Preliminary Report – May 2021
Full Report Planned for Fall 2021

University of Vermont Department of Education
2021 Selected Improvement Plan Survey Results
Measuring Impact on Student Learning in a Proficiency-Based System

Introduction
Our Selected Improvement Plan focuses on CAEP Standard 4.1 - the impact of our graduates on student learning growth. In June 2013, the state of Vermont passed legislation in Act 77 which requires schools to develop personalized learning plans (PLPs) for each student in grades 7-12 that include flexible pathways to graduation. Flexible pathways include options like work-based learning, service-learning, and dual enrollment. This type of system requires a shift to proficiency-based education because student progress toward graduation is no longer based on seat time and grades. In this new paradigm, students navigate through middle and high school based on their attainment of skills and knowledge identified as proficiencies. These proficiencies are developed by each school district in alignment with the Education Quality Standards developed by the state.

The shift to proficiency-based education has been a complex undertaking for schools in Vermont. Though the requirement for personalized learning plans is specific to grades 7-12, the shift to proficiency-based systems is happening across all grade levels and content areas. The purpose of this Selected Improvement Plan is to examine the impact that our alumni have on their students’ learning in proficiency-based systems. The research findings will be used to improve how we prepare future teachers to effectively teach in a proficiency-based system.

Our overall objective is to answer this primary question—How do teachers define impact on student learning in a proficiency-based system?

Sub-questions include:

- How do alumni define student growth in a proficiency-based system?
- How do they implement principles of proficiency-based systems in their classrooms?
- What types of assessments do alumni develop and use in a proficiency-based system?
- How do school structures/policies support or interfere with implementation?
- How effective are proficiency-based systems for all students (e.g. students with special needs and ELLs)?
How do we collect data to answer these questions?
In accordance with our plan, data are collected using an online survey that includes both open-ended and closed-response items. The first iteration of the survey was administered in Spring 2018. This preliminary report includes some of the results of the second version of the survey, which was administered in Spring 2021.

How did we develop the survey?
The survey design process followed guidelines for development of high-quality survey instruments as outlined by Dillman, Smyth, and Christian (2014). This included a review in fall 2016 of existing literature on proficiency-based systems, including a survey featured in an American Institutes of Research study on teacher practices in proficiency-based education models (Haynes, et.al, 2016). This review informed the development of our survey framework which is aligned to our Selected Improvement Plan goals and objectives. It also informed, development of items for the initial survey draft. Three University of Vermont (UVM) educator preparation faculty participated in cognitive interviews about the initial draft, and their responses and comments informed revisions of survey items and structure. The survey was then piloted with two in-service Vermont educators who have expertise in proficiency-based learning, and was again refined based on their feedback.

The 2018 version of the survey was sent only to 2013 and 2014 alumx of UVM educator preparation programs who we were able to confirm were employed in Vermont schools in the 2017-2018 academic year. In Spring 2021, we expanded the survey population to include all licensed teachers in Vermont, and therefore added questions about the year and institution of initial licensure. We also added questions about opportunity to learn about proficiency-based systems during and after initial licensure. The survey items are available at https://www.uvm.edu/sites/default/files/College-of-Education-and-Social-Services/CAEP/New%20folder/2021_UVM_Educator_Preparation_Survey_SIP.pdf

When and how did we distribute the 2021 survey?
The survey was administered in February – March 2021 using the Qualtrics survey platform at UVM. In February 2021, we asked Vermont P-12 principals to distribute a link to the survey to all licensed teachers in their schools. In this email request we described the purpose of the survey and asked that in addition to sharing the link with teachers, that they also confirm the link was distributed and include the number of teachers who received the link so that we could calculate a response rate. We sent a reminder email in March 2021. Invitations were sent to 292 principals, 77 of whom informed us that they distributed the survey invitation and link.

What was the response rate?
Based on principal responses to our request that they distribute the survey link, we estimate that 2600 Vermont teachers (of approximately 7240 teachers working in Vermont schools [https://www.publicschoolreview.com/vermont/burlington-school-district/5002820-school-district] ) had opportunity to complete the survey. Of those, 365 entered the survey, and 269 who identified as licensed to teach in Vermont responded beyond this initial screening question. These 269 respondents represents a little over 10% of teachers who had opportunity to complete the survey. Based on the distribution strategy and response rate, it is unlikely that survey results are generalizable to all Vermont teachers. However, the results add to our evolving
understanding of how teachers are responding to policy that requires broad implementation of proficiency-based learning.

Who completed the survey (respondent characteristics)?
Initial licensure years ranged from 1965 to 2020, and years teaching (including 2020-2021) ranged from 1 to 56. The distribution of years teaching is shown in the chart below.

Most survey respondents completed their initial educator preparation at an institution other than UVM or through an alternative pathway. The distribution is shown in the chart below.
The highest level of education reached by most respondents is a master’s degree. The distribution is shown in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EDUCATION LEVEL</th>
<th>NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s Degree</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master’s Degree</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional Certification(s)</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctorate</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data on respondent endorsement areas, teaching grades, and teaching content areas will be available in the final version of this report anticipated for fall 2021.

**How will the survey results be analyzed?**
Data analysis will begin with creation of charts and tables from the raw data for each closed-response question. Charts and tables will also be created for data disaggregated by demographic variables such as institution for initial educator preparation, teaching grade span or extent of formal training in proficiency-based education. Open-response questions will be analyzed for themes or patterns. Results will be reviewed for themes, especially as they relate to the study questions. Results of UVM alumnx will also be compared to those of the 2018 survey.

**Responses by Question – UVM Licensure Program Alumnx - 2015 – 2020 (n=13)**

For this preliminary report, we focus on UVM alumnx who completed educator preparation programs since the 2013 passage of legislation and new rules in Vermont that mandate proficiency-based learning in grades 7 – 12. What follows is brief description of the group, their responses to questions about defining impact on student learning, and their advice to programs preparing teachers to work in proficiency-based education systems.

**Group Characteristics**
While this group of 13 represents only 5% of survey respondents, it experienced the most recent iterations of UVM educator preparation programs. As shown in the charts below, these respondents represent both undergraduate and graduate programs, had at least some opportunity to learn about proficiency-based education in their educator preparation programs, and work at all levels Pre-K through high school across seven different content areas.
**WHAT IS THE HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATION YOU COMPLETED?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor's Degree</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master's Degree</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctorate</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

UVM GRADS 2015 - 2020 (N=13)

**TO WHAT EXTENT DID YOU OR DID YOU NOT HAVE OPPORTUNITY TO LEARN ABOUT PROFICIENCY-BASED SYSTEMS DURING YOUR PREPARATION FOR LICENSURE?**

- Explicitly taught and modeled in most courses and field experiences: 6
- Taught and/or modeled in one or two courses or field experiences: 7

UVM GRADS 2015 - 2020 (N=13)

**WHICH AGE GROUP(S) OR GRADE LEVEL(S) DO YOU WORK WITH THIS YEAR?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-K</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Level</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

UVM GRADS 2015 - 2020 (N=13)
Defining Impact

I know my students are learning when:

- They are engaged and having well thought group discussions
- They can independently apply a taught strategy across contexts. Or when they can go back and correct their own mistakes with or without prompting.
- They complete formative and summative assessments
  They participate in class
  They reach out for help
- data gathered from formative and summative assessment suggests students are making progress towards learning targets
- They can show me their thinking.
- They are able to make connections and apply critical thinking to a task.
- Perform skills with content, or apply old skills to new situations.
- They are engaged and curious.
- They can show me or tell me how they understand the skill.
- They demonstrate to me that they can produce their second language, either written, spoken, or hear a second language based on what they currently know.

Please describe in a few sentences what "student learning" means to you.

- When a student is interested in learning more and pushes themselves to learn.
- Growing in knowledge and ability to apply skills to in context and out of context situations.
- Student learning means that students are gaining something new, whether that be knowledge or an experience.
- To me, student learning means student academic achievement as measured by classroom assessment as well as social emotional gains also measured by classroom assessment.
- It means understanding a process and being able to problem solve.
• in science we have the NGSS 3-D learning. Student learning to me really means they can describe cross-cutting concepts like mathematical patterns or cause/effect in a science and engineering practice like developing a model or writing a CER.
• The ability to recognize concepts and apply skills in new situations, both in and out of the classroom.
• Student learning means that students are working through challenging concepts to have a deeper understanding.
• They have a deep understanding of a skill.
• Student learning is a relationship between a student and a teacher to help said student understand and use the concept, material or knowledge that is presented or instructed. Much of student learning depends on where students are currently at, and then a demonstration of being able to use that knowledge as well as potentially going slightly beyond that initial production of learning.

Please describe how you know whether your instruction is making a positive difference for student learning.

• Conversation is a big thing in my classroom.
• When I see that a strategy is being applied with fidelity independently in the general education classroom.
• I know that my instruction is making a positive difference for student learning when they show up to class and participate. Especially for students who are attending school virtually, I know that it is easier to "hide" when they are at home. For some students, just logging in to the Google Meet is a win. I also gave my students end of course surveys, so I have their responses as a more concrete reflection of making a positive difference.
• I know my instruction is making a positive difference on student learning by comparing student performance on diagnostic assessment with data gathered from formative assessment throughout the instruction and summative assessment at the end of instruction. If the comparisons indicate movement towards a learning target, I know my instruction is making a positive difference.
• They leave with a feeling of accomplishment or wanting to ask more questions.
• I am making a positive impact when students are able to complete high level work with more independence. As the year progresses I provide less scaffolding on our work and I know students are learning when they no longer need the same amount of structure and scaffolding as the beginning of the year.
• Increases in performance metrics (ex: improvement on rubric, other grading criteria)
• Student conversation (ex: said to a peer - "This was that term from that class.")
• Observation (ex: more self-direction in assignment two vs assignment one).
• Formative assessments and critically analyzing student data.
• by the data in the assessment and the quality of their work.
• I know that my instruction is making a positive difference when my students progress in their proficiency and thus their ability to use the language in a variety of ways.
Suggestions for Educator Preparation Programs

What suggestions do you have for higher education programs that are preparing students to work in proficiency-based education systems?

- Explain differentiation more
- Model it, model it, model it. Teach the teachers the way you want them to teach. Lecturing about how to teach in a proficiency-based way is more harmful than helpful. Bake student agency and choice into teaching programs and you will prepare teachers to do the same in their own classrooms. Make sure that proficiency-based expectations are not just around homework, but truly part of what happens in the classroom as well. Teaching a class that is lecture based with set trajectories and ways to respond while in class, but having choice outside of the classroom in not enough. Expectations need to be set that proficiency-based and learning objectives are a consistent thread through the syllabus, learning experiences and outside work, not just one aspect of the course. Honestly this could be better modeled in how programs are structured as a whole as well, but it involves active feedback and a better mentoring system to support that same work by the teachers.
- Come see what we’re doing at ______________! I feel very strongly that our proficiency based grading system is high quality and should be a model for other schools.
- Perhaps specifically introducing pre-service teachers to concepts from Hattie's Visible Learning. I feel that we often focus so much time and effort on teaching strategies that matters little in terms of student achievement (i.e. grading that involves writing feedback on every single students paper) when that time could be dedicated to strategies that have a much larger impact. Grading that way, for example, works in a traditional grading system but when all students much reach proficiency the inefficacy of the strategy really shows up.
- I would suggest more work with making on the stop changes when things are not working. How to pivot and adapt in the moment both with a lesson and class social situations.
- We need a clearer idea of proficiency-based systems. When do we start collecting data? How do we manage student's social-emotional learning if we collect 1's on assessments at the beginning of a unit as they build knowledge? How do we get 3 authentic pieces of evidence for each standard? What does it look like to do incorrect proficiency based grading?
- As a UVM M.A.T. alum, most of the preparation was directly applicable and indeed essential for implementation of PBE systems. One important facet of PBE that was how varied standards are from school to school. More exemplars of how day-day teaching of standards integrated into graduation requirements would have been helpful. Because it seems like every school does things differently, the aim shouldn't be to chronicle all forms of PBE, but rather to expose students to the categories of PBE standards, such as skill vs content standards, sequential vs non-sequential standards, and single class vs multi-class standards (i.e., you show certain standards in select classes vs showing any standard in any class).