**Proficiency-Based Learning Simplified**
http://www.greatschoolspartnership.org/proficiency/

The Great Schools Partnership created Proficiency-Based Learning Simplified to help schools develop efficient standards-based systems that will prepare all students for success in the colleges, careers, and communities of the 21st century. For this reason, our model is focused on prioritizing and assessing the most vitally important knowledge and skills, while also balancing these high academic expectations with the need for flexibility, responsiveness, and creativity in the classroom.
We know that learning standards are powerful instructional assets that can bring focus and coherence to an academic program. But we also recognize that standards are sometimes translated into burdensome instructional checklists that can stifle instructional flexibility and limit learning options. In our model, standards are not checklists but prioritized learning goals that help schools and teachers design more effective academic programs and learning experiences that will meet the distinct needs of each student.

Throughout this website, school leaders and teachers will find detailed guidance on developing a proficiency-based system. We have strived to keep our guidance concise and practical, focusing only on the most essential policies, processes, and practices. In addition, we see our model as an iterative process, and we intend to revise, improve, and expand our resources over time.

For general questions related to Proficiency-Based Learning Simplified, contact Stephen Abbott: sabbott@greatschoolspartnership.org

# Ten Principles of Proficiency-Based Learning

Over the past decade, the movement to adopt proficiency-based approaches to teaching, learning, and graduating has gained momentum throughout the United States, as more educators, parents, business leaders, and elected officials recognize that high academic expectations and strong educational preparation are essential to success in today's world. Schools use proficiency-based learning to raise academic standards, ensure that more students meet those higher expectations, and graduate more students better prepared for adult life.

To help schools establish a philosophical and pedagogical foundation for their work, the Great Schools Partnership created the following "Ten Principles of Proficiency-Based Learning," which describe the common features found in the most effective proficiency-based systems:

1. All learning expectations are clearly and consistently communicated to students and families, including long-term expectations (such as graduation requirements and graduation standards), short-term expectations (such as the specific learning objectives for a course or other learning experience), and general expectations (such as the performance levels used in the school's grading and reporting system).
2. Student achievement is evaluated against common learning standards and performance expectations that are consistently applied to all students regardless of whether they are enrolled in traditional courses or pursuing alternative learning pathways.
3. All forms of assessment are standards-based and criterion-referenced, and success is defined by the achievement of expected standards, not relative measures of performance or student-to-student comparisons.
4. Formative assessments measure learning progress during the instructional process, and formative-assessment results are used to inform instructional adjustments, teaching practices, and academic support.
5. Summative assessments evaluate learning achievement, and summative-assessment results record a student's level of proficiency at a specific point in time.
6. Academic progress and achievement are monitored and reported separately from work habits, character traits, and behaviors such as attendance and class participation, which are also monitored and reported.
7. Academic grades communicate learning progress and achievement to students and families, and grades are used to facilitate and improve the learning process.
8. Students are given multiple opportunities to improve their work when they fail to meet expected standards.
9. Students can demonstrate learning progress and achievement in multiple ways through differentiated assessments, personalized-learning options, or alternative learning pathways.
10. Students are given opportunities to make important decisions about their learning, which includes contributing to the design of learning experiences and learning pathways.

→ **Download the Ten Principles of Proficiency-Based Learning (.pdf)**

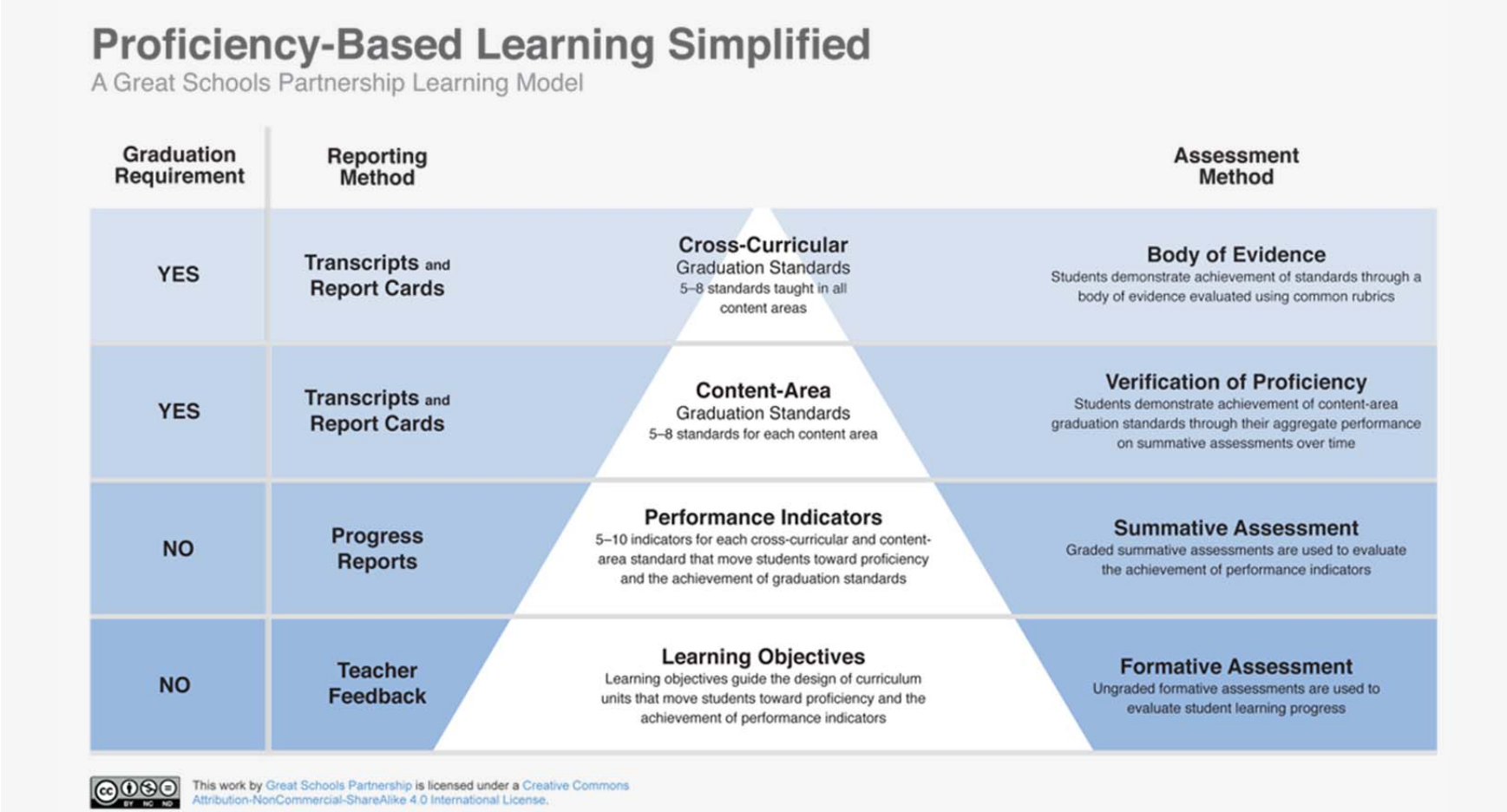
→ **See the Research Evidence Supporting the Ten Principles**

# Proficiency-Based Learning Simplified: How It Works

For proficiency-based learning to be effective, school leaders and teachers need to prioritize. They have to determine what critical skills students absolutely need to acquire before they graduate from high school, what content knowledge students need to know in each subject area, and what important benchmarks students need to meet as they progress through their education.

Proficiency-Based Learning Simplified provides a foundational structure that will help schools prioritize learning goals and build a more coherent academic program.

The following diagram illustrates how the Proficiency-Based Learning Simplified model works in practice:




Click on the image to download the diagram as a .PDF

**Cross-Curricular Graduation Standards** are aligned with cross-curricular state standards, and they should describe the most essential skills and habits of work that students will need to succeed in adult life. Students demonstrate achievement of cross-curricular graduation standards through a body of evidence, such asportfolios, exhibitions, or capstone projects that are evaluated using common rubrics.
**Content-Area Graduation Standards** are aligned with state standards and learning progressions, and they describe the most essential content knowledge that students will need to succeed in adult life. Students demonstrate achievement of content-area graduation standards through their aggregate achievement of performance indicators over time.

In general, the measurement of progress on graduation standards is determined at the end of elementary school (grade 5) and middle school (grade 8), and the final achievement of graduation standards is determined at the end of high school (grade 12). School districts may choose to structure their standards progressions differently or use different grade levels for measurement of progress.

**Performance Indicators** are aligned with content-area and cross-curricular state standards, and they provide more detailed descriptions of what it means to meet a graduation standard. Achievement of performance indicators may be determined using summative assessments—either common school-wide assessments for a content area and grade level, or course assessments developed by individual teachers. Over time, a student's aggregate performance on summative assessments determines whether performance indicators have been met.
**Learning Objectives** are aligned with state standards and guide the design of curriculum units intended to move students toward proficiency and the achievement of performance indicators. Achievement of unit-based learning objectives is determined using formative assessments, and teacher feedback prepares students for summative assessments. Teachers provide students with multiple opportunities to demonstrate their emerging proficiency.
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