Introduction

The Proficiency Based Learning Family Guide is intended to inform members of our school community of the tenets and practices associated with learning in RSU 5. High standards that focus on skill development rather than seat time help us actualize our district mission:

To provide our students with a world-class education that will challenge minds, engage creativity, develop self-discipline, and advance inherent strengths.

Our goal is to see all students achieve at high levels by taking a preK-12 systemic approach to proficiency based learning. Our frameworks are aligned to state and national academic standards and identify the essential skills and understandings that all students must be able to demonstrate.

Our system is designed to do the following:

- Provide the conditions necessary for all students to achieve their highest potential;
- Measure and accurately reflect student achievement;
- Use high quality feedback to support the learning process and encourage student success;
- Assess and report academic achievement and learner behaviors separately;
- Use a common lens to accurately, consistently, and fairly score the quality of student work;
- Provide opportunities for students to engage in relearning and reassessment;
- Increase student success through early intervention;
- Provide clear, meaningful achievement information to students, parents, and institutions of higher learning.
We are...

**Learner-centered**
We believe that when we take responsibility for our learning, we are empowered to become collaborative learners who seek support when needed and are self-directed.

**Critical Thinkers**
We believe that when we examine a problem from multiple perspectives with an open mind and a questioning spirit, we are able to enrich our understanding of the world.

**Effective Communicators**
We believe that when we articulate our thoughts and listen actively, we are able to effectively engage others, collaborate within our community, and reflect on our strengths and weaknesses.

**Problem Solvers**
We believe that when we take initiative, use a variety of approaches and strategies, and learn from both our successes and failures, we are able to solve complex and important problems.
Proficiency-Based Learning refers to systems of instruction, assessment, grading, and academic reporting that are based on students demonstrating that they have learned the knowledge and skills they are expected to learn as they progress through their education. Standards serve as descriptions of what students are expected to know and be able to do. Teachers formally communicate progress toward these standards through trimester report cards.

In the “Information Age,” students must be prepared with skills to be successful in a highly competitive and rapidly changing global job market. Proficiency-based learning is a way of teaching, learning, and assessing that involves the following:

- **Clearly Defined Standards:** Stating what students need to know and be able to do;
- **Transparent Assessment Practices:** Communicating levels of achievement by standard, and separating out the content standards from the habits of work;
- **Supporting All Students:**
  - Creating plans for students who haven’t met the standards; and
  - Extending learning for students who are already proficient.
Grading and Assessments

In a proficiency-based learning model, a student’s content area grade (math, reading, science...) is determined from assessments of the content-based standards. There are two types of assessments:

**Formative Assessments**

Formative assessments are opportunities for students to practice and receive feedback on their learning, and that do not impact their final grade. Examples of formative assessments include observations, some class work or homework. They typically explain to what extent a student is learning a concept, skill or a knowledge set which in turn informs the teacher of what needs to be taught next.

**Summative assessments**

Summative assessments determine academic achievement. They are comprehensive measures of a student’s ability to demonstrate concepts, skill, and knowledge. Examples of summative assessments include research projects, presentations, labs, essays, tests, papers, and other performance tasks. Each summative assessment is linked to at least one content area (science, math art...) standard.

One way to think about the difference between formative and summative assessment is to liken them to athletics or performing arts. A soccer team, for example, practices and scrimmages (formative assessments) to prepare for the games (summative assessments). A drama production has multiple rehearsals (formative assessments) prior to the actual show (summative assessment).
What Grading Scale will Teachers Use?

For each standard, teachers develop scoring rubrics that make clear the criteria that a student will have to meet in order to receive a proficient grade. The chart below defines the grade scale for both content and habits of work.

The Grading Scale:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proficiency Level</th>
<th>Designation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Distinguished</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Developing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Beginning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Not Assessed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What supports are available for students who are not meeting standards?

From the very start of a child’s education in RSU 5, teachers differentiate for all students. In addition to identifying what it means to meet the standard, teachers identify ways that students can extend the standard through more complexity.

Identifying and closing learning gaps early for at risk students is one of the best strategies to ensure proficiency.

Students that receive special education have individualized education plans (IEPs). A proficiency-based system focuses on meeting standards identified on IEPs for students who have defined disabilities.
Habits of Work

Students will also be assessed for Habits of Work. Habits of Work are an essential part of a student’s success in school and beyond. There is a clear correlation between quality Habits of Work, academic achievement and learning. Strong Habits of Work almost always result in high levels of learning and achievement and solid Habits of Work prepare students well for college and career endeavors. Habits of Work are reported separately on the report card.

The following Habits of Work are assessed:

**Respect**: respecting the ideas, feelings, and property of others

**Preparedness**: demonstrating timeliness, organization, & assignment completion

**Engagement**: demonstrating participation, interpersonal involvement, and a productive approach to group-work

**Determination**: demonstrating the ability to self-assess and persist, using feedback effectively
Frequently Asked Questions

1. What will happen if my child is already proficient at a standard?

   Your child’s teacher may respond to this in different ways depending upon the learning targets, subject area, and the degree of mastery. A teacher may choose extension activities that deepen the learning in that content area. She may accelerate the work by accessing standards at the next grade level. At times a teacher may expand the learning to include a different but related standard.

2. How will I know how my child compares to other children in his or her grade level?

   Parent teacher conferences are a great place to ask this question. Our goal, however, is to provide information based on a grade level learning progression, not by sorting students. The transparency of rubrics can help identify strengths and areas for improvement. Exemplars of student work can also provide feedback on student progress.
Glossary

**Formative Assessment:** snapshot measure that captures a student’s progress in the learning process. These assessments inform the teacher of what the student has learned and what skills to reteach before assessing for proficiency.

**Habits of Work:** identified traits or behaviors that promote and are essential to learning. These traits or behaviors are assessed separate from academic learning.

**Learning Targets:** day to day learning objectives

**Performance Indicators:** demonstration of learning students will do to meet the standard; measurable. Performance indicators provide more specific descriptions of what it means to meet a content area standard. Usually, when students engage in a summative assessment aligned with a particular standard, it is at the performance indicator level against which they are assessed.

**Proficiency:** demonstration of student performance on each performance indicator of a standard against detailed scoring criteria.

**Proficiency-Based Learning:** systems of instruction, assessment, grading, and academic reporting that are based on students demonstrating that they have learned the knowledge and skills they are expected to learn as they progress through their education.

**Rubric:** an assessment tool used to define levels of proficiency.

**Scoring Criteria:** a set of descriptors of the various levels of proficiency for each performance indicator related to the standards.

**Standard:** broad statement of key learning that all students are expected to demonstrate

**Summative Assessment:** used to evaluate student learning, skill acquisition, and academic achievement at the conclusion of a defined instructional period—typically at the end of a project, unit, course, semester, program, or school year; they are generally evaluative, rather than diagnostic.