Competency-based Education

Franklin West Supervisory Union - Focusing Assessments on Knowledge Transfer

How does your organization define competency-based education?

In FWSU, proficiency (competency/mastery) is defined as a demonstration of progress, seen via a body of evidence, in an articulated set of prioritized, cross-cutting transferable skills. At any juncture when reporting proficiency, a student must be "advancing: making progress, going forward, accomplishing." Exhibitions of learning, with evidence of growing proficiency, are gleaned from coursework, personalization, and flexible pathways. This "body of evidence," represents this continuous progress and is the exhibition platform for demonstrating proficiency. There are no grades. There is a shift to a proficiency transcript.

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Overview

Our schools have developed targets and scales for academic content that are more "friendly" to the integration of transferable skills. This shared work has evolved into a variety of focused pathways that have allowed schools to move forward with innovations in both formative instruction and assessment.

Some grade clusters are working on the management and the collection of benchmarks. As noted, some teachers are working on how to connect participation to self-directed learning. Another school had evolved the work into a focus on pedagogical frameworks; by using a workshop model

from one of our elementary schools for both literacy and math, which clearly embeds practices for first instruction, differentiation, formative and math. This school has created an observation tool for students and teachers to ensure fidelity of implementation. This formative evidence helps to assess the implementation of a structure. The students have become so familiar with the structure that learning ownership has increased.

To achieve a deeper understanding of transfer of knowledge through assessments, BFA High School has developed an embedded professional learning model using a "Frankenfolio." Groups of teachers contribute actual student work representative of proficiency-based learning evidence and use a protocol to collaboratively analyze this authentic student work, assessing the transferable skills through a variety of content performances. In addition, they are working in department to implement single point rubrics to help students both personalize and move assessment artifacts forward in a continuous improvement model. The Physical Education staff have created benchmarks for transferable skills to create a life-long wellness plan that is personalized for each student.

Beliefs

Continuous improvement in Proficiency-based Personalized Learning, as articulated in Vermont's Act 77, continues to be a major anchor for our schools. In addition, our Action Plan for Continuous Improvement is a major driver. The goal of deepening understanding and providing responsive feedback puts students at the center. Philosophically, we are not interested in checklists; our goal is continuous growth in learning for all learners.

Rationale

Vermont's Act 77, Action Plan for Continuous Improvement, Vermont's Education Quality Standards, and developing Multi-tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) all guide our student-centered approach.

Outcomes

One elementary school has seen an increase in instructional time for students. Teachers deepened their understanding of a workshop model in math and literacy, and quality and integrity of instruction and assessment increased. They have gained quality learning time due to a shared framework of common instructions and assessments that was referenced earlier.

BFA High School is moving toward a system focused on learning rather than content delivery, which teachers support and are excited by.

Another elementary school had focused on our Local Assessment Plan and a process for analyzing data and providing approaches to embed intervention along with a learning continuum for all students, thereby reducing the need for intensive academic supports. Thereby, increasing the number of students demonstrating proficiency at earlier grades. The same elementary school had worked to make connections with responsible and involved citizenship (transferable skills) and academic achievement, addressing a problem of practice - what does evidence look like in a PBIS

model?

Surprises

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At Georgia Elementary & Middle School, we were surprised by the commitment to training in project-based Learning to shift instruction and assessment to be more personalized and authentic.

Overall, most schools have moved through change stages and we have found that people can tolerate more ambiguity than they previously were able to.

Trade-offs

Generally, our biggest shifts have been trading off the comfortable and predictable for the unknown and messy, and trading off teacher control to student-owned learning, which is shifting teachers' roles.

Specifically, reimagining time and giving up concept of "units" is an adjustment, but time is looked at differently. Even in athletics, losing the concept of eligible/ineligible without grades creates some messiness.

Considerations

We have a few considerations and words of advice:

- Change theory and change cycles matter. Using an implementation science "approach" is helpful - explore, plan, launch, sustain.

- Staffs can survive rapid prototyping if transparency and support are priorities. Support comes in the form of the time and resources to for people to do the work.

- Be clear about your invitations to innovate: you cannot fall in love with everything you try, because you may abandon it or it will be modified as it is scaled up.

- Administrators must be learning along with the teachers. They do not have to be experts. Collective professional expertise moves a work in-progress forward much more efficaciously.

- Breathe throughout the work, you don't have to wait until everything is perfect.

- This work is not a "do it, you're done" model. Be mindful of the greatest influences on change of practice: vision, collaboration, consultation, opportunities to implement and share and