

# PROFICIENCY-BASED LEARNING IN A PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY (PLC)

## A Guide for Secondary PLCS in Granite School District

**i** Collaborative work with the professional learning community (PLC) process should pursue the **three big ideas of a PLC**:

1. *a focus on LEARNING rather than TEACHING: all students can learn at high levels*
2. *a collaborative culture*
3. *a results orientation in which collecting evidence of learning is essential*

Achieving these aims requires PLCs to address **the four critical questions of a PLC**:

1. *What knowledge, skills and dispositions should every student acquire as a result of this unit, this course or this grade level?*
2. *How will we know when each student has acquired the essential knowledge and skills?*
3. *How will we respond when some students do not learn?*
4. *How will we extend the learning from students who are already proficient?*

*(Dufour, DuFour, Eaker, Many, & Mattos, 2016).*

## CRITICAL QUESTION #1

**i** *What knowledge, skills and dispositions should every student acquire as a result of this unit, this course or this grade level?*

Because secondary collaborative teacher teams believe that all students can learn at high levels (big idea #1), they should start by identifying the most important knowledge, skills and dispositions every student should learn.

To accomplish this, PLCs should:

- Consult the district curriculum map and proficiency scales for the content/subject area.
- Determine and agree upon essential standards that must be taught in the unit, course or grade level.
- Work together to design engaging lessons and units of study and determine the evidence of learning that will be solicited from students.

## PBL Connection

*Grades should communicate students' current levels of learning on specific standards that have been explicitly taught.*

- Which standards/sub-standards will be reported on in gradebook? PLCs should agree on which standards will be reported on based on their discussion of what is most essential.
- Which standards can/should be combined when designing lessons and units of study?
- Which standards should not be reported on in gradebook, keeping in mind the most recent score on every standard average into the overall score/grade?
- How will student CHOICE and VOICE be considered when determining the learning evidence that will be collected?

## CRITICAL QUESTION #2

**i** How will we know when each student has acquired the essential knowledge and skills?

Secondary PLCs meet regularly to decide what evidence of learning they need to gather (big idea #2 & #3). Teachers need multiple ways to approach assessing the same learning standards. To accomplish this, PLCs should:

- Review the proficiency scale for the standard(s) – see the *PBL Library Tile on the GSD Portal*.
- Discuss the evidence of learning required (amount and type/modality).
- Develop and/or administer common formative assessments (CFAs).

### PBL Connection

*Students should be provided opportunities to demonstrate what they know and can do in a variety of ways.*

- Share ideas for assessing the same standard(s) in different ways (CONSIDER OBSERVING ONE ANOTHER).
- Create a list/menu of options students can choose from to demonstrate their understanding.
- Develop & use common rubrics to accompany project or performance-based learning evidence.
- Use the *School City* platform to find assessment items/prompts aligned by standard and proficiency level.

## CRITICAL QUESTION #3

**i** How will we respond when some students do not learn?

At the end of a unit of study, when a PLC determines which students have not yet demonstrated proficiency, they must then determine what to do next. To accomplish this, PLCs should:

- Compare proficiency data and look for trends (scores of 1, 2) in outcomes and instructional practices.
- Identify topics/concepts that need reteaching or additional practice.
- Brainstorm alternative resources/materials that can be used.
- Looks at students' history of homework & classwork completion to determine customized SKILL or WILL-based interventions.
- Review engagement of lessons and units of study for possible revision.
- Determine what will motivate and engage students in their own learning.

### PBL Connection

*Students should receive timely feedback and have access to meaningful, ungraded learning activities and practice that will help them improve their proficiency on specific standards.*

- Determine which students need additional practice and learning activities. Customize as needed.
- Communicate the importance and “WHY” of additional practice in improving learning (not just the grade).
- Work to establish a “learn” vs. “earn” classroom culture.

## CRITICAL QUESTION #4



*How will we extend the learning for students who are already proficient?*

At any time during a unit of study, when a PLC determines students have already demonstrated proficiency, they must then determine what to do next. To accomplish this, PLCs should:

- Compare proficiency data and look for trends (scores of 3 and above) in outcomes and instructional practices.
- Identify ways students can extend their understanding (**Analyze, Create, Evaluate**).
- Brainstorm instruction resources/materials that can be used

## PBL Connection

*Students deserve opportunities to achieve at high levels and clearly understand what is required to earn a 4 on any given assessment.*

- Determine which students are already proficient.
- Create a list/menu of options students can choose from to demonstrate their understanding at a higher level with a focus on offering alternatives, not just add-ons or additional work.
- Create rubrics that help students understand what learning evidence is required at each proficiency level, including level 4.

## HOMEWORK AS EXTRA PRACTICE

*Students should have access to meaningful, UNGRADED learning activities and practice that, with their full participation, can improve their proficiency on specific standards. Academic scores should reflect ability, not work habits or behaviors.*

John Hattie's (2009) meta-analysis suggest feedback has a positive influence on student achievement when students know the learning goal and receive suggestions related to reaching that goal. In PBL, homework's role is to serve as practice and a mechanism for formative feedback, both of which increase learning. When homework points are tied to completion, as they typically are in a traditional points-based system, the emphasis is on *doing* the work instead of *learning* (Townsend & Wear, 2020).

## Personalized Practice

- Acknowledge that not all students need the same type or quantity of practice. **Explain this to students.**
- Incorporate self-evaluation, reflection, and goal setting (Hattie, 2009) into your practice.
- Develop a unified "homework purpose statement" that communicates the WHY of homework in your department or school.
- Recognize the difference between lack of SKILL and lack of WILL. Some students may lack the skill or supports to complete learning activities and homework, while others choose to disengage. PLCs should strategize different responses and interventions.
- Keep the focus on *learning* rather than *earning/doing* (compliance).

## Four Criteria for Implementing Homework as Ungraded Practice

- Homework should not be part of the students' final grade.
- Students should receive feedback on homework that is assigned.
- Homework should be purposeful and connect to specific course standards.
- Teachers should regularly work with students who are struggling because they are not completing homework. Communicate concerns with parents.

## USING PORTFOLIOS AS EVIDENCE OF LEARNING

*Teachers are encouraged to “build a case” for proficiency by collecting multiple lines of evidence, in multiple modalities, of student learning.*

Not all standards are comprehensive enough to warrant assessing through a portfolio approach. PLCs should discuss which standards are most appropriately assessed with a collection of learning evidence.

### Portfolios ARE

- A means to break a standard down into smaller parts and collect evidence on those smaller parts; scaffold learning.
- A method for conducting regular “proficiency checks” and providing formative feedback during the learning process.
- A collection of evidence around a specific standard(s) that uses a standardized scoring criteria but allows students to collect/submit different learning evidence based on a differentiated approach.
- Intended to have scores that can be entered into gradebook at regular intervals.
- A method that allows students to collect/submit evidence in different modalities.
- A means to encourage students to participate in all classroom activities.
- A method to encourages students to think of grades as earned rather than something that “just happens” to them.
- An opportunity for student reflection, self-assessment, and choice (in determining learning evidence to submit); a means to promote student agency.

### Portfolios are NOT

- A means to assess student behaviors and compliance outside the core standard(s)\*
- A way to “count” homework in the academic grade or dock students for non-compliance.
- A way to “get around” PBL philosophy and guiding practice.
- A substitute for regular, on-going feedback.
- A reason to not enter regular scores in gradebook/Canvas.

\*Some USBE core standards include skills, dispositions and/or behaviors. If explicit in the core standard, it is appropriate to assess/collect evidence on these skills.