Assessing Multiple Pathways: Recognizing Student Learning in Career and Technical Education Programs and Other Experiences

What you need to know

• Students attain proficiency on graduation standards and the Guiding Principles by demonstrating their knowledge and skills on performance indicators.

• Students can accumulate evidence of learning from a variety of tasks in a variety of courses, programs, and experiences.

• In Maine, it is the responsibility of the diploma-granting school to determine if students have met their district’s graduation standards, regardless if the learning occurs in a Career and Technical Education (CTE) program, an alternative program, or another approved experience.

What you need to do

• Identify the specific performance indicators through which students will demonstrate proficiency to meet each graduation standard.

• Collaborate across CTEs and sending high schools to identify learning standards achieved by students at the CTE and how this achievement aligns with the performance indicators and/or graduation standards.

• Ensure students can demonstrate proficiency through diverse learning experiences within and beyond the school, and promote those diverse opportunities.

Timeline

Spring, 2017 and beyond

Reminder: The steps we recommend and the resources we provide are grounded in the PBL Simplified Model we have created and assume a general level of familiarity with it.

Establishing the requirements for earning a high school diploma is a local decision, and these decisions may vary among sending schools within a Career and Technical Education (CTE) region. Selecting graduation standards and performance indicators required to demonstrate proficiency are local decisions. By encouraging student engagement in CTE or other learning pathways, schools implicitly bear an onus of responsibility to those students to identify every valid means by which they may attain proficiency toward graduation standards while “off campus.”

The Maine Revised Statutes (Chapter 207-A, subchapter 3, §4722-A, and §4725) for the proficiency-based diploma highly encourage multiple and diverse learning opportunities and pathways, including career and technical education, to achieve learning standards. Per the statute, students who are not involved in CTE programs must be engaged in educational experiences relating to ELA, math, science, and technology in each year of the student’s secondary schooling. Students who are involved in CTE programs must be exposed to all content areas of learning standards at least through grade ten. All of the learning that occurs when a student participates in programs and courses, both at a student’s diploma-granting school and other institutions, becomes part of the body of evidence needed to graduate. Thus, assessment scores from tasks aligned to specific performance indicators from all external programs are included in the aggregation of scores from tasks completed in the diploma-granting school. These scores are then used to make a final determination of graduation standard proficiency in each content area.

Current Maine statute allows students to substitute demonstrated achievement of the Maine science standards with successful completion of CTE courses that form a full program and passage of the aligned external or third party CTE
examination. While this approach may provide an incentive for students to enroll in CTE programs, it doesn’t take full advantage of the promise of a proficiency-based system. To recognize the rich and valuable learning taking place in CTE programs aligned with other content areas, we recommend that schools engage in the strategies outlined below.

The first step is to crosswalk the CTE course performance indicators or industry standards with the performance indicators from each content area of the diploma-granting school. Proficiency is not about taking specific courses. The vision of multiple pathways is to support the demonstration and achievement of learning standards through a variety of learning activities in a variety of settings. CTE students should be assessed on performance indicators within their program. When CTE program performance indicators also align with those from content area graduation standards at the diploma-granting school, proficiency achieved will be recognized in both settings.

While time and logistics may be daunting, collaboration among content area and CTE teachers is recommended. This will facilitate—among others—reaching agreement regarding common performance indicators and scoring criteria from their respective courses and programs and lead to increased learning pathways for students.

To ensure achievement of graduation standards, diploma-granting schools should maintain a record of achievement of any performance indicators regardless of the learning setting that leads to meeting the school’s unique graduation standards.

The advantages of this system for the student are many. Students engage in multiple ways to demonstrate achievement of performance indicators and, with both school-based and external coursework in the mix, a checks and balances system emerges. While time may not allow students in alternate pathways to engage in the same number or type of core courses as other students at the diploma-granting school, recognizing external/CTE-based learning encourages students to engage in pathways that meet their aspirations and interests. Finally, coordinating this learning can also prepare students for the current set of required grade 11 state assessments.

Schools will need a process for assisting those who supervise students in field experiences to accurately and fairly define, select and assess evidence aligned with performance indicators relevant to the student learning experience. This illustrates the importance of creating and implementing task-neutral scoring criteria (see link below) for each content area performance indicator. Such criteria define expected performance levels for students, increasing the likelihood of reliable judgments on different pieces of student evidence—as long as the assessments being scored are designed with the same performance indicator(s) in mind.

The work of promoting and offering pathways should not pit one school, CTE center, or program against another, but rather allow and support students to meet common learning expectations through diverse opportunities in multiple settings. Some educators may feel that their programs are not as valued or respected as traditional academic classes, but a multiple pathways approach to proficiency supports all students to learn in more personalized ways. Using common scoring criteria, multiple pathways for learning can provide additional evidence of progress toward the same common goal. Rather than a tug-of-war between courses and programs, we envision a shared focus on helping students meet graduation standards.

Resources

- Maine Certified Industry Standards
- Colorado Career and Technical Education Standards and Academic Alignment
- Assessment Pathways as a Means to Ensure Equity, Rigor, and Personalization for All Students
- Assessment Pathways: Evidence of Learning
- Designing Personalized Learning Pathways: Best Practices from Vermont
- District Policy Exemplar: Multiple Pathways
- Maine Department of Education: Maine Proficiency Diploma Requirements Beginning 2020-2021
- Video: Flexible Pathways to Graduation: Six Vermont High School Students
- Scoring Criteria: Design Guide
- Maine Department of Education Update: Meeting at the Crossroads: Identifying pathways to proficiency through technical programs, mathematics and English language arts