CompetencyWorks

AN INITIATIVE OF THE AURORA INSTITUTE

STRENGTHENING LOCAL ASSESSMENT SYSTEMS FOR PERSONALIZED, PROFICIENCY-BASED EDUCATION

Strategies and Tools for Professional Learning

BY PAT FITZSIMMONS

Strengthening Local Assessment Systems for Personalized, Proficiency-Based Education:
Strategies and Tools for Professional Learning

OCTOBER 2020

Acknowledgments

About the Author

Pat Fitzsimmons is proficiency-based learning team leader at the Vermont Agency of Education. She collaborates with educators to implement proficiency-based learning and assessment systems that are student-centered. She has worked with various stakeholders to construct a Vermont Portrait of a Graduate and co-authored numerous documents related to proficiency-based learning. Before moving to state-level work, Pat was the science specialist for the Barre Supervisory Union in Vermont. She also fondly remembers her first 14 years in public school as a kindergarten teacher. Pat was the first kindergarten teacher in Vermont to receive the Presidential Award for Excellence in Science Education.

Introduction

This report describes Vermont's convenings to support schools, districts, and other education organizations seeking to create high-quality local comprehensive systems of assessments. It can serve as a resource for schools, districts, and states that are working toward improving their own assessment systems. Readers will learn about the rationale and essential components, formative and summative performance assessments, and student-designed performance assessments.[1]

Local comprehensive assessment systems (LCAS) are essential for ensuring equitable learning opportunities for all students. They have the potential to ensure that each and every learner meets high expectations that are set across all content areas. The Vermont Agency of Education held convenings with educational leaders to refine tools and investigate resources that can improve local systems of assessments that support personalized, proficiency-based learning.

The Vermont Education Quality Standards (EQS) state that "each supervisory union shall develop, and each school shall implement a comprehensive system of assessment that:

a	assesses the standards approved by the State Board of Education;
b	employs a balance of assessment types, including but not limited to, teacher-or student-designed assessments, portfolios, performances, exhibitions and projects;
c	includes both formative and summative assessments;
d	enables decisions to be made about student progression and graduation, including measuring proficiency-based learning;
e	informs the development of Personalized Learning Plans and student support;
f	provides data that informs decisions regarding instruction, professional learning, and educational resources and curriculum; and
g	reflects strategies and goals outlined in the district's Continuous Improvement Plan."

LCAS is also one of four levers highlighted by the Vermont Agency of Education for supporting the success of all students. Therefore, Agency staff convened educational leaders from around the state to refine tools and investigate assessment resources that support personalized, proficiency-based learning. Act 173 Technical Guidance: Local Comprehensive Assessment Systems in School District Systems expands on the vision of high-quality assessment systems found in the EQS and served as a foundation for our work.

Essential Components of Local Assessment Systems

Engaging Assessments

"What is the most interesting way that you have ever demonstrated your learning?"

That question was posed to educators at the beginning of our first Local Comprehensive Assessment Convening. Responses ranged from operating a forklift to riding in a horse show.[2] They demonstrated that the "way you show that you have learned something," or assessment, can be engaging, relevant to the learner, and provide opportunities for continued growth. How do these compare with assessments that are typically part of our educational systems?

To get a better understanding of what is currently happening in schools, teams of educators were asked to draw a diagram representing the current state of their assessment system.[3] Many included the screening, diagnostic, and monitoring assessments used to determine who is on track for meeting grade-level expectations in mathematics and English language arts and who needs additional support. These assessments are certainly important components. However, what about:

- Assessments that require students to actively demonstrate their proficiency in diverse and interesting ways like the forklift and horse examples that teachers shared at the start of our convening;
- Assessments that are meaningful and engaging for learners; and
- Assessments that measure transferable skills essential for succeeding in the 21st century?

Where do these types of assessments fit into an assessment system?

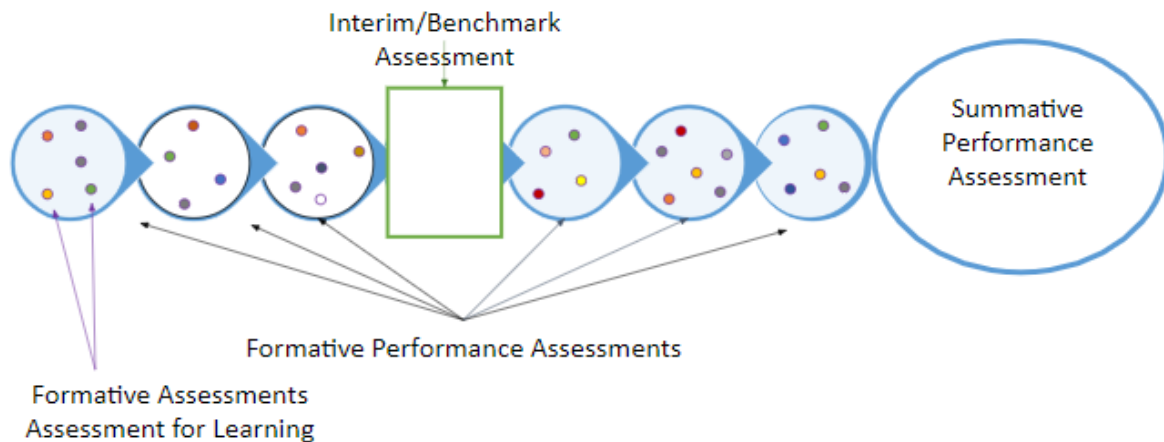## Local Comprehensive Assessment Systems: The "Backbone"

Let's start at the 30,000-foot level, with a brief overview of several types of assessments, and work backward.

G. Christian Jernstedt, Professor Emeritus of Psychological and Brain Science at Dartmouth College, provided workshops about the brain and learning for educators throughout Vermont. Numerous times he commented, "The person who is doing the work is doing the learning." If that thinking is applied to educational systems, then students should be actively engaged in "doing the work." Essentially, the process of "doing the work" should provide opportunities for students to demonstrate what they have learned.

Formative performance assessments provide that opportunity. They require students to apply learning or perform, to demonstrate their current level of understanding. Educators and students can then use the information generated to determine next steps for the learner. Examples of specific formative performance assessments used in classrooms are provided later in the report.

30,000 foot level . . . .

Local Comprehensive Assessment System
The "Backbone"

Interim/Benchmark Assessment

Summative Performance Assessment

Formative Performance Assessments

Formative Assessments Assessment for Learning

VERMONT
AGENCY OF EDUCATION

Formative assessments embedded within performance assessments allow teachers and students to continually check performance levels related to identified goals and make adjustments as needed to guide instruction and learning opportunities. An interim or benchmark assessment provides a "dipstick" that answers the questions:

- Are students where they need to be at this point?
- What do they understand?
- Where are they confused?
- Who is ready to move on?
- Who needs additional support?

Finally, summative or comprehensive performance assessments allow students to pull together multiple pieces of information to demonstrate their learning in a new context. Learners demonstrate their level of knowledge, understanding, and skills to produce a product or performance that serves as evidence of learning.

The complexity of performance assessments provides each learner an entry point. Some may demonstrate proficiency upon completion of the task, while others will need additional opportunities. This reflects the kinds of "assessments" that are faced on a regular basis in the workplace, as well as those that our convening participants originally described as most interesting.

Linda Darling-Hammond and colleagues (2013) suggest that a high-quality assessment system should include assessments of **higher-order cognitive skills, as well as critical abilities such as communication, collaboration, modeling, problem-solving, reflection, and research**. These assessments should be valid, reliable, fair, and have value for informing teaching. They should also be instructionally sensitive—i.e., representative of content and concepts that students learned from curriculum and instruction.

Assessment Systems: A Closer Look

What you do not see in the "big picture" diagram above of an assessment system, however, are those finer-grained assessments—screeners, diagnostics, and monitoring—that are also essential components of this system [see Figure "LCAS: The Next Level" on next page]. The Vermont Multi-Tiered System of

LCAS: The Next Level
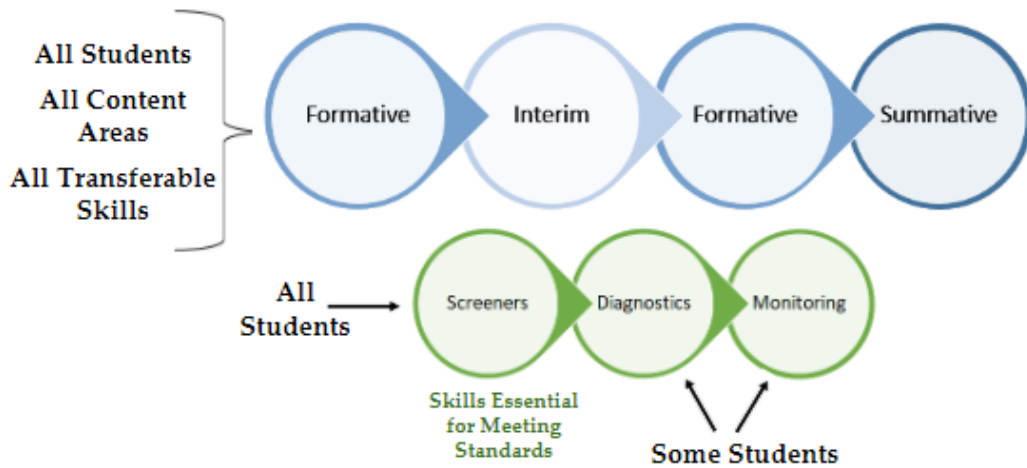
states, **"A balanced system recognizes that no single assessment can capture all important aspects of standards and curriculum, nor important outcomes in every domain. Multiple, varied and recurring assessments are needed for that."**

Screeners, typically related to mathematics and English language arts, are administered to students to predict who may have learning challenges. Diagnostics, more in-depth assessments of essential skills, can then provide additional information so appropriate supports can be provided. Finally, monitoring is essential to ensure learners are making progress. The goal, therefore, of a strong assessment system is to intentionally gather information that provides an accurate picture of each learner—their strengths and areas in need of support—to enable them to succeed.

A Self-Assessment Tool: Quality Criteria for Local Comprehensive Assessment Systems

After clarifying the big picture, participants had the opportunity to reflect on their own assessment systems using the Quality Criteria for Local Comprehensive Assessment Systems.[4]   We posted this as a Word document so educational leaders could tailor it to meet their needs. Some of the essential components include:

■ The assessment system has a theory of action aligned to the Continuous Improvement Plan that states how assessments are connected to intended outcomes, as well as how the parts of the system are related.
■ Assessments provide equitable access for students with diverse needs and backgrounds.
■ Assessments are aligned to clearly described standards/proficiencies for all content areas and transferable skills.
■ Assessments are aligned PreK-12 and across classrooms within a grade level to support learning and avoid unnecessary duplication.
■ Multiple measures, including universal screeners, diagnostics, progress monitoring, formative and summative assessments, performance assessments, and state assessments, comprise a comprehensive assessment system.

Root Cause Analysis: What Are the Challenges?

A fishbone diagram was used to uncover challenges connected to constructing strong assessment systems. The capacity to collaborate, create assessments, and calibrate scoring, especially in small schools, was raised as an issue. Data analysis tools and resources, along with assessment literacy, were also identified as areas in need of support. The data from these diagrams, as well as information gleaned from rich discussions throughout the day, will guide future decisions regarding professional learning opportunities that the Vermont Agency of Education will provide.

Formative and Summative Performance Assessments

This section describes activities to improve student-centered assessment systems by strengthening the use of performance assessments. Formative and summative performance assessments are essential for attaining equitable outcomes for all students and improving the effectiveness of educational systems.

Formative Assessment Probe: Performance Assessments

The convening described in this section started with this formative assessment probe: *What words or phrases would you use to describe performance assessments?* Mentimeter captured everyone's ideas in a wordle and also provided background information to facilitators. The more times a word is entered, the larger it appears in the wordle. Below is the wordle that was generated at the beginning of the day. "Authentic" and "Time Consuming" are clearly attributes that were at the forefront of participants' minds.

Current State of Assessment Systems: The Self-Reflection Tool

To dig a little deeper into the current state of assessment systems, particularly assessments for learning, we utilized a tool developed by the Assessment for Learning Project. This tool, the Request for Learning: Self Reflection Tool V2, provides an opportunity for educators to reflect and discuss their systems through the following lenses:

- Process: Assessment for learning is an integrated process;
- Priorities: Assessment for learning prioritizes feedback and reflection;
- Product: Assessment for learning produces bodies of evidence of learning; and
- Purpose: Assessment for learning enacts more equitable systems and learning environments.

Each "lens" of the Self-Reflection Tool is written as a continuum, such as in the image below.

Participants were asked to brainstorm all of the assessments within their systems on sticky notes, including one assessment on each note. Next, they each placed their assessments along one of the continua.[5] This process provoked important discussions and questions. One educator commented how data from some of the assessments are not used and therefore questioned the need for administering them. Two educators from the same school placed identical assessments at the opposite ends of a continuum. This discovery resulted in some laughter and a discussion about the purpose of the assessment. Participants were also asked to look at the placements of their assessments and share thoughts about what an ideal continuum would look like.

This process was repeated for each of the four "lenses" (process, priorities, product, purpose). The hope is that leaders use this tool with educators to refine their assessment systems to reflect priority goals for teaching and learning, prevent the inclusion of duplicative assessments, and highlight assessments that generate data used to inform instruction.

Formative Assessment: Key Strategies

Next, we wanted to build a common understanding of formative assessment. Dylan Wiliam's key formative assessment strategies were shared [see "Key Formative Assessment Strategies figure below]. A modified jigsaw format was used with Wiliam's article, "Assessment: The Bridge Between Teaching and Learning." During the first round, participants met with a peer and were responsible for communicating essential components of one strategy while learning about another one. Partners took notes about the new strategy and in the next round were expected to explain this strategy to someone else. The process was repeated numerous times.

The purpose of this exercise was to develop common language related to formative assessment and to clarify our vision of formative assessment as a powerful practice for improving student outcomes. Wiliam identifies three vital learning processes that provide a framework for formative assessment: determining (1) where the learner is right now, (2) where the learner needs to be, and (3) how to get there. The goal is to continually be checking where a student is in relation to learning intentions and adjusting instruction and learning opportunities to enable students to meet expectations.

Educators often make the request: "Show me what it looks like." We took advantage of a collaborative project, Models of Excellence, between EL Education and Harvard Graduate School

of Education to do just that with formative assessment strategies. Participants watched the videos, "Snakes Are Born This Way" and "Building Motivation and Skills through Whole-Class Research." Small groups then discussed the following questions:

- What key formative assessment strategies do you see the teacher using?
- What additional strategies might the teacher use?

These discussions helped everyone to deepen their understanding of formative assessment strategies by seeing what they actually might look like in a classroom. The videos also model the importance of actively engaging learners in formative performance assessments so that learning becomes visible. Additionally, these elementary videos were selected with the intent of showing what elementary students are capable of achieving. Just imagine what the possibilities are in middle and high school!

Essential Partners: Proficiency-Based Learning and Performance Assessment

To deepen participants' knowledge of proficiency-based learning and connections to performance assessment, the Aurora Institute's publication, What Is Competency-Based Education? An Updated Definition, was explored. (Vermont uses the term "proficiency-based learning" (PBL), which is synonymous with "competency-based education" and "mastery-based education.")
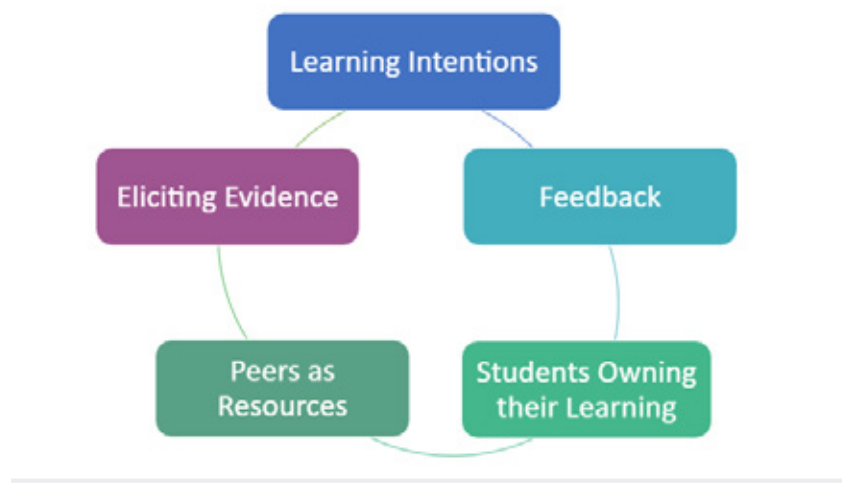
Participants were asked to read through the new definition of CBE/PBL [see definition next page] and identify keywords or phrases they would like to see in boldface.[6] This was used as a strategy to engage participants in the text and encourage close reading. It also served as a formative assessment – what did participants view as essential within a definition of proficiency-based learning?

"Empower," "apply knowledge," "differentiated support," "timely feedback," "learn actively," and *"rigorous"* were among the words/phrases selected. Within the definition of competency-based education, we also identified specific components with a direct link to performance assessments:

- Students are empowered daily to make important decisions about their learning experiences, how they will create and apply knowledge, and **how they will demonstrate learning**.
- **Assessment is a meaningful, positive, and empowering** learning experience for students that yields timely, relevant, and actionable evidence.
- Students receive **timely, differentiated support** based on their individual learning needs.
- Students **progress based on evidence of mastery**, not seat time.

Performance Assessments Defined

Now that we had spent much of the day clarifying the intent of assessments, discussing various types of formative performance assessments, and identifying connections between performance assessments and proficiency-based learning, we wanted the group to agree on a definition of performance assessments. Participants read and discussed related quotes.[7] Jay McTighe's blog, "What is a Performance Task?" and his report, *An Intro to Performance Tasks: Guide to Engaging Students in Meaningful Learning*, provided the group with a definition and descriptors of performance assessments. **McTighe defines performance tasks [assessments] as any learning activity, investigation, or task that asks students to perform to demonstrate their knowledge, understanding, and proficiency level.** Attributes of performance assessments include:

- **Engage** students in meaningful **learning in authentic contexts**;
- Can be **student- or teacher-designed**;
- Show genuine **applications of knowledge**;
- Yield a **tangible product and/or performance** that serve as evidence of learning; and
- Help integrate subject areas and **21st-century skills**.

With agreement about the definition and attributes of performance assessments, participants were ready for the final activity of the day. It focused on refining the Quality Criteria for Performance Assessment template. This document is a synthesis of the work of others, including SCALE and SCOPE. Since context matters, refinements and additions had previously been made to the original documents. Participants in the convening were asked to use the draft version of this document to review selected performance assessments and then identify strengths and suggestions for improvement. The feedback was used to improve and finalize the document.

Formative Assessment Probe Revisited: Performance Assessments

At the end of the day, we revisited our original question*: **What words or phrases would you use to describe performance assessments?*** I was glad to see that "time consuming," although sometimes true about performance assessments, was no longer one of the most prominent words in the final wordle (shown below). **Meaningful, authentic, transferable, engaging, complex, choice, and rigorous** now stood out. Those are powerful descriptors and good reasons for including performance assessments within personalized and proficiency-based local comprehensive assessment systems.

Definition of Competency-Based Education

What Is Competency-Based Education?

An Updated Definition

CompetencyWorks

WRITTEN BY
Eliot Levine
Susan Patrick

AURORA INSTITUTE

1 Students are empowered daily to make important decisions about their learning experiences, how they will create and apply knowledge, and how they will demonstrate their learning.

2 Assessment is a meaningful, positive, and empowering learning experience for students that yields timely, relevant, and actionable evidence.

3 Students receive timely, differentiated support based on their individual learning needs.

4 Students progress based on evidence of mastery, not seat time.
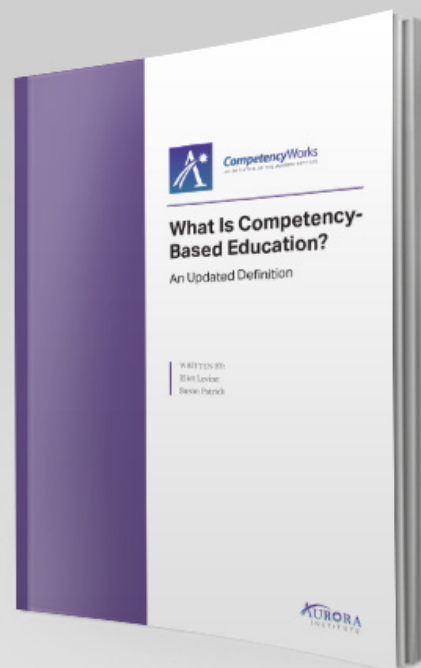
5 Students learn actively using different pathways and varied pacing.

6 Strategies to ensure equity for all students are embedded in the culture, structure, and pedagogy of schools and education systems.

7 Rigorous, common expectations for learning (knowledge, skills, and dispositions) are explicit, transparent, measurable, and transferable.

aurora-institute.org

Student-Designed Performance Assessments

This section describes activities to improve personalized, proficiency-based assessment systems by focusing on strategies for supporting student-designed performance assessments.

Essential Components of Student-Designed Assessments

The convening described in this section began with this question: *What do you think are the most essential components of student-designed assessments?* Participants were asked to write down their initial thoughts on an index card that we would return to later in the day. The intended outcomes for the day were also explained:

- Develop a shared understanding of what is meant by "**authentic assessment**."
- Explain the importance of **student agency** and its role in personalized learning.
- Understand how to support and incorporate **student-designed assessments** into the learning process.
- Understand how student-designed assessments can be an integral part of **personalized learning** and the **personalized learning plan process**.

What Is an Authentic Performance Assessment?

The need to develop a collective understanding of the word "authentic" had emerged at our previous convening. Although authentic is often associated with performance assessments, it was clear that the group lacked a common understanding. An Edutopia video, "What is Authentic Assessment?" was used to provide background information and elicit participants' ideas. Educators were asked to work with a partner and respond to the following prompts:[8]

- What needs to be in place for an assessment to be authentic?
- What is one example of an authentic assessment?

A lively discussion ensued! To focus the discussion, we investigated a proposed definition of authentic assessment:

An assessment is considered authentic when students are asked to **perform real-world tasks** that **demonstrate meaningful application of essential knowledge** and **skills** that are relevant and **applicable to their lives outside of school**.

As this definition was considered, people questioned the use of "real-world," and it became apparent that "real-world" took on different connotations depending upon content as well as grade level. The take-away from this discussion is the importance of clarifying language that is being used within educational systems. In "Words: The Power of a Shared Vocabulary," Jim Knight states, "**The simple act of talking about a word like voice, and working to develop a shared, deeper understanding, can be very meaningful professional development**." Without these important discussions, educators may unintentionally create inconsistent (and therefore possibly inequitable) expectations and learning opportunities for students as a result of having different interpretations of common terms.

Connections: Learner Agency and Student-Designed Assessments

Learner agency, a critical aspect of student-designed assessment, is one of six attributes identified in a Vermont Portrait of a Graduate. The related descriptors include: **Students take ownership of and drive their own learning; Students develop their own voice and the ability to use it in a variety of settings; and Students have high expectations for themselves and see themselves as lifelong learners**. The document What is Personalized Learning? explains that student agency requires that ". . . all students are held to clear, high expectations, and students take ownership over their own learning. With the help of their teachers, they are involved in designing their own learning process and should be given a choice in how they demonstrate their learning through performance-based assessments." Additionally, the quote below by Starr Sackstein, from "When Students Design the Assessment, Everyone Wins," justifies the value of including students in the assessment design process:

> ## "
> **Students must be put into a position of control over their own learning if we truly hope to make them life-long learners who are intrinsically motivated. By giving them opportunities to get involved in the design process, we allow them to show themselves that they are in fact capable of this task without our help.**
>
> ———— Starr Sackstein

Acknowledging that teachers are at varying degrees of readiness or willingness to turn over the development of assessments to learners, we explored the continuum of collaboration shown below, which ranges from entirely teacher-designed to entirely student-designed.
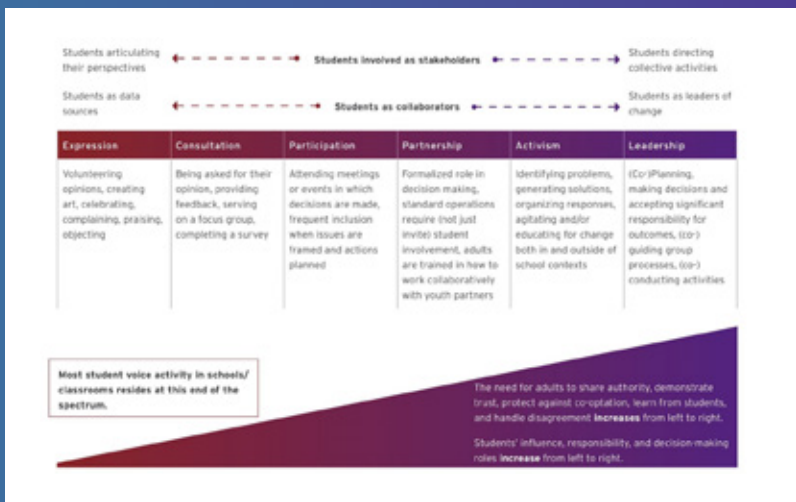

Source: Emily Leute, Vermont Agency of Education

Important decision points were then identified. For instance, who (teacher and/or student) and to what degree will they determine:

- The standards, proficiencies, and/or learning targets to be addressed
- What the actual learning opportunity will be
- The evidence necessary to demonstrate proficiency
- The assessment process

Note that in the Continuum of Collaboration diagram, neither arrow is labeled as "good" or "bad." It is important to remember that this is a journey, and educators need time to develop an understanding of the value of student-designed assessments, as well as opportunities to collaborate with colleagues on implementing them.

The article "Orchestrating the Move to Student-Driven Learning" by Bena Kallick and Allison Zmuda thoughtfully describes how learning and assessment opportunities can vary along a continuum from teacher-generated learning to student-generated. The authors use numerous controls on an audio sound board to represent the degree of learner control and input. Kallick and Zmuda identify seven key elements on this "Personalizing Sound Board" that can be adjusted up or down based upon students' ability to take ownership of and drive their own learning. These key elements include: goals, inquiry and idea generation, task and audience, evaluation, feedback, instructional plan, and cumulative demonstration of learning. The discussion framed by this article helped to clarify opportunities for balancing teacher and student control in the assessment design process.

Students must be put into a **position of control** over their own learning if we truly hope to make them **life-long learners who are intrinsically motivated**. By giving them opportunities to get involved in the design process, we allow them to show themselves that they are in fact capable of this task without our help.

Finally, Catlin Tucker states in her post, "3 Ways to Build Student Agency into Your Lessons:"

> **[T]he ability to make key decisions about their learning is a powerful motivator for students.** If they are invited to tailor the learning to their interests, decide how to approach a problem, or determine what they will create, it makes them **feel valued as individual learners**.

Our next activity helped participants determine the current status of student voice, a component of agency. The figure on the next page, from *Motivation, Engagement, and Student Voice* by Eric Toshalis and Michael J. Nakkula, shows a spectrum of student voice based on the ways students can act as stakeholders and collaborators in their learning. In the figure, students' influence, responsibility, and decision-making roles increase from left to right. After educators assessed where their typical student assignments fell on the spectrum, participants discussed what they might do to move their system further to the right.

Source: *Motivation, Engagement, and Student Voice* by E. Toshalis and M. Nakkula, 2012. Students at the Center Hub.

Supporting the Development of Student-Designed Performance Assessments

What might a student-designed assessment look like? David Rickert in "The Power of Student Designed Rubrics" offers an example. Rickert provides a "mastery rubric," and students are empowered to develop individual projects to meet identified standards-based expectations, such as these three standards from one of his rubrics:

- **Theme:** Determine a theme of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details.
- **Support:** Cites strong and textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly, as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.
- **Audience:** Strong consideration of an audience in project design is evident.

After Rickert shared his initial rubric with students, they were provided the opportunity to develop additional rubric categories related to their specific project and asked to consider the following: skills, quality work, publication, and quantity. This co-developing of a rubric allows students a level of control over how their project will be assessed.

One student, Elli Tai, uses her passion for piano to musically represent various scenes in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* through a Piano. She describes each scene and then her justification for the music selection. For instance, *South Side*

Stomp is used to depict Huck as "...a lively, free-spirited boy." She explains, "He loves his freedom, and wants to live adventurously by his—and only his—rules. Huck is miserable while living with Widow Douglas and having to follow her rules (Chapter 1)." Elli then justifies her music choice: "Jazz is a musical style loved for its freedom of expression. This song has an energetic, slightly rowdy tempo, a fun swing style, and thrill-seeking runs." She not only selected each piece of music, but also learned how to perform the pieces in a professional manner.

Participants at the convening gained a deeper understanding of high-quality student-designed assessment by reflecting on Elli Tai's work to determine strengths, as well as potential areas of improvement. A tool, the VA Student-led Assessment NIC Performance Assessment Review Template from the Virginia Student-Led Assessment Networked Improvement Community, allowed educators to analyze the assessment by looking for evidence related to:

- Voice and choice;
- The assessment process and products;
- Students' goals, self-assessment, and reflection; and
- Feedback opportunities throughout the process.

> "
>
> **[T]he ability to make key decisions about their learning is a powerful motivator for students.** If they are invited to tailor the learning to their interests, decide how to approach a problem, or determine what they will create, it makes them feel valued as individual learners.
>
> ———— Catlin Tucker
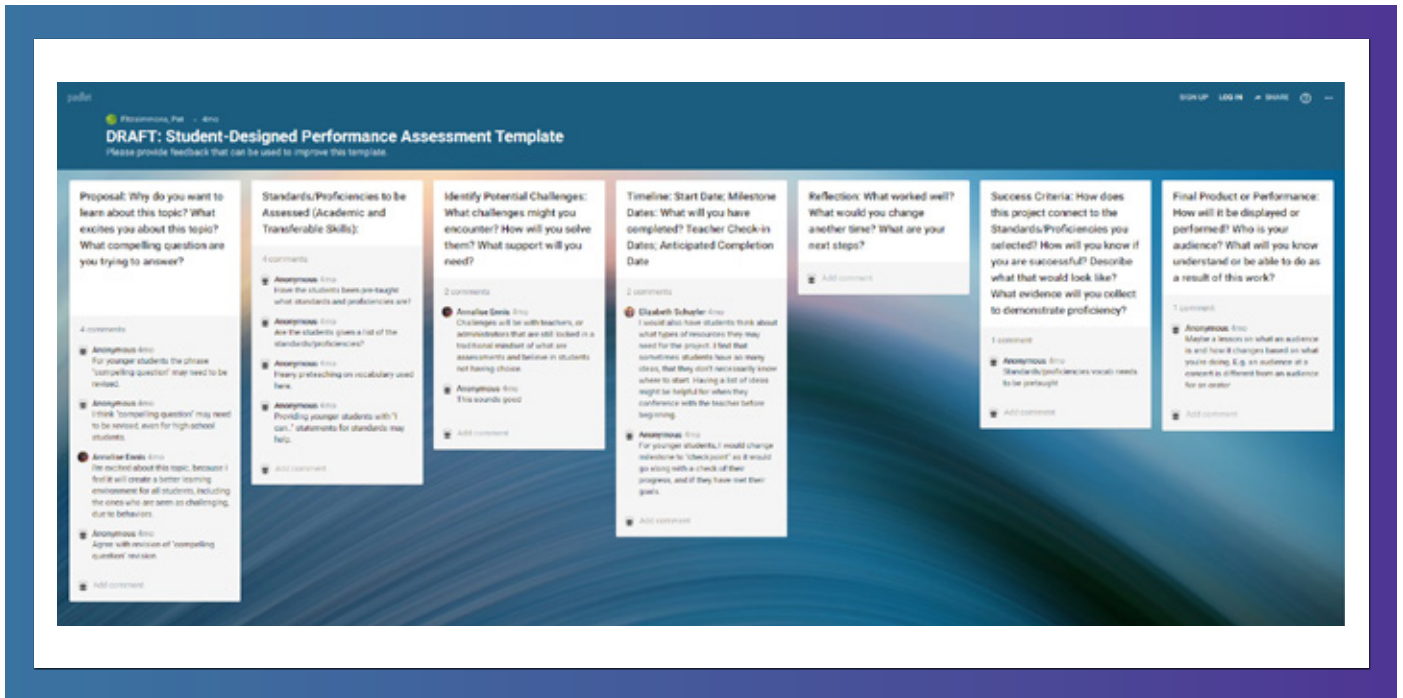
Although the *Huckleberry Finn* performance assessment had many positive attributes, some areas for potential improvement were also identified. The goal is to use tools like the Student-Led Assessment Review Template to objectively review student-designed assessments to ensure that they provide evidence of rigorous learning related to standards or proficiencies.

The Student Assessment Template

To support the development of student-designed assessments, content specialists at the Vermont Agency of Education constructed a draft Student-Designed Performance Assessment Template (also shown above). It was developed in Padlet so that educators and students can provide feedback to improve the process. The draft document mirrors performance assessment templates created for educators. Additionally, because personalized learning plans are required for all Vermont students in grades seven through twelve (see Act 77), the template intentionally aligns with critical elements of a Personalized Learning Plan (PLP): student goals, action steps, achievement of action steps, reflection, and revision. This alignment highlights the value of providing opportunities for students to be involved in the assessment development process. Sample PLPs for the arts, history, and STEM were shared to help clarify connections between performance assessments and a student's PLP.

The Vermont Personalized Learning Plans Process Manual explains that PLPs "can be envisioned as a student's road map (minimally beginning in grade 7) as they progress through their educational experience, informing choices through those years and beyond. PLPs not only help articulate and clarify students' goals and needs but also are a reflection of the importance of student agency in learning as they work to meet graduation proficiencies" (p. 5).

Ideally, PLPs are created by a student with support from parents/guardians, educators/mentors, and peers. They provide a venue for students to personalize their educational journey by identifying their interests, setting near- and long-term goals, and collecting evidence of learning in relation to their goals. As students evolve over time, so does their PLP. The goal is to generate greater coherence, ownership, and focus to each student's educational decisions.

This convening provided an opportunity to share a student-designed assessment template draft with educators and receive feedback regarding the language in the document, the length, and the various components. Our next step will be to work collaboratively with students to get their feedback for a revision of the template. Tony Bryk and co-authors *Learning to Improve: How America's Schools Can Get Better at Getting Better* strongly advise innovators to check with the "users." As students are the intended users of this document, it is vital that we get their feedback. In the past, when students have been given the opportunity to provide feedback on our work, they have always helped to improve it. Students have a unique perspective that is extremely valuable. We need to ensure that their ideas are heard and incorporated into this process.

References

An act relating to encouraging flexible pathways to secondary school completion, 77 Vermont Legislature §§ 941-944 (2014). Retrieved from http://www.leg.state.vt.us/docs/2014/Acts/Act077.PDF

Assessment for Learning Project. (n.d.). Request for Learning: Self Reflection Tool V2. Retrieved from https://drive.google.com/file/d/1TbDndyMZe_L7LGRuRQELR47JZ8UhUXjT/view

Bryk, A., Gomez, L., Grunow, A., & LeMahieu, P. (2015). Learning to improve: How America's schools can get better at getting better. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Publishing.

Center for High Quality Student Work. (n.d.) Snakes are born this way: Illuminating standards video. New York: EL Education. Retrieved from https://modelsofexcellence.eleducation.org/resources/snakes-are-born-way-illuminating-standards-video

Center for High Quality Student Work. (n.d.) Inspiring excellence, part 2: Building motivation and skills through whole-class research. New York: EL Education. Retrieved from https://modelsofexcellence.eleducation.org/resources/part-2-inspiring-excellence-building-motivation-and-skills-through-whole-class-research-3

Darling-Hammond, L., Herman, J., Pellegrino, J., Abedi, J., Aber, J. L., Baker E., et al. (2013). Criteria for high-quality assessment. Stanford, CA: Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education. Retrieved from https://edpolicy.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/publications/criteria-higher-quality-assessment_2.pdf

Edutopia. (2011). What is "authentic" assessment? Retrieved from https://www.edutopia.org/video/what-authentic-assessment

Kallick, B., & Zmuda, A. (2017). Orchestrating the move to student-driven learning. Educational Leadership, 74(6), 53–57. Retrieved from https://drive.google.com/file/d/12U2O4E4Ov73qi81rOzvTq3PJk1ZVgjzm/view

Knight, J. (2013). Words: The power of a shared vocabulary. Newark, DE: International Literacy Association. Retrieved from https://literacyworldwide.org/blog/literacy-now/2013/02/26/words-the-power-of-a-shared-vocabulary

Levine, E., & Patrick, S. (2019). What is competency-based education? An updated definition. Vienna, VA: Aurora Institute. Retrieved from https://aurora-institute.org/resource/what-is-competency-based-education-an-updated-definition/

McTighe, J. (n.d.) What is a performance task? Northbrook, IL: Defined Learning. Retrieved from https://www.definedlearning.com/blog/what-is-a-performance-task/

McTighe, J. (n.d.) An intro to performance tasks: Guide to engaging students in meaningful learning. Northbrook, IL: Defined Learning. Retrieved from https://drive.google.com/file/d/17Rw9Wlz7fIVLEalMHQwcgD9hq3TrT7zx/view

Rickert, D. (2018, January 4). The power of student designed rubrics. Retrieved from https://davidrickert.com/2018/01/04/student-designed-rubrics-2/

Sackstein, S. (2016, February 25). When students design the assessment, everyone wins. Education Week. Retrieved from http://blogs.edweek.org/teachers/work_in_progress/2016/02/when_students_design_the_asses.html

Tai, E. (n.d.) The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn through a piano. Retrieved from https://ellitai.wixsite.com/huckfinnthroughpiano

Toshalis, E., & Nakkula, M. J. (2012). Motivation, engagement, and student voice. Washington, DC: Jobs for the Future. https://studentsatthecenterhub.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/Exec-Toshalis-Nakkula-032312.pdf

Tucker, C. (2019, June 12). 3 ways to build student agency into your lessons. Retrieved from https://catlintucker.com/2019/06/3-ways-to-build-student-agency-into-your-lessons/

Vermont Agency of Education. (2020). A Vermont portrait of a graduate. Retrieved from https://education.vermont.gov/sites/aoe/files/documents/edu-pog.pdf

Vermont Agency of Education. (2020). Draft: Student-designed performance assessment template. Retrieved from https://padlet.com/patfitzsimmons/sj20a4t8c28jyu2u

Vermont Agency of Education. (2020). Local comprehensive assessment system quality criteria. Retrieved from https://education.vermont.gov/sites/aoe/files/documents/edu-local-comprehensive-assessment-system-quality-criteria.pdf

Vermont Agency of Education. (2019). Local comprehensive assessment systems in school district systems: Act 173 technical guidance. Retrieved from https://education.vermont.gov/sites/aoe/files/documents/edu-local-comprehensive-assessment-systems-act173-technical-guidance_0.pdf

Vermont Agency of Education. (2019). Personalized learning plans process manual. Retrieved from https://education.vermont.gov/sites/aoe/files/documents/Personalized%20Learning%20Plans%20Manual.pdf

Vermont Agency of Education. (2019). Quality criteria for performance assessments. Retrieved from https://education.vermont.gov/documents/edu-quality-criteria-for-performance-assessments

Vermont Agency of Education. (2019). Vermont multi-tiered systems of support guidelines: Field guide 2019. Retrieved from https://education.vermont.gov/sites/aoe/files/documents/edu-vtmtss-field-guide-2019_0.pdf

Vermont Agency of Education. (2017). What is personalized learning? Retrieved from https://education.vermont.gov/sites/aoe/files/documents/edu-plp-what-is-personalized-learning.pdf

Vermont State Board of Education. (2016). Manual of rules and practices, Series 2000 – Education Quality Standards. Retrieved from https://education.vermont.gov/sites/aoe/files/documents/edu-state-board-rules-series-2000.pdf

Virginia Networked Improvement Community. (2020). VA student-led assessment NIC performance assessment review template. Retrieved from https://docs.google.com/document/d/1nNZfIp9puUlVeSXb1mEogM84mDp6UopKgGaMoureccQ/edit

Wiliam, D. (2013). Assessment: The bridge between teaching and learning. Voices from the Middle, 21(2), 15–20. Retrieved from https://library.ncte.org/journals/VM/issues/v21-2/24461

Endnotes

1. These convenings were initially conducted in person in 2019 and then continued remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic. The report includes a series of remote learning tips highlighting strategies used in Vermont.

2. **Remote-Learning Tip:** The Floating Grid in Mentimeter works well to capture participants' responses.

3. **Remote Learning Tip:** Because collaboratively drawing an LCAS diagram remotely is challenging, participants create an elevator speech about their current LCAS. A Google note catcher is used to capture their ideas. The following prompt is provided: "Imagine that you are explaining your LCAS to a new teacher. Your team will have 15 minutes to prepare an 'elevator speech' that explains your system."

4. **Remote-Learning Tip:** Breakout rooms with a facilitator displaying the Quality Criteria document work well for supporting small group discussions.

5. **Remote Learning Tip:** Participants individually write each assessment on a sticky note and then break up into small groups. A facilitator in each group displays a continuum from the Self Reflection Tool and educators placed their stickies on their computer monitors. We discussed where assessments were placed and why. Jamboard might also work well for this activity.

6. **Remote Learning Tip:** A "storm chat" requires everyone to post their ideas at the same time. Their ideas come "storming" into the chat box. The facilitator provides time for people to write down their ideas and then has everyone post them simultaneously. It's a good strategy for learning what each person is thinking.

7. **Remote Learning Tip:** A virtual "wall walk" was created in Padlet. Educators read all the performance assessment quotes and then identify one quote they find particularly interesting. Each person then writes why they selected their quote.

8. **Remote Learning Tip:** A chat box "chalk talk" works well to deepen a conversation. Facilitators and participants can build on another person's ideas or pose questions to probe for specificity in the chat box. This strategy also provides a way for some of the quieter participants to share their thinking with the larger group.

About the Vermont Agency of Education

The Agency of Education implements state and federal laws, policies, and regulations to ensure all Vermont learners have equitable access to high-quality learning opportunities. The Agency accomplishes this mission through the provision of its leadership, support, and oversight of Vermont's public education system.

About *Competency*Works

*Competency*Works is a project of the Aurora Institute. It is a collaborative initiative dedicated to advancing personalized, competency-based education in the K-12 education system. We are deeply grateful for the leadership and support of our advisory board and the partners who helped to launch *Competency*Works: the American Youth Policy Forum, Jobs for the Future, and the National Governors Association. Their vision and creative partnership have been instrumental in the development of *Competency*Works. Most of all, we thank the tremendous educators across the nation who are transforming state policy and district operations, as well as schools willing to open their doors and share their insights.

Suggested Citation

Fitzsimmons, P. (2020). *Strengthening local assessment systems for personalized, proficiency-based education: Strategies and tools for professional learning.* Vienna, VA: Aurora Institute.

AURORA INSTITUTE

A New Dawn for
Every Learner

The mission of the AURORA INSTITUTE is to drive the transformation of education systems and accelerate the advancement of breakthrough policies and practices to ensure high-quality learning for all.

1934 Old Gallows Road, Suite 350
Vienna, VA 22182 -4040

ph. 703.752.6216 I fx. 703.752.6201

www.aurora-institute.org