



219 North Main Street, Suite 402
Barre, VT 05641 (p) 802-479-1030 | (f) 802-479-1835

MEMORANDUM

TO: Superintendents
FROM: Jess DeCarolis, Division Director, Student Pathways
Pat Fitzsimmons, Program Manager, Proficiency-Based Learning
SUBJECT: Proficiency-Based Graduation Requirements – Status Update Survey
DATE: August 7, 2019

Proficiency-Based Graduation Requirements Status Update

As we near the 2020 goal for students graduating with personalized learning plans (PLPs) in a proficiency-based system, all public schools serving secondary students should have proficiency-based graduation requirements (PBGRs) and PLPs in place. A key attribute of high-quality PBGRs are performance indicators. Performance indicators are essential for clarifying expectations of what students should know, understand and be able to do, and for providing some flexibility regarding how graduation requirements are met. This flexibility is helpful to all students, and essential for those students who need additional supports and/or are engaged in flexible pathways to graduation. Transfer students also benefit when the enrolling school can connect performance indicators that have been achieved to their PBGRs.

We realize that the summer is a time of transition (and hopefully rest) for all educators, and therefore we are not requesting any information at this time. Rather, this memo serves to inform you that a follow-up request for the information detailed below will be sent this fall:

1. Proficiency-Based Graduation Requirements and related Performance Indicators;
2. Learning Targets associated with Performance Indicators, if available;
3. The articulated process used for determining requirements that have been met for students transferring into a system;
4. PLP samples and/or templates; and
5. A description of your personalized learning planning process.

This memo also serves to draw your attention to a critical design consideration related to personalized, proficiency-based education.

Linking PBGRS to coursework, and compliance with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires schools to provide students with disabilities the same opportunities for education as students who do not have a disability. The Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) sections of IDEA (20 U.S.C. §1414(d)(1)(A))

require that students with disabilities “be involved in and make progress in the general education curriculum.”

It is essential that PBGRs and expectations for proficiency – as well as PLPs and the personalized learning planning process - are transparent and accessible to students, families, and community members. It has come to our attention that in some schools students can only meet certain proficiencies by taking specific classes, with no alternative means to demonstrating proficiency. This limitation can make it difficult for students with disabilities to meet graduation requirements and could potentially be a violation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

The AOE does not believe that local education agencies (LEAs) would intentionally link PBGRs to coursework to complicate or prevent students with disabilities from accessing their education or graduating with their peers. However, the AOE cautions LEAs linking PBGRs to specific coursework to be aware of the risk to FAPE, and to address this possibility as a part of determining student pathways to graduation or when refining or developing PBGRs. Additionally, LEAs should consider how a coordinated approach to curriculum and PLP development can lead to the attainment of proficiency for all students.

LEAs linking PBGRs to coursework are encouraged to do one or more of the following, to ensure all students are provided equitable opportunities to demonstrate proficiency and meet all PBGRS:

- Link each PBGR to multiple learning opportunities
- Ensure that every student’s pathway to graduation includes courses and learning opportunities that meet the LEA’s PBGRs
- Make the connections between all required PBGRs and a student’s learning experiences explicit within a PLP (*Please note that for students on IEPs, an IEP and PLP are not interchangeable; all students with IEPs who are also eligible for PLPs, as determined by their grade level, must have both documents*)
- Document the attainment of PBGRs within a PLP, including periodically checking and addressing gaps in PBGR attainment

We recommend that you share this request with curriculum coordinators, principals, school counselors, special educators or other staff involved in the development or oversight of graduation requirements, flexible pathways, and personalized learning plans.

Additional tools related to ensuring access for students who need additional supports will be forthcoming this fall.

Please feel free to contact us with any questions, concerns or comments related to the PBGR survey at pat.fitzsimmons@vermont.gov or contact Jacqui Kelleher at jacqui.kelleher@vermont.gov with questions related to special education.