦ The Vermont Agency of Education Proficiency-based Learning Team
- ✦ The Bay and Paul Foundations
- ✦ The McClure Foundation

for their guidance and support.

# OVERVIEW

*In a proficiency-based model or system, learners progress through courses and grade levels by demonstrating individual mastery of specific learning standards. A learner struggling to demonstrate proficiency receives additional support or interventions until that individual achieves the required skill or knowledge. Individuals who demonstrate proficiency engage in learning opportunities to extend or accelerate their learning. Proficiency-based learning allows educators, and the learners themselves, to identify strengths and weaknesses and monitor learning progress over time.*

The “Stories on the Road to Proficiency” video compendium was produced by UP for Learning, in partnership with the Vermont Folklife Center, to build understanding and support for proficiency-based learning (PBL) implementation and personalization in Vermont. It is designed to serve as a catalyst for dialogue, to trigger conversation about why proficiency-based learning matters, and to explore the path to full implementation from both learner and educator perspectives.

## VIDEO OPTIONS

The full length version of this video has been edited in several ways to allow for flexibility in use depending on your audience, time allowance, goals, and context:

<p><b>Trailer (6:02)</b></p>	<p>This short but powerful version can be used with audiences of all ages and roles. It captures key points and draws a person into central issues of PBL implementation. It is particularly aligned with youth audiences due to a balance of youth and adult voices throughout.</p>
<p><b>Full Length Version (19:49)</b></p>	<p>This longer version is suited to audiences who are vested in PBL implementation and committed to a deep exploration of the topic. Educators, board members, parents/guardians, and community members will appreciate the varied glimpses into engaging classroom practices across four school settings and content areas.</p>
<p><b>School/Content Area Clips:</b></p> <p>BFA St. Albans: Science (3:58)</p> <p>Champlain Valley Union HS: Math (6:18)</p> <p>Harwood Union: Humanities (5:08)</p> <p>Peoples Academy: Social Studies (9:13)</p>	<p>The video was edited to capture the story of each of the four schools that took part in the documentary. The clips may serve content specialists who will be drawn to their particular academic focus area.</p>
<p><b>Specific Themes (2:00 to 5:00)</b></p>	<p>Themes emerge across the content areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Getting Uncomfortable</li> <li>Playing the Game of School versus Deep Learning and Engagement</li> <li>Knowing the Learner: Taking Incremental Steps</li> <li>Changing Roles: Shared Responsibility and Partnership</li> </ul> <p>These short clips will spark dialogue about these particular aspects of the change process.</p>

One goal of these videos is to raise awareness of the desire and capacity of young people to partner in this change process. Anecdotal evidence suggests that students often feel proficiency-based learning is simply another adult agenda, a set of things being done “to” them and “for” them. This naturally leads to resistance and a lack of buy-in. These videos reinforce the message that the change process itself will accelerate if young people become partners in proficiency implementation and advocates among their own peers.

## THE POWER AND PURPOSE OF DIALOGUE

*“You cannot force someone to comprehend a message that they are not ready to receive. Still, you must never underestimate the power of planting a seed.”* —anonymous

A didactic approach to school change can backfire. Trying to convince people that proficiencies are a good thing by “telling and selling” the concept can have the opposite effect from your intentions. People may well resist an abstract idea they cannot visualize, especially if it runs counter to deeply-held beliefs. Instead of insisting that others adopt the new practice, we must plant seeds for understanding, offering stakeholders ways to see and appreciate proficiency-based learning. They must construct their own understanding of why proficiency-based learning matters.

Our task is to help them shift their mental models of learning and education to ones better aligned with PBL principles and practices. One purpose of this video compendium, then, is to offer a concrete vision of the abstract concept—what PBL looks like, from both learner and educator perspectives, when manifest in engaging classroom settings. Sharpening the image of “the destination” is particularly important when so few of us have ever experienced PBL in our own lives. (See Public Understanding and Support Rubric in Appendix A).

A second goal of this compendium and guide is to spark dialogue about the change process as the transition to PBL is underway. Authentic dialogue honors people’s current beliefs and experiences, and then invites them to shift their perceptions as they incorporate new new information and insights. Encouraging discussion about challenges (a given of any change process) allows viewers to share their current reality at the outset. Follow-up discussion can explore the ways those challenges are leading to deeper learning and authentic assessment; this opens the door for acceptance and support of the change. While uneasiness in a major transition is inevitable, the ultimate benefits will outweigh that discomfort when a dialogue strategy accompanies change.

## START WITH WHY

There is a natural tendency for dialogue participants to jump right into the “weeds” of practical implementation, seeking clarity on the particulars. For example, adults entering a dialogue session with anxieties about moving from a traditional grading report card to a PBL report may immediately want answers on the new system’s details. What form will the new report system take? How exactly will it work? What will colleges think about the new form? For you as a facilitator, there may also be a natural impulse to address implementation questions you know are percolating within the community, hoping to put them to rest.

Communications research is clear, however, that understanding must precede implementation. Until we help individuals truly grasp *why* proficiency-based learning makes sense, we will not move the needle on understanding and support for this change. Well- structured dialogue that illuminates the reasons for this shift should be the first objective of any gathering.<sup>1</sup>

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1. If you would like to know more about the rationale for starting with why, take a look at Simon Sinek’s Ted Talk “How Great Leaders Inspire Action” at [youtu.be/u4ZojKF\\_VuA](https://youtu.be/u4ZojKF_VuA).

## KEY THEMES

Below are some of the key themes that emerge in the full-length video, represented as shifts from the conventional, “industrial” model of education to a PBL framework. This can serve as a reference for you in facilitating dialogue, suggesting ideas to be aware of and highlight as appropriate.<sup>2</sup>

THEME ATTRIBUTE	SHIFT FROM...	SHIFT TO....
<b>Content delivery</b>	All students receive the same content at the same pace, regardless of learner differences and rates of mastery.	Delivery of content is differentiated.
<b>Knowing each learner: Incremental steps in learning</b>	Instruction is designed and paced based on assumptions about the average student.	Instruction is individualized based on information from clear learning targets, helping the teacher design instruction accordingly. This allows learners to monitor and take charge of their education.
<b>Learner engagement and ownership</b>	Students are largely passive recipients of information given to them by the teacher. Teacher ownership is high; student ownership is limited.	Learners are actively involved in their own process of gaining proficiency and feel motivated through shared responsibility and ownership in learning.
<b>Playing the game of school versus genuine learning</b>	Motivation is tied to obtaining a grade, not necessarily related to genuine learning itself. Content mastery is often superficial and short- term, with loss of content or skill development following a test.	Motivation is tied to mastery of relevant skills and the inherent satisfaction of the learning process. Incremental skill development and content mastery establish a solid foundation for subsequent learning, building competence and confidence as a life-long learner.
<b>Response to “failure” in the learning process</b>	The inability to master material at the given pace is interpreted as an indicator of limited intellectual capacity, often resulting in a detachment from natural risk-taking in learning. This results in diminished confidence as a learner. The neurologic response to repeated failure is avoidance.	The pacing of instruction and learning is accepted as unique to each individual. Risk-taking and failure are embraced as central to a learning process and as indicators of progress and intellectual capacity. The neurologic response to success as an incremental learner is willing engagement.
<b>Meeting the needs of all learners</b>	Content progresses regardless of level of mastery. Those who have not mastered prior material as a foundation begin to feel inadequate and progressively detach from the learning context, losing faith in their abilities. This leads to low self-expectations which become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Those who master the content quickly become bored.	Learners know the steps to mastery of any given topic. The pace and style of learning are individualized to ensure steady progression toward learning targets. This incremental success toward mastery affirms the individual’s ability as a learner. This helps sustain belief in one’s own capacity and a willingness for continued engagement.

2. You may notice that we have shifted the language of student-teacher to learner-educator, to break from entrenched stereotypes of what a traditional student-teacher relationship looks and sounds like. In the new paradigm, learners and educators share responsibility. Educators often assume the roles of learner and guide in this process, while learners co-construct their education. The boundaries blur between these distinctions, in a dynamic process of learning. Importantly, the power dynamic shifts to one of partnership.

THEME ATTRIBUTE	SHIFT FROM...	SHIFT TO....
<b>Balance of work in the learning context</b> <b>“The one who does the work is the one who learns.” (Bob Greenleaf)</b>	The teacher does most of the work, designing and delivering lessons and assessments. The students respond to teacher-generated materials and requirements.	Learners are active partners in creating their learning paths to proficiencies. They have a clear sense of the learning goals and have control over their progress. The work of learning is shared.

## ENSURING QUALITY DIALOGUE

Engaging and inclusive dialogue strategies, based on School Reform Initiative protocols, invite all participants to have a voice in the dialogue ([schoolreforminitiative.org](http://schoolreforminitiative.org)). These methods for structured conversation create a safe space to explore thoughts and feelings. They also help prevent groups from digressing to debate, judgement, and possible polarization. Young people particularly appreciate these proven strategies that allow them to step into the facilitator role with confidence and competence.

For those leading the change process, part of the art of effective facilitation will be choosing the right protocols for participants. You’ll need to consider both your particular goals and your unique context: available time, physical space, and participants’ current level of knowledge and acceptance of PBL. Several of the activities in this guide suggest choices. Familiarize yourself with all the options, and then choose the one(s) that will best match your circumstances.

It can take some time to feel at ease with the structure of these protocols. Especially for adults, adherence to prescribed steps can feel artificial and needlessly contrived. The protocol structures, though, have been carefully designed to promote safety and inclusion. Protocols help manage the monopolizer who demands disproportionate airtime; they also prevent side conversations and encourage reluctant participants. Often, they allow more introverted members to engage immediately in discussions.

Establishing shared agreements or “ground rules” for discussion is important if a group does not already have well established commitments to quality dialogue. A sample of such commitments can be found in Appendix B-1. They should be briefly reviewed at the start of a dialogue session, asking for any clarification and ultimately a “thumbs up” to affirm participant agreement. If there is strong resistance to working agreements, you can use the exercise in Appendix B-2 to help the group generate its own commitments. This is often most effective after an initial meeting has indicated the need.

## USE OF THIS GUIDE

This Dialogue Guide provides a variety of inclusive strategies to engage all stakeholder groups (learners, educators, parents/guardians, board members, and community members) in exploring the reasons for proficiency-based learning. Remember that WHY needs to precede WHAT for effective change to occur.

The summary table will help guide your choice(s) of activities, taking into consideration the purpose of the activity, the size of your group, and the time you have available. You will need to combine this information with your insights into the participants in the room. For example, what are their mental models of education and learning? Do they believe that learning equates with a lecture format and the job of teachers is to “pour in information,” or do they support having learners actively construct their own learning? What is their current experience with proficiencies? Are they coming into the dialogue with strong agendas one way or the other? The community context is unique for each school setting and you will be customizing your communications efforts accordingly.

These activity options assume that there is a general understanding of why schools are changing, which is necessary to understanding and embracing proficiency-based learning. Participants should be aware that education is:

- shifting from an industrial era model to one that aligns with a very different world and set of work demands.
- aligning with what we now know about how the brain learns.
- committed to ensuring that all young people can realize their full learning potential.

If you need to back up to provide this wider context of school redesign, consider the many activities found in the “Shaping Our Future Together” web site: <http://shapingourfuturetogether.org/resources/why-change-schools/>. (The Youth and Adults Transforming School module is a particularly rich compendium of effective strategies, along with the host of other options noted).

In this guide, Activities 1 to 7 directly reinforce the content of the Stories on the Road to Proficiencies videos. Activity 8 helps explore the shortfalls of traditional grading, knowledge that’s important to grasping why the shift to proficiencies is happening. Activity 9 facilitates groups exploring proficiency basics and the common concern about college admissions through short but compelling text options.

Our goal—shifting mental models of education to ones better aligned with a proficiency-based model—ultimately means embracing opportunities for genuine learning. Think about the inherent joy of learning we witness in young children. The promise of proficiency-based strategies is to tap once again into this natural enthusiasm and confidence. When we can help others understand that regenerating this fundamental capacity lies at the heart of the shift to proficiencies, we will have succeeded.

The activities in this guide open the door to understanding, but the impact will only endure when these new mental models become manifest in the school culture, shared by a majority of participants in the school community and woven into day-to-day practice.

**NOTE:** These videos and the guide were developed as part of UP for Learning’s Communicating School Redesign Initiative, which began in 2014 to help the Agency of Education build support for flexible pathways and proficiency-based education in Vermont. Youth-adult teams from around the state have been learning about research-based communications practices, conducting mental models research, and designing and implementing their own campaigns accordingly. At the same time, resources have been developed to help them do this work. To learn more, go to [upforlearning.com/initiatives/communicating-school-redesign](http://upforlearning.com/initiatives/communicating-school-redesign). A comprehensive communications toolkit can be found at [shapingourfuturetogether.org/communications-toolkit](http://shapingourfuturetogether.org/communications-toolkit).

# Activity Choice Guide

ACTIVITY	PURPOSE	PRIMARY AUDIENCE	SIZE GROUP	TIME
<b>1. What are Proficiencies? A Basic Introduction</b> (page 9)	Establish a baseline understanding of a proficiency based learning system	Any group	Any size	20 minutes
<b>2. Proficiency Infographic</b> (page 11)	Explore the basics of PBL	Any group	Any size	13-15 minutes
<b>3. What Stood Out for Me... Progressive Pairs</b> (page 14)	Provide video viewers time to share their immediate reactions to the video, honoring all perspectives.	Any group	Any size	8-60 minutes
<b>4. Proficiency-based Learning Chalk Talk</b> (page 16)	Provide video viewers time to share their immediate reactions to the video, honoring all perspectives.	Any group	8 to a group of any size	35 minutes
<b>5. Quote Mania</b> (page 18)	Draw on the wisdom of the youth and adults featured in the video to spark dialogue about key points.	Any group	Any size	10-70 minutes (3 activity options)
<b>6. A Smorgasbord of Questions to Ponder</b> (page 29)	Create an opportunity for deep dialogue to explore questions that are central to PBL and its implementation.	Any group	Wagon Wheel option minimum of 6 Microlab option minimum of 3 Up to any size	30 minutes
<b>7. How Are Proficiencies Like Adjustable Seats?</b> (page 34)	Explore the myth of average and its relationship to the rationale for proficiency-based learning through the experience of Todd Rose.	Any group	Any size	45-60 minutes
<b>8. Grading: An Average Doesn't Tell the Whole Story</b> (page 38)	Surface the impact of averaging grades when an individual has failed on a test/assignment.	Any group	Any Size	45-60 minutes
<b>9. Text-based Discussion Options</b> (page 40)	Use compelling and simple written pieces to prompt dialogue about key themes relating to proficiencies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Higher education admissions and PBL</li> <li>• Core principles and practices of PBL</li> </ul>	The suitability of the readings varies from option to option. Some are geared more to adult/educator groups, while others would also work well with student groups.	Any Size	20-50 minutes

## Activity 1

# WHAT ARE PROFICIENCIES? A BASIC INTRODUCTION

**PURPOSE:** Establish a baseline understanding of a proficiency-based learning system, with a focus on why this model has become a priority.

**MATERIALS:**

- LCD/speakers/computer
- “What’s the Deal with Proficiency-based Learning” video link: [youtu.be/\\_jV91CVs1mU](https://youtu.be/_jV91CVs1mU)
- Paper and writing implements for all participants
- Large newsprint pad or whiteboard and markers to record participant responses

**TIME:** 20 minutes

**STEP 1: (1 minute):**

- Explain that you are going to introduce the basics of proficiency-based learning through a video and a two-page “infographic.” The purpose is to address participants’ questions: both existing questions people may have about proficiency-based learning and why it’s becoming a central goal for schools, and also any additional questions that may come up in the process.

**STEP 2: (8 minutes)**

- Inform the viewers that this video includes many reasons for proficiency-based learning. Ask them to jot down any of these reasons they see as they watch. Show the “What is the Deal with Proficiency-based Learning” video (7:04).

**STEP 3: (3 minutes)**

- Ask participants to turn to a neighbor and combine their list of the reasons why proficiency-based learning is a positive change.

**STEP 4: (5 minutes)**

- Solicit a composite list of the “whys” of PBL, giving each pair of participants a turn to add one reason to the list. Below is a list of the themes noted in the video for your reference. You can fill in any unidentified reasons after the participant list has been solicited:
  - You can learn at your own pace, since each of us is different in this regard.
  - PBL provides alternative ways of demonstrating your learning (since we all are not necessarily good traditional test takers).
  - Learners play a bigger role in shaping their own learning.
  - Learning becomes more challenging and more fun.
  - The world is changing and education must prepare young people for a new work context and a new world.

- ✦ Letter grades do not tell the whole story. When a teacher averages your grades, you are immediately punished if you do not learn as quickly as another person and do badly on some test(s) on the road to proficiency. Once you have a bad grade, even if you then master the material, your grade will be lower due to this learning curve. Proficiencies measure what you know and can do, and are a more accurate measure of learning.
- ✦ What is currently deemed “failure” is an essential part of the learning process. In a proficiency system, redoing work to reach mastery follows the natural learning progression and encourages learners to take risks as they master new skills and concepts.
- ✦ Proficiencies match the way the brain works. We all learn different content at different rates. Brain research affirms that all individuals can learn with time, feedback on practice, and support.
- ✦ A PBL system allows for the time and personalization to facilitate genuine learning for all students. In doing so, students do not lose confidence in themselves as learners due to a slower pace of learning, which can spiral into hopelessness and detachment. PBL mobilizes the learning potential of all students, not just some.
- ✦ PBL personalizes learning, so everyone can master content and demonstrate learning in different ways.
- ✦ PBL builds life-long learning skills, such as communicating effectively, creatively solving problems, being self-directed, making a positive difference in the world, and applying our thinking to many situations.

#### **STEP 5: (3 minutes)**

- ✦ Ask participants to turn to a different neighbor and talk about which of the reasons feels most important to you and why. Give a signal after one minute to switch the speaker, so both have a chance to talk.

## Activity 2

# PROFICIENCY INFOGRAPHIC

**PURPOSE:** Establish a baseline understanding of a proficiency-based learning system, with a focus on why this model has become a priority.

**MATERIALS:**

- Proficiency-based Learning Infographic (see <http://www.upforlearning.com/initiatives/communicating-school-redesign> - first item of “tools & resources”)
- Writing utensils

**TIME:** 13-15 minutes

*Note: Activity 1 is an ideal lead-in to this activity, with the infographic reinforcing the video.*

**STEP 1: (3-5 minutes)**

- Pass out the Proficiency-based Learning Infographic and instruct participants to silently review both sides of this handout, making note of three things that stand out for them. This could be for any reason: something you have never thought about or never knew, a question that was sparked, a quote you like, etc.

**STEP 2: (6 minutes)**

- Gather into groups of three. Each individual will have two minutes to state the three things that stood out for them in this infographic, sharing the reasons why. The two others in the group should be active listeners, giving the speaker their full attention. They may ask questions for clarification, to understand better what they are hearing, but should not otherwise interrupt the speaker or comment. This is not a dialogue but a chance for expression and listening. As the facilitator, you serve as timekeeper, giving a signal every two minutes to switch: “next speaker, please.”

**STEP 3: (4 minutes)**

- Solicit reflections from the whole group about what was meaningful for them or what they heard was meaningful to the others in their group. This may develop into a short full-group discussion. You may summarize common themes you heard to bring the activity to a conclusion.

# Vermont's Shift Towards Proficiency

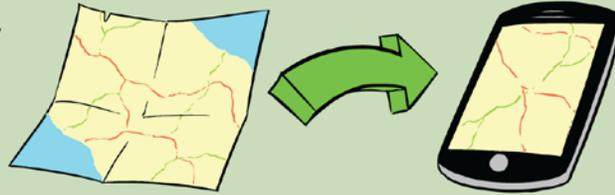
**What does it mean to be competent or proficient at something?**

*Proficiency is both understanding material and the ability to apply and demonstrate it.*

## WHY move to a proficiency-based system?

The world is changing so fast that schools today are preparing students for:

- Jobs that don't yet exist,
- Technologies that haven't been invented,
- Solve problems we don't even know are problems yet.



Schools are developing new methods of teaching and assessment to keep up with and prepare students for this rapidly changing world.

### Proficiency-based learning honors what we now know about learning & the brain:

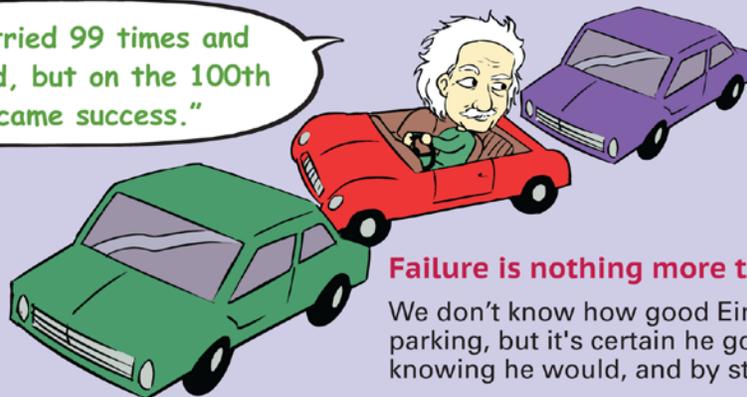


- We all learn in different ways and at different paces.
- All students have the capacity to learn.
- We build our capacity to learn the same way we strengthen our muscles - with practice, time, and support.
- Proficiencies FULLY capture what students have learned or the skills that have been mastered. Numerical grades, alone, do not provide this level of understanding.

## WHAT does proficiency-based learning look like?

Proficiency-based learning gives every student the opportunity to learn at their own pace, as they move toward mastery, through lots of practice, learning by mistakes and ongoing feedback.

"I have tried 99 times and have failed, but on the 100th time came success."



### Failure is nothing more than information.

We don't know how good Einstein was at parallel parking, but it's certain he got better at it by knowing he would, and by sticking with it.

**Learn the rules of the road.**

(Knowledge)



**Practice driving the car with adult supervision and coaching.**

(Skills)



**Obtain your license.**

(Proficiency)



## Activity 3

# WHAT STOOD OUT FOR ME... PROGRESSIVE PAIRS

**PURPOSE:** Provide video viewers time to share their immediate reactions to the video, honoring all perspectives.

### **MATERIALS:**

- ✦ LCD/computer/speakers
- ✦ Stories on the Road to Proficiency video (whatever option best suites your audience):
  - ✦ Trailer or Full Length: [upforlearning.com/initiatives/communicating-school-redesign/video-series](http://upforlearning.com/initiatives/communicating-school-redesign/video-series)
  - ✦ School/content specific: [upforlearning.com/initiatives/communicating-school-redesign/stories-from-our-schools](http://upforlearning.com/initiatives/communicating-school-redesign/stories-from-our-schools)
  - ✦ Themed Vignettes: [upforlearning.org/initiatives/communicating-school-redesign/themes-vignettes](http://upforlearning.org/initiatives/communicating-school-redesign/themes-vignettes)
- ✦ Paper and writing utensils for all participants

**TIME:** 8–60 minutes

### **STEP 1:**

- ✦ Before showing the chosen video, instruct participants to have paper and pen or pencil ready to take notes on anything that stands out for them as they watch the video, for whatever reason. Ask them to jot down a quick note so that they can recall those moments.

### **STEP 2: (1 minute)**

- ✦ At the close of the video, provide a minute for everyone to review their notes and circle the two or three most memorable aspects of the video, thinking more about why they were so poignant.

### **STEP 3: (4 minutes per round; minimum of 2 rounds)**

- ✦ Provide the following instructions:
  - ✦ Please stand up and find a person you do not know well or rarely get a chance to talk with. When you have found this person, introduce yourselves to each other.
  - ✦ You will each have one minute to share one thing that stood out for you in the video. Explore why this piece was particularly notable to you.
  - ✦ When the designated speaker is talking, the listener can respond non-verbally, but can not enter into dialogue or offer their thoughts or opinions. When you're the speaker, you get uninterrupted time to talk. When you're the listener, you support the speaker with your full attention.
  - ✦ It is possible that there will be some silence as people think. That's fine. Just enjoy it!

- I will be the timekeeper and I'll cue you after one minute, when it's time to switch talking and listening roles.

#### **STEP 4: (5 minutes)**

- Repeat this process, choosing a different partner and a different point that stood out for you from the video. Note: Introduce yourself to your new partner each round.

#### **ALTERNATIVE:**

- Ask everyone to form two parallel lines, facing each other. The person directly across from an individual is their first partner. When the first round of speaking is done, instruct one of the lines to move one person to the left. The person at the end will loop to the other end of the line. The new person directly across from you becomes your new partner. (Note: Two concentric circles is another way to create progressive partner pairs.)

#### **STEP 5: Closing Reflections**

- Ask:
  - Were there surprises? Did your response to the video or the response of someone you talked to surprise you? How?
  - What is one new insight into PBL you have now—something you did not think about before watching the video?
  - What questions has the video raised for you or for one of your talking partners? Does anyone have an answer for that question?

## Activity 4

# PROFICIENCY-BASED LEARNING CHALK TALK

**PURPOSE:** Provide video viewers time to share their immediate reactions to the video, honoring all perspectives.

### **MATERIALS:**

- ✦ LCD/computer/speakers
- ✦ Stories on the Road to Proficiency video (whatever option best suites your audience):
  - ✦ Trailer or Full Length: [upforlearning.com/initiatives/communicating-school-redesign/video-series](http://upforlearning.com/initiatives/communicating-school-redesign/video-series)
  - ✦ School/content specific: [upforlearning.com/initiatives/communicating-school-redesign/stories-from-our-schools](http://upforlearning.com/initiatives/communicating-school-redesign/stories-from-our-schools)
  - ✦ Themed Vignettes: ([upforlearning.org/initiatives/communicating-school-redesign/themes-vignettes](http://upforlearning.org/initiatives/communicating-school-redesign/themes-vignettes))
- ✦ 3 large pieces of paper (Newsprint size or larger. Rolls of art paper work well!)
- ✦ 3 pieces of chart paper
- ✦ Markers for each participant

**TIME:** 35 minutes

**PREPARATION:** Create three “chalk talk stations” using three large sheets of newsprint or art paper. In the center of each one, write one of the following questions:

- ✦ Why does a proficiency-based learning system makes sense?
- ✦ What are some challenges of implementing a proficiency-based system?
- ✦ How does a proficiency system shift the traditional roles of students and teachers?

### **STEP 1: (3 minutes)**

- ✦ If you have a group of 15-24 participants, create groups of 5-8 individuals and have each group go to one of the chalk talk stations. If you have a larger group, simply create another set of three chalk talk stations with the same questions and divide the group up accordingly.

### **STEP 2: (4 minutes per station; 14 minutes in total with transition time)**

- ✦ Provide the following instructions:
  - ✦ This activity is called a Chalk Talk. We are going to enter into silent dialogue for the next 14 minutes.
  - ✦ We have three stations with a single question at each one, all related to the video and PBL. You will have four minutes at each station to share your thoughts and ideas. You will respond to the

question in the middle of the sheet by writing (or even drawing) rather than oral discussion. There are no right or wrong answers! Be as open and honest as you can be. There will be responses, but no negative judgement.

- ✦ Think of this as a written discussion. Feel free to comment on other participants' contributions.
- ✦ Remember, this is a SILENT activity. There should be no talking.
- ✦ As facilitator, you will keep time and give a signal every four minutes for each switch to a new station. Consider providing some soft background music while groups are rotating through the stations; it can help set a productive mood.

### STEP 3: (5 minutes)

- ✦ Provide the following instructions:
  - ✦ Now circle back to your original station. Talk—out loud now—in your group about what themes have emerged in the comments you see. Agree on three things that stand out for you as a group based on this analysis. Write them down on a piece of chart paper, and prepare to report out to the large group at the end of five minutes.

### STEP 4: (6 minutes)

- ✦ Have each group report out what themes emerged, using their chart paper list for reference. Limit groups to two minutes for this.

### STEP 5: (5 minutes)

- ✦ Ask for any final reflections about what was learned.

### STEP 6: (2 minutes)

- ✦ Ask how the structure or process of this activity followed the principles and practices of proficiency-based learning. For example:
  - ✦ It ensured that each individual had a chance to be actively involved in making meaning of what they had learned.
  - ✦ People contributed when they were ready to do so, at their own pace.
  - ✦ There was an implicit valuing of the wisdom of each participant; all input mattered.
  - ✦ Every individual shared responsibility to construct meaning.
  - ✦ The activity encouraged honesty and risk taking within a safe framework.



# Activity 5

## QUOTE MANIA

**PURPOSE:** Explore key aspects of proficiency-based learning through poignant quotes taken directly from the video. The quotes are provided by themes as follows:

- Moving from “Playing the Game” to Learning and Engagement
- Getting Uncomfortable
- Knowing Each Learner: Incremental Steps
- Changing Roles: Shared Responsibility and Partnership

**MATERIALS:**

- Facilitator quote choices, developing one or more of the themes

**TIME:** 10–70 minutes (depending on the option)

**FACILITATOR NOTES:** Beginning on page 21, you’ll find lists of quotations selected from the full-length *Stories on the Road to Proficiency* video. They have been grouped by theme, and cite the source for each one as either a learner or an educator.

You have many poignant and provocative quotes to choose from as a springboard for dialogue. You will likely want to cull these options down to a more limited number in order to focus the discussion. If you viewed the trailer, choose from the quotes that are starred.

The activities below offer three alternative ways to engage a group in dialogue prompted by quotations. Decide on your dialogue objectives and choose your quotes accordingly. Make sure you include the perspective of both learners and educators, to reinforce that understanding the perspectives of both partners in learning is key to successfully implementing PBL.

If you have both adults and youth in attendance, make sure each group has a mix of generations.

In all three Quote Activity Options, the first step is to view your chosen video.

### QUOTE ACTIVITY OPTION 1: (13-21 MINUTES)

*Facilitator Prep:* Cut out the quotes that you think will be most provocative, ensuring a balance of learner and educator perspectives.

#### STEP 1: (5 minutes)

- Create groups of 6-8 participants. Give each group one set of quotes (15 to 20) and have them spread them out on a table so that all can be read. Ask participants to choose silently one or two quotes that are particularly meaningful for them, for whatever reason.

## **STEP 2: (8-16 minutes)**

- Ask that each participant share one of the quotes they chose and why they chose it, giving a maximum of one minute per person. Request that one person be the timekeeper at each table.
- If time allows, instruct participants to do a second round with their second choice of quotes.

## **QUOTE ACTIVITY OPTION 2: (40-70 MINUTES)**

*Facilitator Prep: Choose the number of quotes that match the number of people you will have in each circle (6-8 recommended), making sure that both youth and adult perspectives are included. Put all the quotes in a container and place it in the middle of the circle.*

### **STEP 1: (2 minutes)**

- Create groups of 6-8 people seated in a circle.

### **STEP 2: (2 minutes)**

- Ask the group to identify a time keeper. Have each person draw a random quote from the container (without looking). Ask them to think silently about their chosen quote and what meaning comes to mind.

### **STEP 3:**

- Ask for a volunteer. That person reads his or her quote aloud twice (slowly), and identifies it as a learner or an educator. That's it—just the quotation, without comments!
- You can explain that this person will not comment until everyone else around the circle has shared their reflections.

### **STEP 4: (6-8 minutes per round; 36-64 minutes total)**

- The first reader chooses a direction, right or left, to start the response round. The next person then has one minute to talk about the quotation that was just read: what thoughts or ideas does it trigger? Each subsequent person in the circle also has one minute to share their reactions to the quote. The first speaker—the person who shared the quote—will be the last one to explain what the quote meant to them, having heard all the others.

## **QUOTE ACTIVITY OPTION 3: BLEND OF OPTIONS 1 & 2: (40-70 MINUTES)**

### **STEP 1: (3 minutes)**

- Create groups of 6-8 participants. Give each group one set of quotes (15 to 20) and have them spread them out on a table so that all can be read. Ask participants to choose silently one or two quotes that are particularly meaningful for them, for whatever reason.

### **STEP 2: (1 minute)**

- Ask the group to identify a time keeper. Invite a volunteer to read their quote aloud twice (slowly) and identify it as a learner or an educator. Explain that this person will not comment until everyone else around the circle has shared their reflections.

### **STEP 3: (6-8 minutes per round; 36-64 minutes total)**

- The first reader chooses a direction, right or left, to start the response round. The next person then has one minute to talk about the quotation that was just read: what thoughts or ideas does it trigger?

Each subsequent person in the circle also has one minute to share their reactions to the quote. The first speaker—the person who shared the quote—will be the last one to explain what the quote meant to them, having heard all the others.

#### CLOSING FOR ALL 3 ACTIVITY OPTIONS: (5 MINUTES)

- Provide time to reflect on the activity, posing the following questions to the full group:
  - What was it like to do this activity? What stood out for you?
  - What was it like to be the last to talk about your chosen quote?
  - Were you surprised by anything?
  - Is there some insight that you want to make sure to remember?

*Note: Starred quotes were taken from the Trailer video version.*

# Moving from “Playing the Game” to Learning and Engagement

\*“We’re talking about moving away from grades, and the entire culture of education has been geared around that.” (educator)

\*“There are a lot of positives with this system in terms of the opportunities for students to amend some of their work.” (educator)

“You start with the end in mind and you design backwards, but in this case you’re really designing not just where you’re going to end up content-wise, or even big-idea-wise, but where you’re going to end up skill-wise, and then map backwards what opportunities and experiences are you going to provide for students so that you can coach them to get all the way to proficient and beyond.” (educator)

“I would whip out worksheet after worksheet. I didn’t have to apply myself very much and they would stamp a 100 on it, and I wouldn’t know it the next day.” (learner)

“It’s actually saying, presenting, knowing in your mind what something is.” (learner)

“That something else is—I think—true understanding. And when I say understanding, I mean a student goes in. They know what the teacher’s talking about. They know what the subject is and how to present it to other people.” (learner)

\*“I’ve had difficulties in this class, and when I do I can always redo things, or design my own project and earn my proficiencies that way which I find was really nice because I couldn’t do that before. It was kinda just take a test and if you didn’t do well on it you were kind of stuck there.” (learner)

\*“Give it a chance. Don’t think of it as slapping a grade on something. Think of it as assessing a student’s understanding of the topic.” (learner)

\* “We’re working toward learning the skills rather than working towards having an outstanding GPA. There we feel as though if we have the right skills, a good GPA will follow.” (learner)

## Getting Uncomfortable

\*“Kind of feel like guinea pigs. We’re trying stuff out on them. We’re also guinea pigs ourselves. We’re right along there with them. Trying to refine our craft. Trying to refine education. Take it to the next level for the 21st century.” (educator) “We’re definitely the guinea pigs.” (learner)

“In some ways, I think one of the biggest challenges is a sort of reluctance to move in that direction. I’m really thinking about the start of the year when it was first sort of being implemented, and I remember everyone—including myself— was very wary of it and didn’t want to do it ... thinking this is going to destroy all the hard work that I have done to get a GPA. Or what if I’m going to fail?” (learner)

“I think a lot of students dislike proficiencies and are having so much trouble with it.” (learner)

“We still don’t know what the guidelines are. We’re coming up with all of the rubrics for this.” (learner)

“I just did not feel confident or good about the fact that they could have taken the class and not have demonstrated clear understanding.” (educator)

\*“Until you’re really comfortable, you’re probably not feeling like you’re doing it terribly well. So that may be some of the push back that’s coming from teachers. It’s just a lack of comfort in really having a firm grip on proficiency-based education and what that really means.” (educator)

\*“So with the emergence of the proficiencies, it’s been kinda hard on veteran teachers. You get comfortable doing things one way, and all of the sudden things change—somewhat dramatically—and it’s a real challenge.” (educator)

“Our reporting system was really convoluted. It wasn’t really clear to students or parents. It’s caused our school to make some adjustments for next year.” (educator)

“Certainly there’s still a lot of anxiety about grades. Students have to apply to colleges, and colleges look at grades. So, how do we reconcile standards with grades?” (educator)

\*“This is a pretty significant paradigm shift for the students and the parents, and I’m also going to throw in there still for a lot of teachers. It’s not what we’re used to.” (educator)

“So I didn’t call it proficiency-based, I just called it you’ve got to learn the stuff you’re supposed to learn if you’re going to receive credit.” (educator)

\*“It’s a big mental shift for teachers ... we tend to start with content and then the skills come for students ... so this is just a total reversal putting the skills first and foremost. What are the things students need to be able to do at the end of high school, in life in general, and then the content is just a vehicle to get students to practice.” (educator)

# Knowing Each Learner: Incremental Steps

“Now with standards, I am thinking much more big picture and what big ideas overall I can keep going back to.” (educator)

“For me, you get so much more information about what your learner has learned.” (educator)

“Today, where are we at? How does this task apply to that? Are we feeling confident? What more do we need to know?” (educator)

\*“An entry point. An on ramp, and here’s what you do next, and next, and next... and we were getting so much better at teaching all of the tiny little steps.” (educator)

“B+ in trig—what does that tell you? Nothing. For me it is about that information you get about your learner.” (educator)

“You just compare your work to the Learning Scale, and if you meet the criteria, you’re proficient.” (learner)

\*“You have to self-assess on the Learning Scales. So, you’re thinking about what you’re learning. Whereas before, I was just thinking that I knew it because I did it, and there wasn’t any self reflection. So, now I have to be like: ‘Did I learn this? And I’m like ‘No’ I need to learn it again. I obviously didn’t meet the proficiency.” (learner)

\*“It feels more similar to life or what I know if it. Because I think that things aren’t just given a number. Not everything can be quantified. So, I think having Learning Scales where you can sort of see where you are and work your way up it is a much more organic process. And I think proficiency-based is definitely moving in the right direction. It’s just figuring out how we can move it.” (learner)

\*“You were never really given much information, you just got a lower grade. But if you do it with proficiencies and you get a lower proficiency it tells you exactly what parts you were lower on and what parts you did really well, and I really appreciate that.” (learner)

\*I normally struggle at the old system. I know for a fact that I don’t do well on testing. It needs to be equal for all students.” (learner)

## Changing Roles: Shared Responsibility & Partnership

“Usually we come back together as a class ... some will get to different points, and then we’ll help each other get unstuck. So by the end we know what we’re doing, but now we’re struggling.” (learner)

\*“They don’t make the Learning Scale and just show it to you. It’s a discussion about what should be on the Learning Scale—what should be considered proficient.” (learner)

“It needs to be equal for all students. Tests and quizzes just don’t sometimes work that way.” (learner)

“The state has given districts the ability to figure out what they think is proficient and what’s important for the proficiencies.” (educator)

“Teachers are learners too. We’re having to learn and operate at the same time.” (educator)

\*“A student can see a report card with numerical grades on it and think they know exactly how they are doing, as artificial as those numbers may be.” (educator)

\*“I think with proficiencies it almost makes it feel a little bit easier for students. As you heard with some of them saying: ‘We’ve done this before. Now we’re just applying it to something new.’” (educator)

\*“Instead of there being all these new things we have to learn, it’s ‘I’m going to take this skill that I already know and apply it to this different picture, this different idea.’” (educator)

“How did you evaluate yourself? What did you use for evidence?” (educator)

\*“So that means that students, teachers, parents and politicians—everyone needs to be reeducated on this process and needs to be open and give this new system an opportunity to prove itself.” (educator)

\*“That for us has been key this year—including the students in the conversation right from the beginning. We showed them the scale. We put it so they could edit, and comment.” (educator)

“Where are you? and what are we going to do to help you move forward? We’re here the whole time for supporting and moving them forward ... It’s not like I’m telling you how you are doing ... and we’ve been practicing.” (educator)

\*Everyone needs to be reeducated on this process and needs to be open to give this new system an opportunity to prove itself.” (educator)

## Activity 6

# A SMORGASBORD OF QUESTIONS TO PONDER

**PURPOSE:** Create an opportunity for deep dialogue to explore questions that are central to PBL and its implementation.

**MATERIALS:**

- Movable chairs
- Display technology or chalk/whiteboard

**TIME:** Wagon Wheel Alternative 30 minutes; Microlab Alternative 30 minutes

**FACILITATOR NOTE:** Both of these School Reform Initiative protocols create an opportunity for uninterrupted expression and active listening, allowing all participants an equal chance to be heard.

1. Wagon Wheel Alternative. This protocol requires a flexible room set-up, with groups of 6-8 chairs configured in the shape of a wagon wheel. The novelty of this configuration tends to heighten curiosity and buy-in. It's also an efficient way to give equal time to all voices, exploring four questions in multiple pairings.
2. Microlab Alternative. This protocol has participants form groups of three, to grapple with three core questions. Instructions to Microlab are found on page 33.

**FACILITATOR PREP:** After you choose the protocol that you feel best suits your context, you will choose the questions to have participants discuss in depth. (A starter list appears below). The Wagon Wheel protocol can include up to four questions, while the Micro-lab will address three. Choose wisely!

**STARTER QUESTION LIST:** (Feel free to adapt these questions for your needs.)

Focus on Learning

- What are the elements that create deep learning?
- What are the best ways for people to master new learning?
- What helps people retain their new learning?
- What is the role of the learner/student in education?
- What is the role of the educator/teacher in education?
- At several points in the video, both youth and adults say that proficiencies tell you more about learning than grades do. Why do they say that?
- Bob Greenleaf said, “The one who does the work is the one who learns.” What evidence of this did you see in the video?

### Focus on Implementation

- What are some of the challenges teachers face in implementing PBL?
- What are some of the challenges students face in PBL implementation?
- What are some of the key benefits of PBL implementation—for learners and for educators?
- In the video, some people talk about being “guinea pigs.” Why do you think they feel that way and how could that change?
- Does PBL look different in each content area or is it the same approach in every subject?
- Are there any content areas that are “naturally” consistent with PBL?
- What role might technology play in PBL?
- What are the pros and cons of letting schools figure out PBL for themselves?

### Focus on Culture

- How does a proficiency-based system affect school culture?
- What impact does PBL have on collaboration and competition?
- How do proficiencies help make the learning process equal for all students?
- How do grading systems and PBL systems handle struggle and failure in learning? Compare and contrast the approaches.

### Focus on Grades

- What is (or was) your relationship with grades as a student?
- What is the role of grades now in your school community?
- What does it mean to average a grade? What is the impact of averaging grades?
- How does a traditional grading system affect equitable access to a quality education?
- What is lost when grades are not central to assessment? What is gained?
- How do grades influence motivation? What are the incentives for doing well in this system?
- How do proficiencies influence motivation? What are the incentives for doing well in this system?

### Focus on Shifting Roles and Responsibilities

- How do student and teacher roles shift in a proficiency system?
- What are the challenges of shifting student roles to shared responsibility?
- What are the challenges of shifting the teacher role to guide and mentor?
- What are the pros and cons of co-creating learning scales? (That is, having learners and educators create them together?)

*One final note on questions: If you develop some questions of your own that really work, please share them with us at [helen@upforlearning.org](mailto:helen@upforlearning.org). They will make this guide better!*

## WAGON WHEEL INSTRUCTIONS

Adapted from the School Reform Initiative Wagon Wheel protocol: [schoolreforminitiative.org/protocol-alphabetical-list-2/](http://schoolreforminitiative.org/protocol-alphabetical-list-2/)

### SET-UP:

- ✦ Create wagon wheel groups with eight chairs, by putting four chairs with their backs to each other facing out, each at a 90-degree angle. Now put a chair facing each one of those on the inner hub. (Note: Depending on your group size, you could create a wheel with just six chairs in three pairings). See photos at right for reference.



### MATERIALS:

- ✦ Have the questions in written form visible for each round, on a projected slide or written on a chalk- or whiteboard.

### PROVIDE THE FOLLOWING INSTRUCTIONS:

- ✦ You will have an opportunity to explore four key questions about proficiency- based learning through this structured dialogue activity. I will pose a question, and you will have one minute to think about your response in silence.
- ✦ Then, each person in your pair will have a chance to talk UNINTERRUPTED for 2 minutes about the thoughts, feelings and questions raised by the prompt. The other person will be silent, doing active listening. This is not a discussion. If the person speaking has finished their reflections and time still remains, enjoy the silence. Sometimes the speaker will find more to say after thinking for a while.
- ✦ I will signal when it is time to switch talker and listener roles.
- ✦ After both people have had a chance to speak and listen, we'll take one more minute for open dialogue. When we finish with a question, I will ask you to shift chairs to create a new pairing.



### STEP 1: (1 minute)

- ✦ Ask partners to introduce themselves.

### STEP 2: In the first round only: (1 minute)

- ✦ Ask partners to reach a common understanding of the task by explaining the process to each other.

### STEP 3: (2 minutes)

- ✦ Read the question twice slowly. Point out where it is written on the slide or board. Provide one minute of silence for participants to think about the prompt.

**STEP 4: (5 minutes each round)**

- Identify the partner who will speak first, e.g.: The partner sitting on the inside now has two minutes to speak and share your thoughts. The partner on the outside will listen well. OK, go!
- Give the signal after two minutes when it is time to shift roles.

**STEP 5: (1 minute)**

- Invite discussion by saying: You now have one minute for open dialogue with your partner to finish off this round.

**STEP 6: (1 minute)**

- Invite partners to say good-bye and ask those seated in the outside wheel to stand up and move by rotating clockwise.

**STEP 7:**

- Repeat steps 1-6 three times, switching the person initiating the conversation first from the inside to the outside of the wheel each time. Participants will catch on to the pattern quickly and be ready for your prompts as the activity goes on.

**STEP 8: Reflection (up to 10 minutes)**

- Lead the full group in discussion on some or all of these questions:
  - What were some insights or themes about proficiency-based learning that emerged for you that you don't want to forget?
  - Were you surprised in any way(s)?
  - Did these discussions surface more questions for you? What are they and how might you get them answered?
  - What was your experience of the Wagon Wheel format itself? What are its advantages and disadvantages?



### Microlabs

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*Developed by Julian Weissglass for the National Coalition for Equity in Education based at the University of California, Santa Barbara; adapted in the field by educators.*

#### **Purpose**

Microlabs addresses a specific sequence of questions in a structured format with small groups, using active listening skills.

#### **Time**

About 8 minutes per question — this works best with a series of no more than 3 questions.

#### **Group Format**

Form triads — either with the people you're sitting near, or find others in the group you don't know well.

#### **Getting Ready**

The Facilitator spends time developing a sequence of questions that are appropriate to the purpose or focus of the conversation. The questions and their sequence are important. Consider how one question leads to another and increases reflection and risk.

#### **Process**

The facilitator says, "A series of questions will guide our discussion. Each person will have one minute (or sometimes, 2 minutes depending on the group and the questions) to respond to the question when it is their turn. While the person is speaking, the other two in the group will simply listen. When the time is up, the next person speaks, and so on. I'll let you know when it is time to switch." (It may be helpful to have a chime or audible signal.)

Emphasize the importance of honoring time: both bringing responses to a close when time is called and allowing for silence when a responder does not fill their time. Ask participants to number off within their triad #1, 2, and 3. Read the first question aloud twice. Offer a minute of "think time" to think and/or write in preparation. Be certain to tell the participants which order they will speak, and you might vary the order of each question. For example, begin with person #1, then #2, then #3. On the second question, begin with #2, then #3, then #1. On the third question, begin with #3, then #1, then #2.

#### **Debrief**

- What did you hear that was significant? What key ideas or insights were shared?
- How did this go for you? What worked well, and what was difficult? Why?
- How might your conversations have been different had we not used this protocol?
- What are the advantages/disadvantages of using this activity? When would you use this protocol?
- What would you want to keep in mind as someone facilitating this activity?

Protocols are most powerful and effective when used within an ongoing professional learning community and facilitated by a skilled facilitator. To learn more about professional learning communities and seminars for facilitation, please visit the School Reform Initiative website at [www.schoolreforminitiative.org](http://www.schoolreforminitiative.org).

## Activity 7

# HOW ARE PROFICIENCIES LIKE ADJUSTABLE SEATS?

**PURPOSE:** Explore the myth of average and its relationship to a traditional education system, applying this theory to the principles of proficiency-based learning.

**MATERIALS:**

- Computer/LCD/Speakers
- Todd Rose video: [youtu.be/4eBmyttcfU4](https://youtu.be/4eBmyttcfU4)
- Activity handout
- Writing utensils for all participants

**TIME:** 45-60 minutes

**FACILITATOR NOTE:** This video is a powerful catalyst for dialogue about many aspects of education. The intention of this activity is to have viewers relate implications of the myth of average to underlying principles of proficiency-based learning.

One compelling aspect of this video is that it highlights how the average hurts everyone, “even our best and brightest.” Frequently parents of high-achieving children fear that a move to proficiency-based learning will lead to education getting “dumbed down” in ways that will hurt their children. Todd Rose is currently on the faculty at Harvard—and was also a dropout. He repeatedly speaks about how directing education to a mythical average results in losing far too many “intellectually gifted” learners. This video and follow-up discussion may prove effective in shifting the mental models of this particular group of parents, and likely their children.

The goal, of course, is not to lose anyone. Proficiency-based systems provide a way to honor and optimize the potential in each child. Todd’s story about a little boy struggling to find his gifts in the sciences is an example. A proficiency-based system can serve as an antidote when children come to believe they are not capable, after repeated failures in a system that did not allow them to realize their potential.

The activity protocol below provides questions to help viewers engage thoughtfully with the video, followed by individual reflection and writing, paired discussion, and finally group dialogue. This sequence gives participants repeated opportunities to process the ideas.

**STEP 1: (1 minute)**

- Introduce the video (citing the purpose statement above might be enough) and hand out the “The Myth of Average Idea Catcher” to all participants, making sure they have a writing utensil. Instruct them to think about the two questions noted on the handout as they view the video, jotting down notes as they go.

**STEP 2: (18:26 minutes)**

- Play the video.

**STEP 3: (4 minutes)**

- Provide 4 minutes of silent time for participants to do their own thinking and writing in response to the two handout prompts.

**STEP 4: (4 minutes)**

- Have participants pair with another person and discuss their responses to the prompts.

**STEP 5: (12-27 minutes)**

- Facilitate an open discussion about the video and handout prompts. Any key points not made by participants can be wrapped into your closing reflections.

**FACILITATOR NOTE:** There are two very short and inspiring videos that have often been used in several UP for Learning initiatives. They highlight the frequency of wrong assumptions about intellectual potential and the power of self-expectations. Consider closing with either of them, to reinforce the message and offer further food for thought:

- Thumbs UP for Rock and Roll: [youtu.be/eaIvk1cSyG8](https://youtu.be/eaIvk1cSyG8)
- The Best Motivation Video Ever: [youtu.be/RmTxr7OsPj0](https://youtu.be/RmTxr7OsPj0)

# The Myth of Average Idea Catcher

A proficiency-based learning system is like an adjustable seat because....

Todd Rose says “average hurts everyone.” Why is this true in an educational setting?

# The Myth of Average Idea Catcher

## SAMPLE RESPONSES

A proficiency-based learning system is like an adjustable seat because....

- It honors that every learner is different and therefore must learn at their own pace and demonstrate learning in varied ways.
- It allows each learner to optimize his/her strengths by "adjusting their seat forward" and moving ahead faster than others at times, while at other times sliding the seat back to readjust after a challenging learning task where they struggled, or take more time to fully engage and master the material at hand.
- There is no judgement about the pacing of learning; varied learner pacing is an accepted norm.
- Without adjustable seats, people who have great potential and capacity are excluded or discouraged from trying new things. They are given a message that they "aren't right enough." Too many come to believe an implicit (and sometimes explicit) message that they are limited in capacity and give up. The same thing happens with learners—they give up and drop out. We can't afford to lose any learner in this way.

Todd Rose says "average hurts everyone." Why is this true in an educational setting?

- Children who have a particular strength or perform above average in a given academic area(s) are not challenged because they master this material easily and need more in order to learn to their potential and stay engaged.
- Children who simply need more time or varied ways to master a given academic area(s) come to doubt their basic intellectual abilities, and often feel hopeless or deficient and give up over time. We now know through science that the brain is like a muscle and will learn when it is used (neuroplasticity). When children who are struggling believe in their capacity, they are able to accomplish much more than they ever realized without that belief.
- Personalization of learning, which is at the heart of a proficiency system, allows each child to learn to capacity rather than a phantom average. Learning becomes transparent. The educator and learner are far more aware of their "jagged learning" profile and can utilize strengths to address areas that are more challenging. They can work together to actively shape learning.

## Activity 8

# GRADING: AN AVERAGE DOESN'T TELL THE WHOLE STORY

**PURPOSE:** Help participants understand a fundamental flaw in a traditional grading system when grades are averaged, and compare this to the way proficiencies focus on measuring learning.

**MATERIALS:**

- One handout for every 2 participants

**TIME:** 10 minutes

**STEP 1:**

- Pass out the handout Averaged Grades or Proficiencies (1 for every 2 participants).

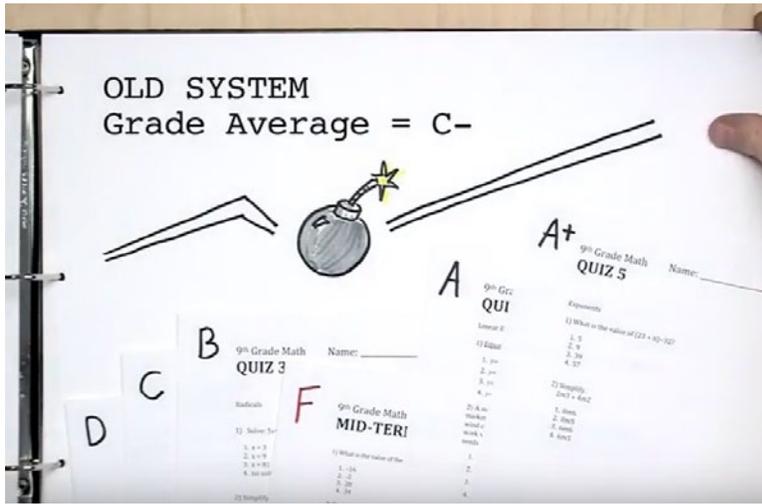
**STEP 2: (3 minutes)**

- Ask participants to make sense of these three pictures and what they reveal about the traditional grading system versus a proficiency-based system of assessment of learning. Ask them to think about the implicit messages of each system and the impact of these messages on the learner.

**STEP 3: (5 minutes)**

- Solicit insights from the group, ultimately reinforcing that once an individual has not performed well (or perhaps gotten a few zeros for missed assignments), they will never be able to bring their grade back up, even if they have mastered the material.

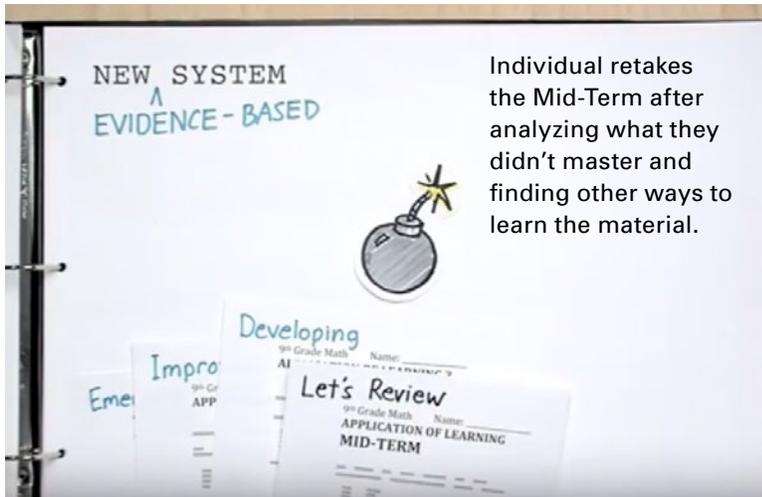
# Averaged Grades or Proficiencies: Which is a better measure of learning?



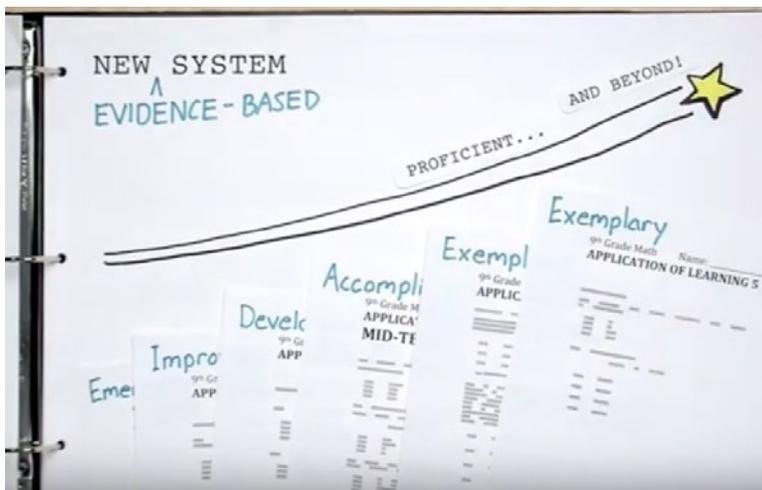
**What is the impact of each of these systems on the learner?**

**What are the implicit messages of each?**

**What are the benefits and challenges of these systems?**



Individual retakes the Mid-Term after analyzing what they didn't master and finding other ways to learn the material.



## Activity 9

# TEXT-BASED DISCUSSION OPTIONS

**PURPOSE:** Explore some key themes in proficiency-based learning implementation through short, compelling, and informative written pieces.

**MATERIALS:**

- Copy of the chosen written piece for each participant
- Writing utensil for each participant

**TIME:** 15-60 minutes

**OVERVIEW OF FACILITATION PROTOCOL OPTIONS:**

There are a number of engaging text-based discussion options to choose from. A suggested time requirement is noted, although this can be adjusted by the facilitator, giving less time for each person's reflection or creating smaller groups. Complete directions for each option follow this activity.

**TEXT RENDERING EXPERIENCE:** This protocol asks that participants identify and share a sentence, phrase and word from the given text. *Time requirement: 20 minutes.*

**FOUR "A" S TEXT:** This protocol requires the reader to identify Assumptions, what they Agree with, what they want to Argue with, and what was Aspirational about the text. *Time requirement: 5 minutes per participant plus 10 minutes to end the session: 20-40 minutes.*

**THE FINAL WORD:** Each person identifies and explains a meaningful quote from the text. Others in the group (4-8) briefly respond to the quote and the presenter's comments. *Time requirement: 48 minutes for groups of 6; 40 minutes for groups of 5; 32 minutes for groups of 4.*

**SAVE THE LAST WORD FOR ME:** Same as above except that the person only offers the quote initially, without any explanation.

**BLOCK PARTY:** Participants write down their chosen quote and then share this in pairs through a highly interactive "mingling" process. This works well with large groups. *Time requirement: 20 minutes minimum.*

**THREE LEVELS OF TEXT:** Participants respond to the text on three levels: 1) literal, 2) interpretation, and 3) implications for their practices/work. This protocol would be best suited to educators. *Time requirement: 5 minutes per person in a group; 20-40 minutes total.*

*"People will participate in learning activities that have yielded success for them and avoid those that have produced failure."*

—David Sousa, *How the Brain Learns*, 2017, p. 61

## OVERVIEW OF WRITTEN PIECES:

### GENERAL PROFICIENCY-BASED LEARNING TEXTS:

- ♦ **Why is Proficiency-based Learning Important.** The Vermont Agency of Education provides an overview on the why of proficiencies, focusing on equity, engagement through personalization, and the development of transferable skills. [education.vermont.gov/documents/why-proficiency-based-learning-important](https://education.vermont.gov/documents/why-proficiency-based-learning-important)
- ♦ **Ten Principles of Proficiency-Based Learning.** This piece was authored by the Great Schools Partnership and provides a succinct overview of PBL core attributes. [greatschoolspartnership.org/proficiency-based-learning/about-pbl-simplified/ten-principles-proficiency-based-learning](https://greatschoolspartnership.org/proficiency-based-learning/about-pbl-simplified/ten-principles-proficiency-based-learning)
- ♦ **Key Characteristics of a Proficiency-based Learning System of Education.** The Vermont Department of Education has outlined the priority components of an educational system along with indicators highlighting the features of a proficiency-based system. As schools move towards proficiency, this single-point rubric can be used to identify strengths as well as areas for improvement. The Indicators are: 1. Equity 2. Culture 3. Standards & Proficiencies 4. Learning: Curriculum, Instruction, & Assessment 5. Reporting, and 6. Structure/Organization/Scheduling. This text-based discussion will require a more significant time commitment, but will yield a rich understanding of proficiencies in the local context. [education.vermont.gov/student-learning/proficiency-based-learning](https://education.vermont.gov/student-learning/proficiency-based-learning)

### COLLEGE ADMISSIONS TEXTS:

- ♦ **How Colleges Evaluate PBL High School Transcripts: Insights for Students and Schools.** The Great Schools Partnership organization convened leaders of highly selective colleges in New England to provide answers to a common concern that proficiency-based learning and grading will disadvantage students in the college application and evaluation process. Their findings dispel this fear. [education.vermont.gov/student-learning/proficiency-based-learning](https://education.vermont.gov/student-learning/proficiency-based-learning)
- ♦ **70 New England Institutions of Higher Education State that Proficiency-based Diplomas Do Not Disadvantage Applicants.** This short piece summarizes higher education's support for proficiency-based transcripts. It lists 70 public and private institutions of higher education from across New England that provided statements and letters stating—unequivocally—that students with proficiency-based grades and transcripts will not be disadvantaged in any way. This list includes many “Ivy” and “Mini-Ivy” schools (e.g. Harvard, Tufts, Wellesley and Bowdoin). [greatschoolspartnership.org/proficiency-based-learning/college-admissions](https://greatschoolspartnership.org/proficiency-based-learning/college-admissions)



## Text Rendering Experience

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*Developed in the field by educators.*

### **Purpose**

To collaboratively construct meaning, clarify, and expand our thinking about a text or document

### **Roles**

A facilitator to guide the process

A scribe to track the phrases and words that are shared

### **Introduction**

Take a few moments to review the document and mark the sentence, the phrase, and the word(s) that you think are particularly important for our work. It can be helpful to number the paragraphs or pages.

### **Process**

It's okay if participants repeat the same sentence, phrase, or word.

#### **1. First Round**

Each person shares a *sentence* from the document that she/he thinks/feels is particularly significant.

#### **2. Second Round**

Each person shares a *phrase* that she/he thinks/feels is particularly significant. The scribe records each phrase.

#### **3. Third Round**

Each person shares the *word* that she/he thinks/feels is particularly significant. The scribe records each word.

#### **4. Discuss**

The group discusses what they heard and what it says about the document.

- What new insights have you gained about the text by looking at it in this way?
- What do you think this text is *essentially* about?

#### **5. Debrief**

The group debriefs the text rendering process.

Protocols are most powerful and effective when used within an ongoing professional learning community and facilitated by a skilled facilitator. To learn more about professional learning communities and seminars for facilitation, please visit the School Reform Initiative website at [www.schoolreforminitiative.org](http://www.schoolreforminitiative.org).



## Four “A”s Text Protocol

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*Adapted from Judith Gray, Seattle, Washington 2005.*

### **Purpose**

To explore a text deeply in light of one’s own values and intentions

### **Roles**

Facilitator/timekeeper (who also participates); participants

### **Time**

Five minutes total for each participant, plus 10 minutes for the final 2 steps.

### **Process**

1. The group reads the text silently, highlighting it and writing notes in the margin or on sticky notes in answer to the following 4 questions (you can also add your own “A”s).
  - What **Assumptions** does the author of the text hold?
  - What do you **Agree** with in the text?
  - What do you want to **Argue** with in the text?
  - What parts of the text do you want to **Aspire** to (or **Act** upon)?
2. In a round, have each person identify one assumption in the text, citing the text (with page numbers, if appropriate) as evidence.
3. Either continue in rounds or facilitate a conversation in which the group talks about the text in light of each of the remaining “A”s, taking them one at a time. What do people want to agree with, argue with, and aspire to (or act upon) in the text? Try to move seamlessly from one “A” to the next, giving each “A” enough time for full exploration.
4. End the session with an open discussion framed around a question such as: What does this mean for our work with students?
5. Debrief the text experience.

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## The Final Word

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*Adapted by Jennifer Fischer-Mueller and Gene Thompson-Grove.*

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this protocol is to give each person in the group an opportunity to have their ideas, understandings, and perspective enhanced by hearing from others. With this protocol, the group can explore an article, clarify their thinking, and have their assumptions and beliefs questioned in order to gain a deeper understanding of the issue.

### **Time**

For each round, allow about 8 minutes (circles of 5 participants: presenter 3 minutes, response 1 minute each for 4 people, final word for presenter 1 minute). Total time is about 40 minutes for a group of 5 (32 minutes for a group of 4, 48 minutes for a group of 6).

### **Roles**

Facilitator/time-keeper (who also participates); participants

### **Facilitation**

- Have participants identify one most significant idea from the text (underlined or highlighted ahead of time)
- Stick to the time limits
- Avoid dialogue
- Have equal sized circles so all small groups finish at approximately the same time

### **Process**

1. Sit in a circle and identify a facilitator/time-keeper.
2. Each person needs to have one most significant idea from the text underlined or highlighted in the article. It is often helpful to identify a back-up quote as well.
3. The first person begins by reading what struck him or her the most from the article. Have this person refer to where the quote is in the text - one thought or quote only. Then, in less than 3 minutes, this person describes why that quote struck her/him. For example, why does she/he agree/disagree with the quote? What questions does she/he have about that quote? What issues does it raise for her/him? What does she/he now wonder about in relation to that quote?
4. Continuing around the circle, each person briefly responds to that quote and what the presenter said, in less than a minute. The purpose of the response is:
  - To expand on the presenter's thinking about the quote and the issues raised for him or her by the quote
  - To provide a different look at the quote
  - To clarify the presenter's thinking about the quote
  - To question the presenter's assumptions about the quote and the issues raised (although at this time there is no response from the presenter)

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## Save the Last Word for ME

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*Developed by Patricia Averette.*

### **Purpose**

To clarify and deepen our thinking about a text

### **Roles**

Timekeeper/facilitator, who both participates and keeps the process moving

### **Time**

Approximately 30 minutes

### **Process**

- The process is designed to build on each other's thinking, not to enter into a dialogue.
  - Participants may decide to have an open dialogue about the text at the end of the 30 minutes.
  - Timing is important; each round should last approximately 7 minutes.
1. Create a group of 4 participants. Choose a timekeeper (who also participates) who has a watch.
  2. Each participant silently identifies what she/he considers to be (for her/him) the most significant idea addressed in the article, and highlights that passage.
  3. When the group is ready, a volunteer member identifies the part of the article that she/he found to be most significant and reads it out loud to the group. This person (the *presenter*) says nothing about why she/he chose that particular passage.
  4. The group should pause for a moment to consider the passage before moving to the next step.
  5. The other 3 participants each have 1 minute to respond to the passage — saying what it makes them think about, what questions it raises for them, etc.
  6. The first participant then has 3 minutes to state why she/he chose that part of the article and to respond to — or build on — what she/he heard from her/his colleagues.
  7. The same pattern is followed until all 4 members of the group have had a chance to be the presenter and to have the “last word.”
  8. Optional open dialogue about the text and the ideas and questions raised during the first part of the protocol.
  9. Debrief the experience. How was this a useful way to explore the ideas in the text and to explore your own thinking?

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## Block Party

### A Pre-Reading Text-Based Activity

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*Adapted by Debbie Bambino from Kylene Beers' pre-reading strategy.*

This activity can be used with a variety of texts, poems, articles, or whole books. It works well with large groups.

#### **Process**

1. Facilitator writes quotes on index cards prior to the session. You may choose one quote per participant, or repeat some quotes.
2. Participants randomly select quotes/cards and spend a few minutes reflecting upon their quote's meaning for them and their work. (3 minutes)
3. Participants mingle and share quotes in pairs. Participants are encouraged to share with 3 other participants in 5 minute segments. (15 minutes)
4. (Optional) Form triads or quads and share quotes and insights about the text and its implications for our work. (Extension: Speculate on the purpose/origin of the text.) (12-15 minutes)
5. As a whole group, share of ideas and questions raised by the experience. This can be done popcorn style or as a round, but is usually not a conversation. (10-12 minutes)
6. The facilitator shares the source of the quotes, posting the link, distributing the article etc. for future work. (1 minute)
7. Debrief the process. (5 minutes)

*Note: At the 2005 National Facilitator's Meeting in Chicago the following possibilities were shared:*

*1) Have participants exchange cards/quotes after each round, 2) Use this format to share end of year reflections or start-up aspirations, 3) Use quotes from longer pieces to open up the conversation in large, mixed groups where students and family members might have previously been excluded from the discussion of the material.*

Protocols are most powerful and effective when used within an ongoing professional learning community and facilitated by a skilled facilitator. To learn more about professional learning communities and seminars for facilitation, please visit the School Reform Initiative website at [www.schoolreforminitiative.org](http://www.schoolreforminitiative.org).



## Three Levels of Text Protocol

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*Adapted by the Southern Maine Partnership from Camilla Greene's Rule of 3 Protocol, November, 2003.*

### **Purpose**

This protocol is designed to deepen the understanding of a text and explore implications for participants' work. It asks participants to respond to 3 levels of the text: literal (level 1), interpretation (level 2), and implications (level 3)

### **Facilitation**

Stick to the time limits. Each round takes up to 5 minutes per person in a group. Emphasize the need to watch air time during the brief group response segment. Do 1-3 rounds. Can be used as a prelude to a text-based discussion or by itself.

### **Roles**

Facilitator/timekeeper (who also participates); participants

### **Process**

1. Sit in a circle and identify a facilitator/timekeeper.
2. If participants have not done so ahead of time, have them read the text and identify passages that they feel may have important implications for their work.
3. Do 1-3 rounds. A round consists of:
  - One person using up to 3 minutes to:
    - Level 1: Read aloud the passage she/he has selected. If another participant has previously read one of your passages, select another to read.
    - Level 2: Say what she/he thinks about the passage (interpretation, connection to past experiences, etc.)
    - Level 3: Say what she/he sees as the implications for her/his work.
  - The group responding (for a **total** of up to 2 minutes) to what has been said.
4. After all rounds have been completed, debrief the process.

## Appendix A

# Public Understanding & Support Assessment Rubric

This rubric spells out the process of shifting our stakeholders' mental models of education and learning to align with school redesign efforts. It should be used to:

1. Assess a community's baseline for mental models and understanding of Act 77 and proficiency-based learning.
2. Shape a communications campaign accordingly.
3. Track changes in community mental models as they evolve over time.

Building the public's understanding and support for educational change is a long-term process. It will typically take three to seven years, depending on the nature of your school and community, as well as the quality and persistence of your communications efforts.

**This rubric charts changes in the public's mental models over time, in the following sequence:**

**Pre-Awareness:** The stakeholder groups have little sense that there is any need for change. They are largely content with the present system and assume it is working well based on their current mental models of education and learning. Even if they are not fully content with the present system, they do not have the clarity or motivation to become involved in a change process.

**Awareness:** As our stakeholders move into "awareness," they begin to perceive that the present system may not be fully aligned with the future preparation requirements for students. They start to explore educational issues more deeply, recognizing their own preconceived notions of education and learning.

**Understanding:** Our stakeholders have begun to shift their mental models of education and learning. They understand what students will need to be well prepared for the future. They become aware of the gap between this new knowledge and elements of the present system. They begin to explore strategies to reduce the gap between their emerging mental model and current reality. They want to resolve the conflict between these two views of education and learning.

**Engagement:** Our stakeholders feel a responsibility to act on their new understandings of education and learning, and are primarily focused on doing this personally and within their own stakeholder groups.

**Support/Advocacy:** New norms emerge based on new understandings as the community develops a shared set of values in support of school redesign. All stakeholder groups can articulate clear benchmarks for education and learning. The community is engaged in supporting and advocating for change across stakeholder groups. The process becomes synergistic, as the combined efforts produce increasingly powerful results.

## Public Understanding & Support Assessment Rubric

# Knowledge of Act 77 & Proficiency-Based Learning

<b>CRITERIA</b>	<b>PRE-AWARENESS</b>	<b>AWARENESS</b>	<b>UNDERSTANDING</b>	<b>ENGAGEMENT</b>	<b>SUPPORT/ ADVOCACY</b>
Components of Act 77	Stakeholders have never heard of Act 77: Flexible Pathways. They have no understanding of dual enrollment, early college program, work-based learning, or virtual/blended learning opportunities. They have also not heard about Personalized Learning Plans.	Stakeholders have heard the terms Act 77 and have a general sense of the new legislation to support learning, but are generally unaware of the specifics.	Stakeholders have been exposed to explanations of Act 77: Flexible Pathways. They are aware of the varied new “external” opportunities and why the school is instituting Personalized Learning Plans.	Stakeholders have a good understanding of Act 77: Flexible Pathways and are able to explain the core components to others. They have a good grasp of the basics of the Personalized Learning Plan implementation and believe it will enhance learning.	Stakeholders have a good understanding of Act 77: Flexible Pathways and its major components and are convinced that it will enhance learning. They help build support for implementing the legislation in their schools and communities.
Awareness of Act 77 adoption in your community	Stakeholders are unaware of any local implementation plan, or the thinking behind this legislation.	Stakeholders are not clear about what the local district is planning regarding implementation of Act 77, or why this change is happening.	Stakeholders have some information about what Act 77 will mean in the day-to-day life of their local school. They are beginning to explore why this legislation was enacted.	Stakeholders have been asked for input regarding certain aspects of implementation and have an emerging understanding of why the legislation was enacted.	Stakeholders are contributing to the implementation of this legislation. They are informed supporters and advocates for the Act 77 redesign effort.
Awareness of proficiency-based learning	Stakeholders have little or no understanding of proficiency-based learning principles and practices.	Stakeholders have some limited understanding of proficiency-based learning principles and practices.	Stakeholders have been exposed to an explanation of proficiency-based learning principles and practices. They have a basic understanding how it will positively impact learning.	Stakeholders have a good understanding of proficiency-based learning principles and practices and can explain the core components of proficiency-based learning to others. They believe it will enhance learning.	Stakeholders have a good understanding of proficiency-based learning principles and practices and are convinced that it will enhance learning. They help implement this new system and build support for this shift in their schools and communities.

# Mental Models of Education

<b>CRITERIA</b>	<b>PRE-AWARENESS</b>	<b>AWARENESS</b>	<b>UNDERSTANDING</b>	<b>ENGAGEMENT</b>	<b>SUPPORT/ ADVOCACY</b>
<p>Collective versus individual mental model of education</p>	<p>Stakeholders believe that the purpose of education is for the individual child to succeed. If there is a problem with education, the responsibility rests with one (or more) of the three main “players”: students, parents, and/or teachers.</p>	<p>Stakeholders believe that the purpose of education is for each child to succeed, but begin to see a greater purpose that involves the collective good. If there is a problem with education, the responsibility still tends to be assigned to students, teachers, or parents. But growing awareness of the collective goal starts to reduce simplistic blaming.</p>	<p>Stakeholders believe that the purpose of education is to ensure that individual citizens engage thoughtfully in their community, state, country, and world. If there is a problem with education, the stakeholders now acknowledge that education is a collective issue and blame should not be assigned to just one party (students, teacher, parents). Instead, it must be addressed by the community at large.</p>	<p>Stakeholders believe that the purpose of education is to ensure a successful future for their community, state, country, and world. They believe that all stakeholders play a key role in making this possible. They understand that improving education will only happen through a collective effort that avoids blaming any single stakeholder group.</p>	<p>Stakeholders believe that the purpose of education is to ensure a successful future for their community, state, country, and world. They believe that all stakeholders play a key role in making this possible. They understand that improving education will only happen through a collective effort that avoids blaming any single stakeholder group. Based on this understanding, they assume an active role in the change process.</p>
<p>Understanding of the need to change education to meet demands of a changing world</p>	<p>Stakeholders believe that the most effective approach to education is to focus solely on reading, writing and arithmetic, known as the 3 Rs. These are the fundamentals and they haven’t changed for years. The solution is to “get back to basics.”</p>	<p>Stakeholders begin to understand that the changes in the world require changes in current educational practices. They begin to explore what these changes might look like, with some fear and skepticism about moving away from “the known.”</p>	<p>Stakeholders understand that it is important to continually remodel education to align with the demands of a rapidly changing world. Adult stakeholders accept that education will therefore “look different” from what they experienced when the primary focus was the “3 Rs.”</p>	<p>Stakeholders pursue information about how to better align education to ensure that young people are prepared for a rapidly changing world. They support current school redesign efforts based on this new understanding.</p>	<p>Stakeholders understand that schools have a responsibility to continually remodel education to align with the demands of a rapidly changing world. Stakeholder groups advocate for redesign efforts.</p>

<b>CRITERIA</b>	<b>PRE-AWARENESS</b>	<b>AWARENESS</b>	<b>UNDERSTANDING</b>	<b>ENGAGEMENT</b>	<b>SUPPORT/ ADVOCACY</b>
Alignment of learning and teaching practices with current research	Stakeholders have little or no awareness of the current research on teaching and learning that is driving change efforts. They do not feel a need to pursue this information.	Stakeholders have some awareness of the current research on teaching and learning that is driving change efforts. They are somewhat curious yet cautious about pursuing further information.	Stakeholders have a basic understanding of the current research on teaching and learning that is driving change efforts. They begin to see how this new understanding might apply to their own situations.	Stakeholders have a deep understanding of the current research on teaching and learning that is driving change efforts. They actively seek new information in order to better understand and support school redesign.	Stakeholders actively pursue new information to enhance their deep understanding of current research on teaching and learning. They continually integrate this new information into advocacy efforts to support school redesign.
Mental model of the scope of education	Stakeholders believe education is largely mastering basic content (English, social studies, science, etc). They do not believe that addressing social, emotional, and life skills (communication, problem-solving, collaboration) should be a responsibility of the school.	Stakeholders believe education is largely mastering basic content. They acknowledge that social, emotional, and life skill development (communication skills, decision making skills etc.) should also be addressed as a secondary goal by the school.	Stakeholders understand that learning must blend content mastery with social, emotional, and life skill development.	Stakeholders understand that learning involves mastery of both content and social, emotional, and life skills, and they apply this understanding to their own education and/or school redesign efforts.	Stakeholders understand the essential nature of learning as mastery of content and social, emotional, and life skill development. They expect these components in school redesign efforts. They advocate for learning that includes these elements on a school/district level.

# Mental Models of Learning

CRITERIA	PRE-AWARENESS	AWARENESS	UNDERSTANDING	ENGAGEMENT	SUPPORT/ ADVOCACY
Teacher and student roles in learning	Stakeholders believe that students learn best by passively absorbing content that others present (teacher-centered learning). They believe other methods will have a negative impact on learning.	Stakeholders have some awareness of student-centered learning, in which students take a more active role in shaping learning. They are somewhat skeptical that it can improve the learning experience and learning outcomes.	Stakeholders understand the basics of student-centered learning and its positive impact on student engagement and learning outcomes.	Stakeholders believe in the importance of moving toward student-centered learning practices to increase student engagement and learning outcomes.	Stakeholders advocate for increasing opportunities for student-centered learning in which students play an active role in their learning.
Student-teacher shared responsibility	Stakeholders believe sharing responsibility for learning has a negative influence on teacher's control over the learning experience and the students' level of respect for the teacher.	Stakeholders believe sharing of responsibility has a limited role in learning, but should be evident to some degree: e.g., chances for students to select topics or projects.	Stakeholders understand that shared responsibility in learning is central to engagement and learning outcomes.	Stakeholders value shared responsibility opportunities in learning and look for evidence of these options in school redesign efforts as an indicator of engagement and effective learning.	Stakeholders' support for shared responsibility in learning is the norm. They actively advocate for sustaining or expanding shared responsibility options school- and district-wide.
Perceptions of alternative learning pathways (rigor & equity)	Stakeholders believe "alternative" learning is less challenging or less rigorous. They believe it should be reserved for students who do not succeed in the regular classroom.	Stakeholders begin to understand alternative learning pathways can be rigorous in nature, but do not see them as valuable options for all students.	Stakeholders understand that alternative learning pathways are rigorous in nature and can benefit all students.	Stakeholders support and take full advantage of alternative learning pathways that are rigorous in nature and show benefit to all students.	Stakeholders advocate for alternative learning pathways at the school and district levels. They understand that offering alternative learning pathways for all students ensures equal access to a quality education.

<b>CRITERIA</b>	<b>PRE-AWARENESS</b>	<b>AWARENESS</b>	<b>UNDERSTANDING</b>	<b>ENGAGEMENT</b>	<b>SUPPORT/ ADVOCACY</b>
Impact of alternative pathways selection on post-secondary choices	Stakeholders believe that encouraging non-traditional pathways will hurt students' post-secondary choices.	Stakeholders begin to consider that non-traditional pathways for learning may not harm students' post-secondary choices.	Stakeholders believe that non-traditional pathways for learning create a strong foundation for post-secondary choices.	Stakeholders know that new student-centered pathways for learning are building life-long learning skills and will serve all students as they consider and pursue post-secondary choices.	Stakeholders help others understand that new student-centered pathways for learning are building life-long learning skills and will serve all students as they consider and pursue post-secondary choices.
Mental model of intelligence: Understanding of neuroplasticity	Stakeholders believe in fixed intelligence that is largely determined by genetics.	Stakeholders are aware of research that challenges the belief that intelligence is pre-determined.	Stakeholders understand that intelligence is not pre-determined (neuroplasticity of the brain). They begin to understand beliefs about intelligence negatively or positively influence learning.	Stakeholders understand the neuroplasticity of the brain and the importance of a growth mindset.	Stakeholders understand the neuroplasticity of the brain, and advocate for the promotion of a growth mindset in all aspects of school redesign.
Mental model of intelligence: Nature of expectations	Stakeholders' expectations of student performance are tied to assumptions about learning potential (some are smart, others are not).	Stakeholders begin to question their preconceived expectations of student performance that are based on a belief in fixed intelligence.	Stakeholders' expectations of student performance are beginning to shift based on a new understanding of the potential of all learners.	Stakeholders hold high expectations of all learners and encourage this understanding for those in their immediate sphere of influence.	Stakeholders hold high expectations for all learners and advocate for this in their school and community.
Mental model of motivation	Stakeholders believe that external (extrinsic) rewards (eg. grades, public awards) are the most effective means to promote motivation and learning. Stakeholders do not believe that students possess the motivation for self-directed learning.	Stakeholders see some limitations of extrinsic strategies to motivate learning and are curious about alternatives. Stakeholders are somewhat skeptical that students possess the motivation for self-directed learning.	Stakeholders understand intrinsic motivation is important to learning. They begin to explore and value strategies that build internal motivation. Stakeholders begin to believe that most students possess the motivation for self-directed learning, with adult support.	Stakeholders understand and value intrinsic motivation. They actively pursue strategies to increase it. Stakeholders believe students are able to take a significant role in directing their learning, with adult support.	Stakeholders know that internal motivation is the key to lifelong learning. They advocate for school redesign efforts that embody this principle. Stakeholders hold high expectations for students' self-directed learning capacity. Students direct their learning with confidence and competence.

## Appendix B

# COMMITMENTS

**One person speaks at a time**

**Ask if you wonder**

**No shame, no blame**

**Stay focused**

**Be fully present**

**Listen with an open mind**

**Speak your truth**

**Share the air time**

**Give gentle reminders**  
(if others stray from these agreements)



## Forming Ground Rules (Creating Norms)

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*Developed by Marylyn Wentworth.*

Gaining agreement around Ground Rules, or Norms, are important for a group that intends to work together on difficult issues, or who will be working together over time. They may be added to, or condensed, as the group progresses. Starting with basic Ground Rules builds trust, clarifies group expectations of one another, and establishes points of “reflection” to see how the group is doing regarding process.

### **Time**

Approximately 30 minutes

### **Process**

1. Ask everyone to **write down what each person needs in order to work productively in a group**, giving an example of one thing the facilitator needs, i.e. “to have all voices heard,” or “to start and end our meetings when we say we will.” (This is to help people focus on process rather than product.)
2. **Each participant names one thing from her/his written list**, going around in a circle, with no repeats, and as many circuits as necessary to have all the ground rules listed.
3. **Ask for any clarifications** needed. One person may not understand what another person has listed, or may interpret the language differently.
4. **If the list is VERY long — more than 10 Ground Rules — ask the group if some of them can be combined to make the list more manageable.** Sometimes the subtle differences are important to people, so it is more important that everyone feel their needs have been honored than it is to have a short list.
5. **Ask if everyone can abide by the listed Ground Rules.** If anyone dislikes or doesn’t want to comply with one of them, that Ground Rule should be discussed and a decision should be made to keep it on the list with a notation of objection, to remove it, or to try it for a specified amount of time and check it again.
6. **Ask if any one of the Ground Rules might be hard for the group to follow.** If there is one or more, those Ground Rules should be highlighted and given attention. With time it will become clear if it should be dropped, or needs significant work. Sometimes what might appear to be a difficult rule turns out not to be hard at all. “Everyone has a turn to speak,” is sometimes debated for example, with the argument that not everyone likes to talk every time an issue is raised, and others think aloud and only process well if they have the space to do that. Frequently, a system of checking in with everyone, without requiring everyone to speak, becomes a more effective Ground Rule.
7. **While work is in progress, refer to the Ground Rules whenever they would help group process.** If one person is dominating, for example, it is easier to refer to a Ground Rule that says, “take care with how often and how long you speak,” than to ask someone directly to stop dominating the group.
8. **Check in on the Ground Rules when reflection is done on the group work.** Note any that were not followed particularly well for attention in the next work session. Being sure they are followed, refining them, and adding or subtracting Ground Rules is important, as it makes for smoother work and more trust within the group.

Protocols are most powerful and effective when used within an ongoing professional learning community and facilitated by a skilled facilitator. To learn more about professional learning communities and seminars for facilitation, please visit the School Reform Initiative website at [www.schoolreforminitiative.org](http://www.schoolreforminitiative.org).