Inside Mastery Based High Schools:
Profiles and Conversations

springpoint
PARTNERS IN SCHOOL DESIGN

About Us

Springpoint is a national nonprofit organization that partners with districts and networks to open new, innovative high schools. Springpoint provides the training and support to design, launch, and continually improve these schools, such that they leverage all available talent, time, technology, and resources to produce success on a grand scale. Our aim is to enable all students, regardless of environment or background, to succeed in high school, college and beyond.

Read the landmark study that provides the foundation for our work: Carnegie Corporation of New York's Opportunity by Design report. To find out more about Springpoint and our work, visit springpointschools.org.

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Introduction

Springpoint works with school designers and their teams from around the country to design and launch new, innovative high schools. These school designs are grounded in Carnegie Corporation of New York's 10 School Design Principles, one of which calls for a mastery-based approach to education, allowing students to advance after they've demonstrated a particular skill or piece of knowledge, rather than after a set amount of time in a course.

Young people today are being educated in the context of a complex, global economy. They need higher levels of knowledge and skills in order to move successfully to college and/or career. Mastery education (also called competency, proficiency or performance-based) is a response to a one-size-fits-all education system that is not meeting the needs of students. Mastery education demands that learners show what they know by performing complex, authentic tasks before they move on to tackle the next set of concepts and skills, and the next, and the next—all the way to graduation.

Essentially, mastery learning can make school more rigorous, individualized and meaningful for the learner. Mastery learning gives students more choice over what they learn, when they learn it and how they show their learning.

Our school designers have been searching for examples of the mastery approach in practice. We recently visited a group of mastery-based high schools to record and codify these examples. We interviewed school leaders, teachers and students and brought back artifacts—schedules, competencies, rubrics, policy statements—that might be of use to others trying to create innovative, mastery-based schools. The artifacts include competency frameworks, schedules, grading guides, family handbooks and other useful examples of tools that enable mastery-based learning. We've included profiles of each school along with transcripts of our extended conversations so you can "meet" these innovators yourself. As you'll see in the transcripts, a few themes run through our interviews: consideration of rigor and what mastery of standards

looks like, new roles for adults, flexible use of time and space, and lessons learned through implementation. We hope the school profiles and transcripts provide a context for understanding each school's artifacts.

Not surprisingly, the school communities we learned about share some approaches to implementing mastery-based learning and diverge on others. All the high schools we visited or interviewed leaders about are small, ranging from 70 to 400 at capacity. The schools vary in their student demographics and their percentage of free and reduced lunch recipients. Some of the schools were urban, some in small towns, others quite rural. Some use technology to personalize learning (as required by the 10 school design principles that guide our work) and others do not. None incorporate all of the principles, though each of them is experienced at mastery in different ways.

Here are some reflections and observations on the schools' varying approaches to implementing mastery:

1) All the schools we visited use mastery-based rubric scales that lay out the student learning journey to mastery, but their scales vary.

In mastery grading, each student needs to meet a high performance standard to move on to the next lesson or milestone. Teachers need to be reasonably confident that the student has understood and can apply the skills and knowledge learned before moving on. Mastery learning asks that students master *more* (no more

"passing" with a 65%) and master *more deeply* (through application in a new context) than they would typically have to in order to pass a test or course in a traditional system. Formative assessment is frequent in a mastery-based system, but only performance on summative assessments is considered when evaluating whether a student has met a standard or demonstrated a competency.

Moreover, in mastery-based learning students set their own pace. It is not expected that all students will move synchronously along the performance continuum during a given period of time. Instead, mastery learning promotes a culture of rigor and revision in which students are given the time and support they need to meet a high standard of performance.

The schools we visited used different scales to document a student's journey toward "meeting the standard." Next Charter has a binary scale of "not yet met" the standard or "meets" the standard, the concern being that having an "exceeds" rating would divide students by achievement and put a ceiling on learning. Casco Bay uses a 1 to 4 scale with 3 being "proficient" and 4 being "exceeds" the standard. At Parker Charter the progress report scale runs from just beginning (JB), to approaching (A) to meets (M) level work. Parker teachers debate whether there should be an "exceeds" on their project rubrics. Some include it, some don't. Does it motivate students or counter the intrinsic motivation for learning they want to foster? Most of the schools use progress reports heavy in narratives about students' progress academically

and otherwise. Those narratives are meant to receive more attention than where a student falls on the scale.

2) All the schools we visited use technology to support mastery-based learning, but to varying degrees.

The 10 School Design Principles require that student learning be personalized with the aid of technology to enable recuperation and acceleration as needed. The schools we profile had varying success with using technology to enable personalization of mastery-learning, and not for want of trying.

Schools ranged in how much access to computers or tablets students had, from 1-to-1 school-issued iPads/laptops for use at home and at school, to 1-to-10 computers-to-students for use at school only. At all the schools, students use technology to pursue individual research interests and communicate those interests using various media in their performance assessments and/or exhibitions.

A major challenge of mastery-based learning is finding digital curricula that lessen the burden of personalization on teachers. Educators we spoke to looked for such material but found few digital curriculum resources that allowed them to effectively personalize learning experiences for students. The main issues they reported were that vendor curricula were either not mastery-based, not rigorous and engaging, or otherwise did not meet their needs.

3) All the schools we visited use time flexibly to differentiate support, but they do so differently.

Schools that make a commitment to mastery-based learning do not leave teachers alone to differentiate. Instead they create supports that prioritize differentiation in teaching across the entire school. The schools we visited used time flexibly to support the needs of individual students. Some allowed students to proceed at their own pace through a progression of classes or requirements. Others differentiated within shared projects and additionally offered regularly scheduled opportunities for self-directed learning.

Boston Day and Evening Academy (BDEA) takes advantage of its status as an alternative school and offers students the most time flexibility of the schools we visited, allowing them four opportunities to enroll a year and four possible graduation dates, according to their needs. Students are not given a grade level, but rather a projected graduation date, which changes according to how quickly or slowly they finish their course requirements. They get personalized attention in advisory, small skill-grouped classes, and daily tutorial periods as needed.

At Casco Bay, an [Expeditionary Learning School](#), the cohort is a central part of the learning experience. Students start in a 9th grade cohort and are expected to graduate four years later, as in a traditional school. However, there are many opportunities to recuperate or deepen learning within the school curriculum. The curriculum is driven by expeditions, which

have strong group and individual components of work, allowing for personalization within a shared experience.

4) All the schools we visited have structures that place students at the generative center of their experience as learners and community members, but they achieve learner-centered cultures differently.

All the schools profiled position adults as coaches supporting students in their self-directed learning journeys. Additionally, all six schools also have advisories and most require public exhibitions—two structures that scaffold students on self-directed learning paths. At these schools, public exhibitions are opportunities for individual students to present the results of self-directed study or to make the case for their advancement to the next Phase, class or division in front of fellow students, teachers, parents and community members. Teachers and advisors scaffold each student's preparation for these exhibitions.

Student-centered culture is also encouraged by the differently structured curricula at these schools.

At Making Community Connections, the curriculum is almost entirely inspired by student interest. There are no traditional classes or grades. Instead, teachers create Learning Studios around student interests and students are heterogeneously grouped. Also part of the curriculum, students spend two days a week at internships of their choosing.

At Casco Bay, though the curriculum is organized around group experiences in the form of expeditions, it is structured to provide many opportunities for differentiation. When we visited, we heard from students that they felt they were all "in it together," though their levels of performance within the same standards, as well as the topics they pursued, differed greatly.

At RSU2, the district has achieved a transparency of goals and individual student progress on their learning platform, which enables students to drive their learning. Students regularly review the Measurement Topics and accompanying Learning Targets they have yet to master and propose projects for fulfilling those requirements to their teachers as an alternative to teacher-suggested projects. Many students learn to construct projects that creatively combine multiple mastery requirements.

The educators and schools we profile believe in mastery-based education because of the rigorous, learner-centered cultures they have been able to cultivate. They shared generously and are eager to learn from the feedback and collaboration of others engaged in similar work. Mastery-based learning is still new, and many practitioners are just beginning to think through its implications.

The artifacts and experiences included here are meant to offer school designers some possibilities for implementation. As one teacher in Pittsfield, NH put it: "Beg, borrow and steal to

develop your competencies [skills, knowledge and dispositions to be mastered] … But don't expect them to look the same in five years." The real work comes in evolving those systems. And no one can do that for a particular learning community and population but the learning community itself.

We hope the profiles, transcripts, and artifacts presented here can add to the growing discussion among school designers about how to implement mastery-based education in a way that supports all students in succeeding in college and beyond.

School Profiles

Boston Day and Evening Academy

PUTTING NEEDS OF OVER-AGE, UNDER-CREDITED LEARNERS AT THE CENTER OF A MASTERY-BASED HIGH SCHOOL

In 1995, [Boston Day and Evening Academy](#) (BDEA) opened as Downtown Evening Academy, Boston's first evening high school to grant mastery-based diplomas. Since then, there have been several iterations on the original model, including the addition of a day program, a distance learning program, and significant adjustments to their mastery based structures and systems.

Today, BDEA has the feel of a well-run alternative school. Students range from 16 to 23 years-old and all enter at least two years behind traditional grade level. Many of the school's students face considerable challenges: young parenthood, having primary responsibility for siblings, dealings with the court system, food insecurity, depression, illness, and more. BDEA's student services office helps students navigate these challenges and dedicated counselors work with students who are late or miss school altogether.

The BDEA model is designed with students at its center. Student wraparound services are a big part of its youth development approach, and so are BDEA's highly individualized and flexible structures for learning. We'll highlight a

few of the school's mastery structures here.

At BDEA, considerable attention is paid to acclimating new students to a mastery-based system. New students can enter at the start of any trimester. They start with a week-long orientation followed by introductory seminars. During the orientation period, they learn that the failure they've become accustomed to in the traditional grading system is behind them. BDEA's curriculum is organized to provide opportunities to master large competencies and corresponding benchmarks. The staff describes benchmarks as the skills that must be acquired to achieve each competency. Students are oriented to these and other mastery structures. They learn that they are either "not yet competent," "competent," or "highly competent," and that they will be fully supported along the path to mastery.

Andrea Kunst, BDEA's Director of Institutional Advancement and Alumni, explains the culture shift that the orientation work precipitates for students: "Transcripts are not our primary source of assessment. They don't really mean anything. What does a D tell us? It means that maybe their homework wasn't handed in on time. It could mean maybe they weren't in class. They were ten minutes late too many times. It could mean that they knew the material but that all of these other things brought their grade down. Who knows? We just want to get that whole concept out of their heads."

During that orientation week, students are assessed using both the Northwest Evaluation

Association's Measures of Academic Progress (NWEA MAP) and internal assessments. In the introductory seminar which includes math, science, and humanities, new students have to demonstrate mastery against competencies. That is, they have to demonstrate their ability

to apply knowledge to meet the expectations of detailed performance rubrics. Proving that they can demonstrate competence by meeting benchmarks before advancing is a new experience for students. One student told visitors: "They won't let you pass out of a class if you can't teach it to someone else!"

Extra staff at these seminars continue to assess the students, who exhibit varying levels of competence in different content areas. Says Kunst: "By the time that first trimester is done, we know exactly where they should be in each of those content areas. They might be acing humanities, so they may be placed in a high-level humanities class. They might be at their learning edge in science and having a really tough time in math. So those are the different levels they get into. They are going to be done with their humanities benchmarks in two trimesters. Then they can double up on their other areas."

After first-trimester seminars, students are placed in level-appropriate courses for each domain. Just as they're never given A, B, C, D or F grades, the students are never given a grade level. Instead they get a projected graduation date, which they review with their advisors twice every trimester. Rather than being freshmen or seniors, students refer to themselves as "graduating March of 2015" or "on track for September but my mom is going into the hospital and I have to take care of my little brother and sister so it may be December." There are four graduation dates per year—in September, December, March and June.

Another key mastery structure at BDEA is the 11-week trimester. BDEA Director of Instruction Alison Hramiec explained: "We played around with the length of time for a marking period. We needed to balance the time that it takes for students to learn something deeply and see their progress, with the reality that students move at different paces based on external struggles." Students start a course together and those that finish all the products demonstrating the relevant competencies by the end of 11 weeks move on. Students who are near completing the course when the trimester has ended are given the first two weeks of the next trimester to finish, with the opportunity to move into the next course if they do. The progression of courses at BDEA is laid out in their Road Map. In addition, all classes stop for project month in December. Teachers pair up to create projects students will work on for that entire month, culminating in a public exhibition of their work. For example, over the last two years, students built an organic garden with a solar powered, hydroponic greenhouse on the BDEA campus.

Several of the students we spoke to at BDEA said they had felt like failures at their previous schools. One student told visitors that he was "locked up one too many times so decided to turn it around." He explained that mastery learning has given him the opportunity to catch up: "Do the work you need, not random work thrown at you. I like that. Helps me better myself. I could have been out of school two years ago, so I like being able to catch up. I like the benchmarks and the charts. We're a big family here.

My old school, they put me down because I was a 5th year freshman."

Several other students pointed to the "family" culture of BDEA as being critical to unlocking their potential. One young woman admitted that after her previous negative school experiences, "Opening up to the teachers and students was a challenge. [It] helped that adults and students so welcoming." Another student described his move to BDEA as "transitioning from isolation to friendliness. [It] was awkward at first."

From its beginning, BDEA has been considered a successful alternative school, and administrators say that the mastery-based structures they've implemented have steadily increased student outcomes. Because the State of Massachusetts only includes as graduates students who complete high school within four and five years, BDEA graduation rates appear low in official statistics. Most BDEA students enter the school having already been in high school for a year or more without success. Adding their previous time in high school to their time at BDEA, relatively few graduate within four or five years. However, BDEA can boast that 84% of their students required three or fewer years at the school to graduate. Out of 370 students enrolled in the 2012-2013 school year, they graduated 71 and had a school retention rate of 70%. The BDEA alumni network—all former dropouts or likely dropouts—now exceeds 700 graduates.

To learn more about BDEA's mastery-based approach, read the transcript of our conversation with Andrea Kunst, Director of Institutional Advancement, and Alison Hramiec, Director of Curriculum and Instruction.

Artifacts

- [Road Map to Graduation](#)
- [Common Grading Protocols](#)
- [Habits of Mind](#)
- [Experiential Learning and Symposium Description](#)
- [Making Mastery Work" Profile of Boston Day and Evening Academy, Including Sample Competency Tracking Report](#)
- [Individualized Learning Plan Sample](#)
- [Master Schedule](#)
- [Click to download all of Boston Day & Evening Academy's Artifacts](#)

Casco Bay High School

AN EXPEDITIONARY LEARNING, MASTERY-BASED SCHOOL IN PORTLAND, MAINE

Principal Derek Pierce's experience with the intricacies of creating and managing a mastery-based high school preceded the founding of Casco Bay High School. In 1999 he was involved, first as a teacher and later as principal, with the startup of mastery-based Poland Regional High School in Poland, Maine. At the time, mastery-based education was a new, radical idea in the community. Pierce says they made the mistake of underestimating the community's attachment to traditional education in those early days.

"There was a vote in town to throw us out and to make changes, including putting back ABC [traditional grades]. We were literally on the ballot!" Pierce remembers. But the mastery-based approach won narrowly, and the data proved the move to mastery had improved outcomes for kids. At Poland Regional, the percentage of kids accepted to college nearly doubled in seven years, from 45% to 88%.

In 2005, coming off the success of Poland Regional, Pierce led the opening of Casco Bay High School for Expeditionary Learning as its founding principal. After his experience at Poland Regional, he had no doubt that it should be mastery-based. Says Pierce, assessing a

student's learning based on the average of her scores on a series of tests makes no sense, "and it really makes sense to have a sense of confidence at the end of a course that a kid has met the fundamental skills and knowledge before moving on. Those two premises alone are just too logical to ignore."

While not all Expeditionary Learning (EL) Schools like Casco Bay are mastery-based, the performance-oriented, student-centered structures that shape EL schools dovetail nicely with mastery-based learning. At EL Schools, "learning expeditions" are the engine of instruction, and the elements of and criteria for a high-quality, learning exhibition are well-established. At Casco Bay, evidence of students having to demonstrate their knowledge is visible in the projects and presentations that cover the hall walls and in the "I can…" statements in classrooms that list daily and long-term learning targets. Talking with students, it's clear that they are deeply engaged in their "learning expeditions"—students keep portfolios and prepare for final, public exhibitions.

In the student lounge, the first-year cohort is working on a learning expedition called "SustainMe." Each student has chosen something from the school that is wasteful or unsustainable, researched it for two months, and will present his or her findings in front of a group of politicians in a nearby university auditorium. One student explains a startling finding from his research: "The government could save 375 million dollars on printer ink this year by switching to the font Garamond!" He notes Casco Bay could also save with his Garamond

font initiative. (Though it was later shown that these results were overstated, the research and discovery process is what the expeditions are ultimately about.)

The third-year cohort is in the middle of an expedition to answer a challenging question: how do communities sustain themselves in times of trouble? They have been exploring this question through projects that integrate literature, environmental science, social studies and math, and they will be traveling to New York to interview Hurricane Sandy victims. They are preparing for their interviews, which will become part of the public presentations and exhibitions they make to answer their guiding question.

Junior Alex started at Casco Bay as a sophomore, transferring in from a traditional high school. He explains the difference between

being in a traditional school and a mastery-based, EL school. "It's a lot more difficult, which could affect my GPA and stuff, I guess. But I feel so much more intelligent. And you'll have crazy projects like public policy where you'll get really passionate about an issue. Public policy was probably the most difficult thing I've done academically. We had to pick a specific environmental problem and then study the law behind it and figure out how it could be fixed. I chose hydraulic fracturing. And now it's something I have extensive knowledge about."

Really, to visit Casco Bay is to visit an excellent EL school (they are in fact one of 20 "Mentor" schools in the EL network of over 150 schools) with a culture of excellence buttressed by mastery-based grading and assessment. The school's Family Handbook is a great resource: it lays out Casco Bay's structures, policies, and expectations as an EL school and a mastery-based school. Its motto is "Get Smart to Do Good" and the core values that organize all its systems, policies and processes are the 3 R's—rigor, relevance and relationships.

When interviewed, Derek Pierce was generous in sharing his perspective on what has and hasn't worked in creating a culture of mastery at Casco Bay.

He stressed the importance of having a living, breathing Faculty Grading Guide that the staff revisits and improves regularly. One such evolution concerned the grading scale. Casco Bay previously had a 1 to 4 scale: 1 = does not meet standards; 2 = approaching the standard;

3 = meets the standard; 3.25 to 3.75 = partially exceeds the standard; and 4 = exceeds the standard. They decided to add a 2+. Pierce explains: "One of the things we've learned is that in a world without C and D work, you have a lot more kids living in the land of 'not there yet' for a lot more of the time. And that's anxiety provoking for kids. The 2+ helps with that a bit. It lets you know you're closer."

The school's leadership has also made changes in how it promotes appropriate Habits of Work (HOW) in a mastery culture where homework and attitude don't count towards your academic grade. Says Pierce, "We've had to be thoughtful about how to keep kids in the game and change the whole culture around revision. And that's where HOW comes in a bit. Because we say if you have a 3 in HOW by the end of the trimester we will never give you a failing grade, you will always get an incomplete and have, in theory, endless time to work on it. That never happens because kids that have good habits of work get there."

Pierce offered more advice regarding motivation: "Though it's good and better to be clear about learning outcomes—and that can be motivating, I want to learn this particular skill that's spelled out in the learning target, what's equally but perhaps more important is that the work itself is compelling and interesting." Guidance for making learning expeditions compelling is outlined in EL's Core Practices.

Every member of Casco Bay's first graduating class in 2009 was accepted to college. Three

of five subsequent graduating classes have repeated that performance. Casco Bay students regularly exceed state and district standards on the Maine state test. Pierce says the school has done a good job of communicating with parents about its mastery-based approach through conferences, exhibitions and the always evolving and informative Family Handbook. The handbook includes a Faculty Grading Guide, which has been very helpful in making mastery-based grading transparent to families. For more of our interview with Principal Derek Pierce, see the full transcript.

Artifacts

- School Schedule
- Faculty Grading Guide
- Sample Casco Bay/Expeditionary Learning Tools
- Summative Assessment Extension Request Form
- Casco Bay High School Brochure: Get Smart To Do Good
- Expeditionary Learning Core Practices
- Family Handbook
- Universal Habits of Work Rubric
- Casco Bay School Profile
- Click to download all of Casco Bay High School's artifacts

Francis W. Parker Charter Essential School

MASTERY LEARNING AND HIGH ACHIEVEMENT IN CENTRAL MASSACHUSETTS

Parker Charter opened as a public school of choice for middle school and high school students in the fall of 1995 in Devens, Massachusetts, and has been mastery-based from the start. Parker was founded on ten principles, one of which reads in part: "The school's goals should be simple: that each student masters a limited number of essential skills and areas of knowledge." By design, the school affirms the aphorism "less is more," and is a wonderful example of what project-based, mastery-based learning and teaching can look like. (Parker's ten principles are those shared by all members of the Coalition of Essential Schools.)

Parker was designed to promote a cohesive cohort culture and to personalize and support student journeys to mastery-level work. There are clear structures at Parker that work together to achieve both.

The cohort experience starts with the organization of students into three Divisions, each of which more or less corresponds to two years of traditional grade levels. Instead of 7th and 8th grades, Parker has Division 1; 9th and 10th grades are Division 2; and 11th and 12th grade are Division 3. Students spend an average of two years in each Division, moving ahead when

they have demonstrated mastery and readiness to do so; some move ahead or spend more time in a Division in one or more academic domains. (For example, we met students who were in Division 2 for Math, Science and Technology but in Division 3 for Arts and Humanities.) Division 3 is the most flexible, as it is designed to be either a one-year, two-year or three-year program. As such, the occasional odd semester ahead or behind gets easily absorbed so that students still graduate in the spring with others from Division 3 after completing their Senior Exhibition.

The curriculum at Parker is generally shared by all students in a given cohort. The curriculum is on a two-year rotation and is team-taught in interdisciplinary domain blocks (see daily schedule). Students participate in three two-hour long curricular blocks each day, the first devoted to Arts and Humanities, the second to Math, Science and Technology, and the third to Spanish and Wellness (one hour each). At Parker there are neither electives nor languages other than Spanish offered. The integrated curriculum creates a shared experience that helps bind Parker students together.

However, the curriculum at Parker and the projects that make it up allow individual students to have different experiences. The center of the personalized experience for students at Parker is Advisory, where each student works with her Advisor and at times her teachers to develop a Personal Learning Plan (PLP), receive college and transition counseling, and manage her domain portfolios.

Exhibitions, a big part of the shared experience at Parker, are personalized presentations. "Senior Seminar" is a small class in which graduating Division 3 students are supported to develop their final "Senior Exhibitions." Each student must choose a topic for year-long, individual study and present her learning in front of teachers, family and friends. As in other mastery-based schools, time is flexible so revision of work products is a big part of the individual experience. Teachers also employ traditional differentiation methods—flexible student grouping, pre-teaching, tutoring, etc.—to differentiate within shared experiences. But unlike in a traditional school setting, Parker has created structures that support teachers to consistently design differentiation into each project and assessment. Each teacher at Parker has two hours a day, four days a week, of planning time in common with their fellow domain teachers. They set aside time within those eight hours to design and discuss student work in domain teams.

In their courses and Senior Exhibitions, students must demonstrate mastery of Parker's Criteria for Excellence in order to advance or graduate. Principal Todd Sumner explains:

> "Everything a student is asked to do maps back on to one of these 13 skill areas. Some of them would be more of a focus in Arts and Humanities [AH]. Some of them would be more of a focus on Math, Science, and Technology [MST]. For example, Mathematical Problem Solving is one of the 13 skill areas and that's something that comes up in MST rather than in AH."

In order to move from one Division to the next, a student must be able to meet standards consistently, to have mastered or be close to mastering a sufficient number of the Criteria for Excellence and successfully make her case for advancing at her "Gateway Exhibition." In order to graduate, each student must fulfill requirements that include having produced work in their portfolios that meets Parker's Criteria for Excellence in nine of the 13 skill areas.

When we visited Parker in early May it was "Senior Exhibition" season. Family and friends visiting the school could choose from among 60 different final-year exhibitions held that week. Rather than feeling chaotic, this special week at Parker hummed along, students and teachers clearly engaged, conversations and congratulations about exhibitions spilling out into the halls.

As visitors, we were asked to be part of the judging panel that included teachers and peers for an exhibition entitled, "How Does Magic Manipulate Perception?" The senior exhibitor documented how she pursued her question with research, attending magic shows and reading books on magic and brain science. She performed magic tricks and then explained the brain science basis for the successful manipulation of the audience. Her PowerPoint contained videos, photos, diagrams and other artifacts, and it complemented her words effectively. Visitors considered the young woman's performance exceptional. In the judge's room, however, the Parker students and teachers on the panel were satisfied but not surprised. They called hers a "typical Parker exhibition" and agreed she had met but not exceeded the criteria for Oral Presentation. Indeed, the other presentations we saw that day were also engaging and sophisticated.

Students not giving or attending exhibitions at Parker that day were involved in other forms of active learning. Down the hall in a Division 2 Math, Science and Technology class, students manipulated lenses and light for a unit on optics. Some students were beginning to prototype telescopes. A math teacher and a science teacher team-taught the class. They moved around the room, helping students with questions at different stages in the project. Down another corridor, students in Division 1 were out of their seats, moving in an organized fashion, responding to commands in Spanish from their foreign language teacher. Meanwhile, in the computer lab, students worked on independent projects or caught up on lessons. (Parker

has the lowest computer to student ratio of the schools we visited. They are so completely hands-on and project-based that it's sufficient to rotate students on computers as needed.)

One of Parker's 10 founding principles is to help "adolescents learn to use their minds well." Another is to "provoke students to learn how to learn and thus to teach themselves." As such, Parker provides a range of supports intended to promote intrinsic motivation to learn. They do not rank students or give out academic prizes. Student progress reports consist primarily of written narrative and use a simple scale that indicates whether the student has met or not met a particular skill area within the Criteria for Excellence. However, all their students pass the MCAS (Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System), the test the state of Massachusetts requires to graduate. Their scores are mixed when they take it in Division 1, as they matriculate from diverse academic backgrounds. But when they take the MCAS as Division 2 students, they all pass. 95% of Parker students go on to college.

For more of the discussion with Principal Sumner and with Parker's Academic Dean, Deb Merriam, about assessment, rigor, teacher roles, and other aspects of Parker's mastery-based program, see our interview transcript, the Parker Charter site, and our links to relevant artifacts.

Artifacts

- Daily Schedule
- "Who We Are—and How It Translates into What We Do"
- Parker Charter Criteria for Excellence
- How Assessment Works
- Student Handbook
- Senior Exhibition Letter
- Ten Common Principles
- Coalition of Essential Schools
- Click to download all of Francis W. Parker Charter Essential School's artifacts

Making Community Connections Charter School

MASTERY-BASED LEARNING IN MANCHESTER, NH

Opened in the Fall of 2012 in Manchester, NH, Making Community Connections Charter (MC2) is a mastery-based high school with student agency at the center of its design. MC2 was founded by the QED Foundation, and benefits from a strong pedagogical underpinning and related frameworks and systems that were developed in the QED's work with other mastery-based schools. Still, MC2 is new: perhaps particularly because the model is predicated on a strong culture of student agency, more time is needed for its thoughtful systems to settle and come to fruition.

The founders of MC2 trust that supporting students in following their passions and developing their interests, particularly by becoming self-directed learners, enables them to jumpstart a process of becoming learners for life. In their time at MC2, students are expected to master two sets of competencies: Essential Knowledge (academic content knowledge) and Habits (dispositions and ways of behaving that support lifelong learning across disciplines). Students are tracked to proficiency and beyond on a continuum that extends from Emerging Competency to Lifelong Competency. MC2 staff put

considerable time into scaffolding the development and application of the habits they believe lead to lifelong learning. In fact, the first phase of each student's trajectory at MC2 is focused primarily on the habits, and on understanding oneself as a learner. The school has detailed rubrics for evaluating students' development of the 18 habits they track. These rubrics help organize detailed conversations with students about their strengths, weaknesses and development as learners.

Rather than grade levels, the school has four phases learners pass through at their own pace. Progress through the phases is illustrated on a "J-curve." The bottom left of the J corresponds to a student's first year (more or less) at MC2—a time when she is encouraged to focus on developing habits of being and doing that lead to steeper gains in academic content learning in the next phases. As students move out of the bottom of the J and up the J-curve, they need less scaffolding in the habits and can focus more on acquiring the essential knowledge they need to graduate. MC2 has an elaborate system of advisories, individual learning plans, rubrics, checklists, exhibitions, a learner diagnostic tool and a customized system of digital portfolios to scaffold and evaluate each student's progress through the phases and up the J-curve.

So what does supporting adolescent motivation, metacognition and mastery look like on the ground? For one, there are no traditional subject classes; nor are there age or ability groupings. Opportunities to learn are driven

by student interest and are organized into four types: personal learning experiences, designed with a faculty member; Learning Studios, based on student interests and designed by faculty; treks, which are group learning trips; and citizenship internships, which entail working in the greater community. Monday, Wednesday and Friday are Learning Studio days. Tuesday and Thursday are internship days. Treks happen any time, including during intersessions, as a separate learning experience or as part of another one, such as a Learning Studio. Personal learning experiences take advantage of student interests and opportunities (such as family trips) and can happen at any time. The school operates on year-round quarters with ten-week terms and three-week intersessions. (Staff are eleven weeks on and two weeks off.)

We visit on a [Learning Studio](#) day. Each quarter, students must engage in two Learning Studios, according to their interests and the requirements each student needs to fill. Each Learning Studio is interdisciplinary and structured around an essential question. For example, we visited one studio called Guerilla Gardening. Its essential question was: "How safe is our food? (How can we know?)." The studio explored the financial, health and environmental costs of using pesticides. Participation in and completion of the work in this studio fulfilled a biology competency in ecosystems, a learning trek requirement, and a college-bound reading requirement. Other Learning Studios that quarter included an examination of the influences of nature and nurture through case studies in criminal psychology; a study of world cultures through the art of masks as well as mask making; a deep dive into the history and present circumstances of the people of their city, Manchester; the hands-on chemistry of cooking through experimenting with sap, syrup and sugar; a survey of different relaxation techniques (zendoodling, yoga, and guided meditation) coupled with personal reflection exercises to home in on what works to increase focus and cultivate a sense of well-being in each participant. Each product a student completes for a studio or other learning experience becomes part of her digital portfolio. She must fulfill all the portfolio requirements on her phase checklist to progress to the next phase and, ultimately, to graduate.

Eddie, who finished 8th grade at a traditional middle school last year, is in Phase 1 and at the start of the J-curve at MC2. He admits he was glad to be pulled out of his current Learning Studio to talk to visitors. He was in the studio about Manchester, the place and the people, and he had trouble engaging ("It was boring!") in their "chalk talk" exercise. "Chalk Talk is when you are quiet and you write down things that you think the essential question is about," he explains to visitors. "The essential question was 'Who do we think we are?' You break it down into what you think it is and what should be discussed."

Head of School, Eddie Marceau, asks student Eddie if he participated. Eddie sits back. They use first names at MC2 so he calls Marceau "the other Eddie." He is clearly used to being asked to reflect on his learning habits with Marceau and the other adults around him. "I didn't write stuff but I did talk. I have horrible writing."

Eddie is not alone among students we met at MC2 with engagement challenges. Since the school is new, most students are early in the J-curve, still learning what works and engages them as individual learners. However, the comfort and candor Eddie and other students we met displayed in talking about their particular learning challenges, as well as the constant adult modeling of effective habits of work, point to a central aspect of MC2. The school might turn traditional education on its head to the point of being unrecognizable, but at its heart, it's a small school grounded in relationships. And for kids like Eddie who have been turned off by school in the past, being known and cared for at school makes all the difference.

A visitor asks him if MC2 is different from his old school. "Way different. I went to Hartside for 6th, 7th, and 8th. Here, the setup's different, the structure's different, and the space is different. If you went to West High, you'd get lost!" Eddie likes that MC2 is small and friendly. Another student, Alexa, tells us: "I like the school. I used to skip a lot at my old school but you can't skip here. There's just no way you can." Advisory bookends Learning Studio days, the staff to student ratio is one to seven, and students have close relationships with multiple adults at school. Marceau tells us: "I try every day to shake every student's hand. I tell them, I'm so glad you're here. That's a norm."

Another intimate practice pulling the pieces together for students is the End of Day (EOD) reflection, a tool Head of School Eddie Marceau described as "vital." Monday through Thursday, "they're required to complete a 200-word EOD which reflects their SMART goals and what they did that day and kind of their 'now what,'" Marceau tells us. "This is a safe space for them to say to the staff, hey, this is working for me, this isn't. Something's going on in my home life. I'm really sad about my performance. I can't tell you how many times a student who has had a behaviorally difficult day has explained it in their end of day. So we say, I get it now, let's move forward." It's not unusual for multiple adults to respond to a student EOD, including parents, who have access to student progress, digital portfolios and EOD through an End of Day web portal. On Fridays, all students must complete a 500-word End of Week reflection.

Yet another MC2 practice that puts self-directed learning at the center of school operations is the structure of professional development for teachers. Teachers are required to engage many of the same practices as students with the same expectation that they will pursue and demonstrate their own learning. Writes QED Director and MC2 founder, Kim Carter: "Commensurate expectations and structures are held/used for/with staff as those that are held/used for/with students. Example: staff have Professional Checklists analogous to students' checklists, but theirs are based on InTASC standards; staff write End of Weeks (and End of Days during PD weeks); staff present public exhibitions of learning, etc." Between these expectations, the expectation that they create quarterly Learning Studios based on student interests, and the role of facilitator or coach that is new for most, teachers, too, will have a learning curve at MC2.

Marceau explains that these parallel requirements have caused a considerable shift in practice for teachers and, increasingly, for students. "One of our sayings is model up, model down. As a staff we are required to [fulfill] a lot of the same expectations. We're trying to show that it's manageable and doable. But as the students become more visible doing it, that's been the biggest culture shift."

Most students at MC2 are in Phase 1 and early in the J-Curve, still primarily focused on developing the habits of being and doing that lifelong learners possess. As more of them complete their Phase 1 requirements and "gateway" to

the next phase (showing through exhibition that they're prepared to advance), other students are noticing and learning what it takes to progress as a learner and to make a path to graduation. The theory at MC2 is that the school culture will reach a tipping point where students will be the primary models and motivators inspiring strong habits of work and being in their peers.

The theory, design principles, and systems behind MC2 have been well-covered at Competency Works. Extensive documentation of MC2 pedagogy, systems and frameworks is available at the MC2 wiki and at the QED Foundation site. Also, see the transcript of our interview with QED and MC2 Founder Kim Carter and MC2 Head of School Eddie Marceau for more information about developing competencies and what has and has not worked in their mastery-based school model.

Artifacts

- MC2 Design Elements
- Daily Schedule
- Exhibition of Learning Rubric
- QED Foundation Guide to Personalized Learning
- Learning Opportunity Design Template
- Sample End-of-Year Reports
- End-of-Day and End-of-Week Reflection Guidelines
- Graduation Checklists
- Learning Studios
- J-Curve
- Essential Knowledge (EK) Competencies
- QED Transformational Change Model

- QED Foundation: The Learner Sketch Tool
- "Smart" Goal Setting Protocols
- Learner Profiles
- MC2 Resource Wiki
- Click to download all of Making Community Connections Charter School's artifacts

Next Charter School

MASTERY-BASED, PERSONALIZED LEARNING IN RURAL NEW HAMPSHIRE

In the fall of 2013, Next Charter opened in Derry, NH as an alternative for students not served by the big, traditional high school in town. Co-Directors Joe Crawford and Justin Krieger designed Next Charter to be a mastery-based, personalized, high-touch, tech-rich school where student voice and choice would be paramount. They had the support of the Derry district, even housing the school in the same building with Hood Middle School, and receiving in-kind support for services such as technology infrastructure and nursing.

Although new, Next Charter has been able to evolve quickly, perhaps because the school is small. When we visited in the spring of its first year, the school had 30 mixed-level and -age students (they aren't grouped in cohorts or grades), with administrators intending to add 15 every year until they reach the school's capacity of 90 students. By May of their first year, Co-Director Krieger told us they were on their fourth incarnation of the daily schedule. Small enough to be nimble, Next Charter's inventive structures and dedicated staff make it a mastery-based school to watch.

The school space consists of three big conference rooms, a student lounge, a few small breakout spaces, a computer lab and offices.

Each student has a laptop and there are Apple TVs in each conference room. Every day starts with a morning meeting of the whole school—30 students and six staff members. Each day a different student emcees the meeting, opening with a quote, song, thought, video or something else of the student's choosing. This morning, the emcee opens by posting a picture of an abstract painting up on the Apple TV screen. Students are supposed to consider what the painting brings to mind for them and be prepared to discuss it at the day's closing. A student raises his hand and suggests they change this procedure: wouldn't it be better to discuss it immediately before we forget? Quite a few students stare blankly. But several others have caught on that at Next Charter, co-creating community structures and processes is part of the work of students. There is a back and forth among these students and staff and it's agreed that changing the format of the meeting open will be considered at a later time. Next, the emcee calls on those with announcements, followed by questions for teachers about the day ahead.

Next Charter was designed to give students a considerable stake in their own learning by making relationships with staff and other students, as well as passion-based and community-based learning, central to the curriculum. At the start of the year, Co-Directors Crawford and Krieger realized that their students were not as ready or willing to take ownership of the community and their learning as the directors had hoped when they designed their model. The students struggled to set goals and make

choices about how to meet the standards to get themselves there. After the first two weeks, the directors changed the self-directed "learning blocks" to traditional subject blocks because the students were more comfortable with that structure. Eventually they modified again to team-taught interdisciplinary blocks. Their hope is still to co-create a culture with students in which the students are more comfortable directing their own learning and can work to pursue their interests through more self-directed, interdisciplinary projects.

Advisory, individual learning plans, community meetings, monthly field work, regular exhibitions, and the flexibility for kids to engage in learning opportunities outside of school—these are core features of Next Charter that support student engagement. The day we visit, the whole school is divided into groups for a Team Challenge. Team Challenges happen once a month at Next Charter. Krieger explains that

they provide an opportunity for students to practice and receive feedback on the school competencies associated with Planning, Inquiry, and Communication: the same three competencies that are summarily assessed during Exhibition.

We join one of the groups, which includes five students, a volunteer, and Co-Director Joe Crawford, on a team challenge that takes us into Derry. Each group collects artifacts from a different spot in Derry. Based on the artifacts, the other teams are supposed to guess where they visited.

Our team visits the Veteran's Memorial Center in town. The 15-minute walk to Vet's Memorial seems to enliven this group of teenagers. With some prodding by Crawford, they've all chosen roles in their artifact collecting. One student takes pictures of the center, including some of seniors taking a dance aerobics class in the gym. Another interviews the Director of the Center about its current and past offerings. Yet another collects brochures and newsletters of various programs housed there. A girl who has been sullen and withdrawn for the entire trip brightens when Joe Crawford suggests that writing a poem about the place would make a great artifact. She smiles as she nods and sits down on the stone steps of the building to write. Joe tells them that the Center really was fundamental to the community when he was growing up in Derry. A couple of the students wonder aloud about the change, the disinvestment in the community, and whether Vet's Memorial could again become the community center it once was.

There are aspects of the Next model that will be interesting to watch going forward, one being its grading scale. A premise of mastery-based education is that we should have a higher standard of achievement for all students, requiring that they master the concepts they study—a level of achievement for all that is not supported by the traditional ABC sorting system of grading. At Next Charter School, they have taken extra steps to ensure that grading does not become a way of sorting their students. They promise to help all kids meet the current standards, and their scale is binary: not yet met (NYM) and met (M) the standard. The idea is that kids will distinguish themselves not by their grades, but by their interests and the individual learning journeys they take, all of which will be recounted in their transcript narrative. Also important at Next, students' Habits of Mind are graded—on a 1 to 4 scale. They are then discussed in conversation with students and parents at regular progress meetings, where the student and staff present evidence to support their own determinations. The group then reaches consensus on the Habits of Mind grades to be given.

Another Next system feature worth watching is the use of Google Docs. The cost and risk of commissioning personalized Learning Management and Gradebook systems for new mastery-based models has been prohibitive for Next Charter and many other schools and districts. More and more schools use Google Docs, considering it either a stopgap until they see something better, or a means to eventually create something better. Next Charter's

Co-Directors have devised a Google Docs solution for their reporting system in lieu of a Learning Management System. Student advisors and teachers regularly work with kids to co-create what they call "Google Explorations." These are links and lessons for individual students embedded in a back-and-forth, time-stamped conversation between student and teachers, which helps guide the student's exploration. Krieger points out that Google review mechanisms are particularly useful tools in a mastery-based culture of revision.

"When we revise it shows the history. Also a link back to the artifact," explains Krieger. This process can be difficult for students. "Kids are used to doing something, handing it in, getting a grade, and rarely revisiting their work in context. Here we ask that you do less things but at a much higher level, many revisions. So kids struggle with that. They're used to something else."

Next Charter has evolved quickly, like most Year 1 schools do. As of August 2014, Next Charter was moved to West Running Brook Middle School in the same district and still receives in-kind services. This coming school year they will pilot the JumpRope platform for reporting. The Google platform will remain the core system in which students produce work and receive feedback on that work. See their most recent Curriculum Framework for more details.

For more information on Next Charter School and its competency-based framework, read the transcript of our conversation with Co-Director Justin Krieger.

Artifacts

- [Next Curriculum Framework](#)

Maine's Regional School Unit 2 (RSU2)

MASTERY-BASED, STUDENT-CENTERED LEARNING IN RURAL MAINE

In 2009, Maine's Regional School Unit 2 (RSU2) started engaging their stakeholders in creating a vision for a mastery-based and student-centered community of schools. Five years later, Superintendent Virgel Hammonds says they're well on their way to fulfilling that vision. To visit their schools is to feel they're moving in the right direction.

Moving down the halls and through the classrooms at Hall-Dale Middle High School, you see engaging, project-based teaching and learning, much of which you might see at other high-quality schools. A class on sound waves has students at different stages of building instruments. In another class on exploring leadership qualities, students analyze great speeches and then write their own.

The school also exhibits several practices unique to a mastery-based approach. For example, students in RSU2 know what proficiencies they need to demonstrate to move ahead in their grade-level work and all the way on to graduation. They check their progress on their computers and strategize about moving ahead, often

creating interdisciplinary projects, tackling several proficiencies across multiple disciplines at once. They can articulate their educational goals and say that their learning is better supported in a mastery-based system. Ninth grader Luke expressed the difference mastery has meant for him this way: "It's about learning. It's more difficult but we learn more this way."

Methods for tracking student progress and differentiating teaching also support mastery-based learning. Students move as they master Measurement Topics (MTs) and the Learning Targets (LTs) within each MT. They pass onto the next MT when they can give a strong performance on teacher-created, summative assessments, which are given when formative assessments show any given student is prepared. In RSU2, students can be spotted checking charts on the walls to see who is in their latest work group. Administrators create student schedules first, based on where they are in their learning trajectories, and then teacher schedules in response, rather than the other way around. They also create a master schedule that allows for maximum flexibility so that, for example, two sequential ELA classes meet in the same period allowing students to be grouped and regrouped across two class rosters with two assigned teachers. Teachers say this makes differentiation possible: they can teach to six levels in a class rather than failing at differentiating to twelve before they actively regrouped. They are also prepared to teach in spans—a full grade level below and above where they might teach in a traditional school—to accommodate regrouping.

Building on these mastery-based practices, RSU2 distinguishes its model in several ways, including the following:

First, in deciding what students need to master and how they progress to graduation, RSU2 has been particularly explicit about rigor. Many educators use a taxonomy of rigor—RSU2 uses Marzano's taxonomy. But at RSU2, they have made it standard practice to mark the rigor level on every learning target of every assignment (Measurement Topic Key). RSU2 administrators say this has made all the difference in creating a deeper conversation and understanding among teachers and students of what is ex-

pected and how to exceed those expectations. Their approach asks: *What do we really mean by comprehension vs. analysis? What qualifies as going beyond analysis in terms of rigor?* Since they introduced this practice last fall, teachers teaching to the same level and area are charged with identifying how to get students to the same, pre-determined level of rigor rather than also having to decide on level of rigor themselves.

Second, although RSU2 has had frustrations with Empower (formerly Educate), the platform they use for their gradebook and LMS, they have been able to utilize it to make student progress along the expected proficiencies very transparent to students, parents and faculty alike. Having an easy-to-read platform to show progress on proficiencies, expressing the information in kid-friendly language, and granting kids constant access with their 1-to-1 laptop program, puts students in the "driver's seat." Students can pitch future projects and combine proficiencies more easily than would have been possible without this high degree of transparency. In addition, IT Director John Armentrout worked with the developers of Empower to create a hot button within the platform so parents can print out a progress report at any time.

RSU2's Standards-Based, Learner-Centered Framework outlines the key elements of their model for learning communities (they don't call them schools) across the district. The elements of their model have been: standards-based, teacher-designed curriculum assessment practices that support learning; learner-centered instructional strategies; the use and development of effective, learner-centered teaching strategies; monitoring learning and providing feedback; and continuous improvement. Their process for developing the structures to support their model has been to focus on curriculum and instruction, leadership, articulation agreements with higher education, and developing community learning partnerships.

Two years into his tenure, Superintendent Hammonds sums up their progress this way: "We like to say we're proficiency-based but we're not as learner-centered as we need to be. We still need to tap into student passions and goals. What do our students want to develop, pursue, be? We're a really good proficiency-based system that is making significant progress at becoming more learner-centered."

For more details on what worked well and less well at RSU2, read the transcript of our conversation with Superintendent Hammonds, Coordinator of Student Achievement Matt Shea, and IT Director John Armentrout, among others.

Artifacts
- Hall Dale Middle/High School Daily Schedule
- Hall Dale Middle/High School Master Teacher Schedule
- Standards-Based, Learner-Centered Framework
- Capacity Matrix
- Measurement Topic Key
- Taxonomy of Learning
- Sample Student Transcript
- Click to download all of RSU2's artifacts

School Interview Transcripts

Boston Day and Evening Academy

TRANSCRIPT

This is a transcript of taped question and answer sessions with **ANDREA KUNST**, *Director of Institutional Advancement, and* **ALISON HRAMIEC**, *Director of Curriculum & Instruction of Boston Day & Evening Academy. These questions were asked on a small group tour, which took place on March 25, 2014. Melissa Giraud asked questions on behalf of* **SPRINGPOINT**. *Other* **VISITOR** *questions are also included in this transcript.*

ANDREA: We're a Horace Mann Charter School. It means that we report to both the state and the district. We receive our per pupil funding from Boston Public Schools. We receive less funding than almost any other high school in the district. We report our outcomes both to the state and to the district, which use different student information management systems, so we do everything twice.

The reason we chose to be Horace Mann is that we want to be a public school. We want these services and this kind of education to be available to all students. Our teachers are part of the collective bargaining unit and we like that as well. We are as much a public school as a charter school. The charter gives us autonomy in terms of curriculum, scheduling, budgeting, time, and hiring: all the components that are important to teaching and learning.

We were chartered by the district. The school started as a program within the public schools. Because it was successful as an evening program

for off-track students, it grew. It became a pilot school with more autonomy. Then the city asked the school to add a day program. At that point, we were trying to precipitate the dropout problem and serve 8th grade students who were 16 and ageing out of middle school. Students can now choose their hours, day or evening, according to what best fits their schedule.

We start now at 9 and end at 5:45 and day and evening have a couple of hours/blocks of overlap. Students are taking the classes they need without age being a factor. All of our students work well together because their focus is on doing the work and graduating, not on who is 16 and who is 20.

Our admissions manager reaches out to counselors at middle schools and at the re-engagement center to make sure that we are getting to the students who need us most. Students who come here want their diploma rather than their GED.

Since we are a charter school, we have a lottery. The job of the admissions manager is crucial. One of her challenges is making sure that all applicants meet the criteria of our mission and are off-track for graduation.

Now that our reputation has changed from being "the school for losers" to a real second or third or fourth chance, students want to come here.

We enroll year round and have four orientations each year. Once a student has come in through the lottery, they come in to the next scheduled orientation. They do that in groups or cohorts of 15.

We introduce them to the language of success, the fact that no one here "fails": they are simply "not yet competent" in a particular area.

Orientation is four full days, so students immediately get into the habit of coming to school. And we start educating them about what they're going to experience here. We talk to them about what a competency is, a benchmark, a trimester. We talk to them about experiential learning and about all the departments they'll come into contact with: the student support team, the student leadership team, the post graduate planning office, all of the things they're going to be exposed to. Maybe most important, panels of current students talk to them about realities and expectations. And we introduce them to the language of success, the fact that no one here "fails": they are simply "not yet competent" in a particular area.

And during orientation, we begin assessments. So at that point they're getting a lot of information about why this is going to be different from their previous school. They get all their questions answered. They're getting to know the students they're going to be in their first trimester with. We're finding out where they are academically,

socially, and emotionally. Transcripts are not our primary form of assessment. They don't really mean anything. What does a D mean? It means that maybe their homework wasn't handed

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There's a lot of peer coaching and support that also takes place and is important to establishing culture and climate.

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in on time. It could mean maybe they weren't in class. They were 10 minutes late too many times. It could mean that they knew the material but that all of these other things brought their grade down. Who knows? We just want to get that whole concept out of their heads. And we assess them. In orientation and in Seminar, teachers do a lot of diagnostics.

At that point, when orientation is done, students are enrolled in the next trimester. So if they are in a January or February orientation, they start in April, with the next trimester. And they start together. And in the first trimester, which is called Seminar, they have content area teachers—Math, Humanities and Science —and a student support person with them in that cohort. During Seminar, students begin to demonstrate mastery against competencies. So they start working on benchmarks in each of these content areas. They get extra help if they need it. There's a lot of peer coaching and support that also takes place and is important to establishing culture and climate.

And they continue to be assessed. By the time that first trimester is done, we know exactly where they should be in each of those content areas. They might be acing humanities so they may be placed in a high-level humanities class. They might be at their learning edge in science, and having a really tough time in math. So in each of those content areas, they are placed at the appropriate level on their individual learning plan beginning with their second trimester. They are going to be done with their humanities benchmarks in two trimesters. Then they can double up on their other areas. They can also get support in content areas through our Personalized Online Learning Lab.

SPRINGPOINT: *What assessments are you using in the first trimester?*

ANDREA: MAP [NWEA's Measures of Academic Progress] to start and then home grown once we get into Seminar and trimesters. If after Seminar students are placed in classes and it turns out that it's not the right class for them, they can ask to be placed in a previous class or assess into the next level.

Capstone is the last trimester before graduation. Antonio who you just met is in Capstone right now. Students pick a topic of particular interest to them, and we encourage it to be career related. Antonio wants to be an actor. He was a finalist for the August Wilson Monologue Competition last year. He has been scooped up by Actor's Shakespeare Project. He decided to do his Capstone project on how to become an actor, what are the steps one takes to become an actor. He used to be gang related but turned

it all around. All of our students have stories that are heartbreaking. Students can receive a "Not Yet Competent" in Capstone. So graduation is not automatic even in the last trimester.

We just passed our Literacy Support Classroom, and we also offer Numeracy Support. The supports are huge, because so many of our students arrived here with very low or undeveloped skills in literacy and numeracy. Our specialists do small group work and individual work there from 9 to 6.

SPRINGPOINT: *What are your biggest challenges?*

ANDREA: When I started here in 2007 there were nine people in the Student Support Office, now it's been decimated by funding cuts so there are four. They are the ones that connect kids to services. When kids are late in the morning they have to check in there first and those folks know by looking at a kid if they

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A lot of our students, because they're older, have no family to care for them or they have families of their own. It's amazing that they even show up here, let alone work so hard and graduate.

haven't eaten. Food is a major issue. Homelessness is an issue. Many are couch surfing so they don't have a place to stay. Trauma is our biggest problem. Our student support coordinator says

that well over 50% of our students are clinically depressed. And the result is self-medication. We have a huge smoking problem. It doesn't necessarily prevent them from coming to school but it prevents them from staying. We can't let kids stay that smell like weed. Attendance is our other biggest challenge. Given our students' academic histories, we have been told that having 55% of our students showing up most of the time is great. But we feel we need at least 75%. So that's our metric, that's our target. The way we feel we can be more effective is by offering more counseling services.

A lot of our students, because they're older, have no family to care for them or they have families of their own. It's amazing that they even show up here, let alone work so hard and graduate.

Students can be assigned to Student Support by a teacher, but it's generally where they go anyway with problems and to talk things out. To get a pass when you're late. But the support staff is everywhere all the time.

Ideally we'd have six people, not four in Student Support. Nine was probably too many but we do have six distinct roles to fill.

SPRINGPOINT: *Classes seem small here?*

ANDREA: Classes are kept at 17 but more like 12. This is a small class because kids are catching up; it's the last week of the trimester. Attendance is low. Also we're beginning portfolio reviews. So students who are not caught up are getting ready for portfolio review.

ANDREA: In the month of December we have something called Project Month. Project Month is completely experiential. Our regular classes stop at the end of November, so it starts after Thanksgiving break. During Project Month teachers pair up and come up with a project that students will work on for six hours a day, four days a week, for the month of December. Then it ends with a science fair type event — we call it Symposium — where everything is on display. We invite the community in and everyone walks around to see what the students have created. We ask guests to rate the work using the rubrics that teachers use in the classroom.

It's everybody's favorite time of year. It's just extraordinary. An example, I don't know if you saw the garden across the street. We have an organic garden with a solar powered hydroponic greenhouse that our students built over the last two years during Project Month.

ALISON HRAMIEC, *Director of Curriculum and Instruction, joins interview*

SPRINGPOINT: *How does BDEA integrate technology into its curriculum?*

ALISON: Five years ago we started with [Moodle](#) and our teachers, as teachers are — resistant, are questioning this way of learning for our students. And our students are, frankly, the majority of them off-track, all behind, many low skilled and low motivation, the online wasn't working for them. And our teachers knew it. We knew you couldn't replace a teacher with

a program. We wanted our online lab used as a place for catch-up or acceleration. Now a couple of teachers are looking at what tech can look like in a classroom of off-track students. You see rotation models at the elementary and middle school level, they have a blended

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The value of coming together and working together and communicating, that's where we want to bring them in. Those are the values we hold.

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learning model that is competency based, but not really at the high school level, we're not seeing any traction that moves beyond online learning. Here or in general. What we're seeing instead is kids working on the computer, doing their coursework on the computer. And what we're trying to do is incorporate bits and pieces of that. The value of coming together and working together and communicating, that's where we want to bring them in. Those are the values we hold.

SPRINGPOINT: *Do any teachers flip their curriculum?*

ALISON: Working with this population it's a little different in terms of motivation, technology and skill sets at home.

SPRINGPOINT: *What about doing it at school?*

ALISON: That's what we're playing with. We have teachers who have put some of their lecture

online, so that when students missed a day they can go over to the computers and catch up before doing the course work. It's also a shift in teaching. So how do you take a group of teachers along on that shift.

SPRINGPOINT: *Expensive good tools.*

ALISON: The two problems are that it's expensive. We're seeing some for low-level skills. But mostly, the engaging online is not out there yet.

Technology can't replace the human side.

SPRINGPOINT: *Part of the tech problem is how to keep track of competency learning for lots of kids. We saw fewer kids in the classrooms we visited here. But if the whole class is here, that's a lot of kids to track.*

ALISON: You're coming in at the end of the trimester. With this group of kids, give them a snow day and they'll take two more. Technology can't replace the human side. We're trying to use technology to replace something that can't be replaced.

As a school, we have an LMS, but it's not as detail oriented as many out there. We custom-designed ours. But we rely heavily on the Advisory Model. One of the ways that students know where they are on the pathway to graduation is because they're in constant contact with their advisors. They meet explicitly about that twice a trimester. This is your progress and this is how it's going to play out for graduation. We

use a lot of Google docs but mostly rely on the advisors knowing our kids.

SPRINGPOINT: *What are your biggest challenges?*

ALISON: I've taught for many years and I became Director of Instruction five years ago. With the teachers we have added new structures and systems to simplify and make our work transparent. It's very different than it looked previously. So a lot of my work is taking these teachers and moving them towards a vision. But sustaining these great ideas is really hard. 20% of our time is self-directed for students so teachers can meet. A lot of school design is looking at how we build in time for teachers to work together. It's just really expensive to build in this type of model.

SPRINGPOINT: *What happens to the kids during that 20%?*

ALISON: We have a 21st century enrichment program that runs on Fridays, with a career exploration focus. A different set of instructors teach classes and build students' capacity to do internships. This can also be expensive to bring in this kind of model so we use community partners and write grants.

VISITOR: I visited E.L. Haines in DC and they said that for every kid taking a virtual course, we have a dedicated person to help them through that course. So beware of looking for efficiencies.

ALISON: That's the costliness of the model. If you really want every kid on their learning edge and supported, that's a lot of resources. Some kids can move more independently but

even they have questions. It's a different shift in how we think about learning. We're resistant to an online solution. I have faith that with our teachers we'll come up with a model that works for our students.

SPRINGPOINT: *You mentioned applying for a Next Generation Learning Challenges grant. What was your dream school model for NGLC?*

ALISON: Our definition of blending learning is a combination of blending technology with active learning. Blended learning is bringing tech in to the classroom and using it to leverage your face to face time with the teacher. We see it as useful to help the low-skilled students or provide some rotation model to provide a more engaging learning environment. Our blend is

What we're focused on is making sure students have time to practice so that they are independent on the final summative assessment.

more than just bringing technology into the classroom as a tool, but to also incorporate movement so that learning is active. Teachers are looking at ways to modify activities so that students are actually getting up from their desks and moving or thinking of activities that 'activate' the students' minds, such as using the Socratic method. The third part of our blended learning definition is to leverage our community partners. We want the students' learning

experience to connect with their community. We think about learning being a human thing and not a technology thing. So their experience would be tech supported and human supported and community supported. For example we are bringing in Actors' Shakespeare Project to provide students with a richer experience when studying Shakespeare. Trained actors come in and teach our students how to interpret and connect to the text. We also don't see the three components of the blended learning existing in one class at one time. Instead we want the students to have a blended day. Their math class may utilize more technology while their humanities might not be heavy on the technology but we will bring in acting and theater to learn Shakespeare. So it's the combination of all that rather than a tech solution.

SPRINGPOINT: *How do you approach grading?*

ALISON: Chris Sturgis wrote a report called *The Shift in Grading* in January. And really what we are talking about with competency based learning is a subtle shift in how we think about grading. Recently, we had to give a workshop on the Cape to 80 traditional teachers. I couldn't sleep because it was a group of very traditional teachers who I thought would question competency based. Usually I talk to people who just say, that sounds like good teaching. I agree with them. What we do is not too different from just a good focus on what students are being asked to learn and being transparent about how they will be assessed. For example, what does it mean when you finished biology with an A or a C. In a competency based program an A means you know this amount of

material. And a C means you know this but not all of the benchmarks that A has learned. We don't use those letter grades but instead use Highly Competent, Competent, Not Yet Competent. For every class there's a set of benchmarks which are front and center to the learning. The students know what they need to know, how they need to show mastery before they can advance to the next class. The assessments are specifically designed to assess these benchmarks. It's very clear to the students what they need to know. To finish the class you have to demonstrate mastery. In a traditional model there is a lot of ambiguity with a grade, it would be a combination of your scores — your attendance, homework and tests. Going back to that A, we don't really know what that A means unless it's translated into those standards. For every benchmark a student has to do it multiple times, independently, using the right vocabulary.

SPRINGPOINT: *Is multiple times three times?*

ALISON: Multiple times is the practice teachers provide students during the course of teaching a new concept: the homework, classwork and formative assessments. It's all the formative ways that a teacher knows what a student can do. We don't get caught up in the number of times. Some of our teachers may track all those multiple times. But what we're focused on is making sure students have time to practice so that they are independent on the final summative assessment. We focus on making sure the assessment is measuring the benchmarks. And can the student demonstrate the skill independently. Currently, we're doing a lot of work

around DOK [Depth of Knowledge Assessment], making sure that the rigor is increasing through the assessment.

We also don't use the word mastery. Our teachers are really deliberate about language.

The other thing that we've done — and I know this scares a lot of traditional teachers — and it really has to fit the mission of your school and the population of your school — is we took the standards and went like this with them (narrows arms). And what that allows you to do is go deeper. So instead of teaching a breadth of content where all you're doing is touching the different standards, with competency based you are able to go deep into the learning. As a result students are asked to use their critical thinking skills.

SPRINGPOINT: *It's a different definition of mastery.*

ALISON: It's a different definition. It's not being able to touch a bunch of different things and having that breadth of knowledge. We also don't use the word mastery. Our teachers are really deliberate about language. Master plumbers and electricians are experts. That expectation scares teachers. So competent is a step down from that. Competence is, yeah I can do it and I have the confidence to do it. Am I a master, no. That language was really

important. I remember teaching and feeling comfortable that students were competent was already a push. Because you're going from teaching where you're just touching on stuff to wanting them to demonstrate some real skill and knowledge. So in order to do that you need to go focus on the essential standards and give the students time to learn and demonstrate them competently. As a natural consequence, they will have a depth of understanding that is very different.

Ultimately you're building their academic confidence and building another set of skills around perseverance, resiliency, the character skills that are far more important than the breadth of content knowledge that used to be the focus of learning.

SPRINGPOINT: *Go to power standards, starting with the CCSS?*

ALISON: Yes, power standards. We started with the state standards and then made it user friendly for the teachers and the students. You have to unpack standards to ensure all understand what the statement is saying so everyone can assess to it equally. Because of our school mission we had to make tough decisions about which standards to keep and which ones to give

up. A school with a different population may have more 'power standards' or competencies than we have. We had to also add competencies because we had to go down to the 3rd and 5th grade levels and teach students to write a sentence, a paragraph, a 5-paragraph essay. You start where the students are. It takes time to teach those skills. But we feel confident that what we landed on is the preparation that students need to be successful in college and career. We have a system to make sure students get placed in the appropriate class, they're working at their edge, they move when they show competence at the end of 11 weeks, and that they're building skills that build on each other. Ultimately you're building their academic confidence and building another set of skills around perseverance, resiliency, the character skills that are far more important than the breadth of content knowledge that used to be the focus of learning.

Also our students are all coming two years behind grade level, so again the mission of our school drives our curriculum. Your design would look different in a different district and with a different population.

This is our [Road Map to Graduation](#). These are all the different courses. So the students leave and go on to the next class when they have become competent in the subject. The design of our school (transparent and modularized learning, with no option to fail) was intentional. We removed the factors that encourage students to see themselves as failures and cause them to drop out. Instead we emphasize that learning

happens at different paces, life gets in the way, don't give up, come back and keep on working where you left off.

ALISON: Right. So first we had to design a length of time for our classes. We need kids to move together for a variety of reasons and we needed to set some increments of time so students could measure their individual progress. Our classes are 11 weeks long, which equals a trimester. And we played around with that length of time. We were at 16, we were at 10. We didn't want to do a year, and half a year was still too long, the striation between kids was too great. Because you want to keep cohorts of kids as close together as possible in regards to learning similar skills. So students all needing the same skills start a class together. At the end of the term they may be at different places. Those that finish move to the next class. Those that are not, stay and work where they left off. It could be that they just have a couple of products to finish in that class. And so they stay in Intro Lit until they finish it. We give them a two-week window in which to finish those assignments. If you can finish within two weeks, we'll let you move on to the next class which would be Genre Writing and you'll join in with the rest of the class. Anything after two weeks you're behind. And we only allow that if the teacher thinks the student has the skill set to catch up. Because otherwise we found students were just not coming. As soon as they get lost, they stop coming.

So the majority of the class starts in the same place. They then go into Genre Writing and then the teacher does what looks like a very traditional model of teaching, such as the workshop model. They'll do a warmup, they'll do an activity. But as the weeks go on or the units go on, you start having students going faster and slower. And so what our teachers are becoming really good at is creating systems in their classroom to manage the different paces.

The teachers are organized and teach the students the systems. If you're going a bit slower you have all the resources you need, the teacher is circulating.

For example the class starts with a warmup, a refresher of information and new information. The teacher will then have students begin work where they left off. Many teachers will organize the room so that the students move to work in groups. The teachers are organized and teach the students the systems. If you're going a bit slower you have all the resources you need, the teacher is circulating. This is where the technology can play a role and many teachers are taking advantage of those resources. If a student is on track, the teacher may have a list of activities that the student needs to do, and when they're done with the activities they can ask for the assessment. Other students will keep on working on the prior activities. Another system teachers have set up is for students to

show that they have completed the classwork before they take an assessment. This builds in the habit of doing homework and making sure you as a student are prepared before you take the assessment. This has been a significant change that we're starting to do because kids don't want to do the classwork or the homework so we're saying to them you can't do the assessment and now you're going to have to stay afterschool or take that assessment later on. The teachers are trying to keep that community of learners moving and also give you [the student] a little bit of push to say, I need to catch up here, I'm falling behind. And for some kids they may stay falling behind and they'll move onto the next unit and they'll have missing pieces. So then they'll stay in that class the next trimester and pick up the next pieces and get caught up.

SPRINGPOINT: *Did you try quarters?*

ALISON: It was too short. Not enough time to go deep.

SPRINGPOINT: *Can you tell me more about your Homework Club?*

ALISON: Homework Club is your study hall and it's after school. We're trying to get them to know how to use that time. So many of our kids don't do homework. The first two trimesters that they're here they're required to do it. Hopefully at that point, they know, OK, when I fall behind I need to stay afterschool.

All of this fits into our post graduate planning program. The post graduate planning happens over a series of trimesters. The first trimester

students take Beyond BDEA, which has students start exploring careers. The following two trimesters they take career exploration classes, learning through participating in classes on specific careers. After they meet these requirements they take a career readiness course that

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They design a Capstone Project for the last trimester they are here. And that's a research project around an essential question that relates to their career goal.

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helps them identify potential internships or job shadows. The final class is Capstone. They design a Capstone Project for the last trimester they are here. And that's a research project around an essential question that relates to their career goal. They present it to a panel of internal or external judges.

SPRINGPOINT: *Can you talk about your schedule?*

ALISON: The day program runs from 9 to 2:45 with Advisory in the middle. Evening program starts at noon to 5:45. So there are two overlapping blocks. Advisory overlaps in the middle. Students in the day program will take four classes with advisory which is 30 minutes and once a week 45 minutes. Evening classes will do the same. They'll start at block 3 and go to block 6. Students can take extra blocks.

If I want to graduate soon and am a strong student, I can take five classes. If I'm not a strong student or have responsibilities outside of school, I can take two classes. So we modify based on a variety of factors and needs of the students. We have two different staff but we operate as a whole school, not two programs.

SPRINGPOINT: *How is it determined who comes in the day or at night?*

ALISON: We try to keep our numbers even, but it just depends on what they sign up for based on the hours that they can or want to do school. We realized best timing for kids matters.

Putting student needs at the center is what pushes our school design. And we are getting better at this based on some of the structures I am going to show you.

Once they're placed on their roadmap, their graduation date is based on how quickly they progress and how hard they work.

Students advance upon mastery. This is the Road Map to graduation. When students enter they're coming with a range of skills and experiences. We bring them in at four different times in the year. We no longer let students come in on any day of the year. They start at the start of a trimester, but through an organized introduction to the school expectations. They come

in two weeks before the start of a trimester for orientation. During orientation they start to learn about our school, they learn about our language, and they start to connect to our community. Each orientation has about 15 or 30 students. During this time they also start to have a connection with some adults at the school. We also assess students during orientation. We give them an in-house diagnostic, we give them an external assessment [NWEA's MAP] which helps us determine what their grade levels are for reading and math. And the teachers look at their transcripts at the end of that week. If they see a C or above, they give them credit, if our diagnostics support it, for work that is C or above.

They then go into the first class on here (the roadmap) which are all seminar classes — Humanities, Math and Science. All of those kids from Orientation are together in seminar and they're getting a much more comprehensive assessment that's based on real formative assessment, where the teacher is teaching some of the basic skills. And now if a student got an F in English on their transcript but they show they can write a solid paragraph, they get bounced past Genre Writing into Intro to History.

So seminar is a place where they get a more comprehensive assessment that gets them placed more accurately on their roadmap. Once they're placed on their roadmap, their graduation date is based on how quickly they progress and how hard they work. They are in charge of their learning at this point.

ALISON: Most students will say that this style of learning is easier for them, it makes sense. Competencies are explicit, measurable and transferable learning objectives. So when you go into Intro Lit the teacher has a set of benchmarks and competencies. The benchmarks for us are what we actually measure as the rungs of the ladder, and the competency is the power standard or the big, deep understanding. Each class has a bunch of benchmarks and there's an assessment for them.

And so the student, once they've mastered those benchmarks, they move to the next class. They don't move based on good attendance, doing their homework and then doing OK on a test. They move to the next class because they are demonstrating that they know the content. And if they move on, they move on to Genre Writing. And if they are Not Yet Competent, they stay in Intro to Lit and keep working.

So what happens to a kid in that situation is there's no social promotion. It's not a yearlong course so they're not falling behind for a whole year. Instead we have shorter periods of time. In 11 weeks, show us what you know and move on or keep working. It sends a real message to the students about how hard work and learning and demonstrating is what moves you from class to class. So a lot of kids in their first two trimesters because they are used to a more traditional model in which they could just get by doing very little put up some resistance. But they catch on quickly about what it takes to

move forward on their road map. They realize that they have to edit that paper again, retake that test, complete the work.

This starts to shift the learning culture. They're in charge of their learning. The only way they're going to get out of that class is if they do the work. And if they keep not doing the work they're going to stay there.

They're in charge of their learning. The only way they're going to get out of that class is if they do the work.

We also have an Advisory Model and the advisor sits with each of their advisees every trimester. They review their progress twice a trimester. You passed this class, you didn't pass this class. Let's calculate your graduation rate based on last trimester's progress. Your graduation date now is March 2015. You should be able to ask most of these kids when they're graduating and they'll be able to tell you. They won't say they're a junior or senior. When they're sitting in the classes, there's a 16 year old on one side and an 18 year old on the other. Age does not matter, skill and learning is instead the emphasis.

And their graduation date is totally up to them to set for themselves. So if they want to go faster and take five classes they can. We have a couple of online courses where they can accelerate their

learning. They can walk into an Algebra B class and say, can I take the diagnostic to test out. Each teacher has a pretty rigorous assessment

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In order to move out of class you need to prove that you can do it on your own.

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that they use in this circumstance. Students can't ask that at week five. And they're learning this. They have to do it at the start of the class. Or else it's messy in terms of moving them into another class. All of this again puts the ownership of learning in the students' control.

VISITOR: *What's it like for the teacher if a kid has to retake a class?*

ALISON: We're trying to use our online lab, technology and other systems to better support students and teachers when you have a student who has not yet finished a class. If it's only one or two assignments they need to finish we assign them to the online lab with a content teacher who can help them finish those assignments. This is usually for intermediate or advance courses and with students that the teacher feels confident can finish the work. The other system is to have a pod of students working on finishing up a class. The teacher supports them once the rest of the class is working independently on an assignment. Depends on the teacher.

VISITOR: *What would the end product be to prove you can move on?*

ALISON: An assessment of a set of benchmarks for each class. We create our own curriculum and assessments. Teachers are going to create an assessment that measures the benchmarks required to be "competent" in that class. One is to write a five paragraph essay independently, so the assessments themselves don't necessarily look different from a traditional school. But to be "competent" in that benchmark, students have to do it independently, using the right vocabulary and multiple times. And there's no failing, it's just NYC. Not Yet Competent. In order to move out of class you need to prove that you can do it on your own.

Casco Bay High School

TRANSCRIPT

This is a transcript of a taped oral interview with **DEREK PIERCE***, Principal of Casco Bay High School, conducted on April 3, 2014, by Melissa Giraud on behalf of* **SPRINGPOINT***.*

SPRINGPOINT: *You've been doing this for a while. How did you come to be competency-based?*

DEREK: Before I was principal here I was involved in the startup of another high school called Polar Regional High School in Poland, Maine. We had a task force of kids, parents and staff members and we looked at all kinds of assessment. This was in 1999. We went to a competency-based, standards-based system at that point.

So we started there and it was a battle, it was a battle royale as we got into it. And we definitely made mistakes in terms of communication with parents. And we underestimated how attached people were to the old system. And there was

a near rebellion. There was a vote in town to throw us out and to make changes including putting back ABC. We were literally on the ballot! And we won but it was close. And there were a lot of months in that first year where it didn't look so good.

So I learned a lot of lessons, I was there for seven years and ultimately became principal. So in coming here I knew I wanted to do that kind of system. And I had learned a lot of lessons and we had sort of a faculty-grading guide. And so I used a lot of that. And we had a similar more compact process. In Poland we had a full year before we opened. So we had lots of time for task force and thoughtful meetings. Here we

had two months. But we spent some time debating, do you want it this way or that way, and getting parents and kids involved. We opened as a standards-based system here.

We are different from Poland. In Poland we were able to say, every kid has to get through Algebra 2—it was a bit more of a proficiency-based outcome. Here we're still in a district that has credits. So I have the same graduation policy as the other two high schools. So we're standards-based at the level of the lesson and at the level of the course. But at the level of graduation we're still in this weird hybrid thing. At least for another year. The state's passed legislation to make everybody proficiency-based starting with next year's freshman class. The policy is now catching up to the practice.

SPRINGPOINT: *Why did you want to continue with standards based, competency based once you'd done it in Poland?*

DEREK: I've never met a teacher who once they've used this system says, oh, I want to go back to the other way. As soon as you break away from the paradigm of… It doesn't make sense to average learning. And it really makes sense to have a sense of confidence at the end of a course that a kid has met the fundamental skills and knowledge before moving on. Those two premises alone are just too logical to ignore. I think once you're in the system and you're grading like everybody else, you say, I know it's crazy but that's the way it is. As soon as you're allowed the freedom to say, what if it wasn't like this? It makes too much sense. Because I think our flaws in Poland were communication flaws.

And they were huge, but they were surmountable. I've never doubted the principles. Because it's so easy to see.

I've never met a teacher who once they've used this system says, oh, I want to go back to the other way.

You know, people have a remarkable allegiance to the old system but it's this thick (holds up thumb and forefinger to indicate not thick). And if you scratch a little bit beneath it and you say, remember that Biology teacher you had? And you got a B, and your friend down the hall got an A and you knew you were working twice as hard and it was totally unfair? And they say, Yeah! Everybody's got a story like that. Well, that's what you're supporting with the status quo. But it does take a little work.

A couple things made the roll out here more smooth. Because we've never had any significant pushback here whereas at Poland it was all out war. First, people choose to be here. They could go to Portland or Deering high schools. Now those schools are going to look more like us in terms of grading, so that'll be interesting [because of the new mandates]. So there's that piece which is significant.

I think equally significant is we were upfront about the big fear as kids get into high school is—oh my God, it's going to hurt my kid in

the college process somehow. So we go right at that fear from the outset. We had college admissions people. We did a survey and

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We doubled the percentage of kids who went to college at Poland in my seven years there. We had 100% of our kids get into college for our first class here.

got data that indicates, no they won't be at a disadvantage. And we explain how we're going to explain it so it's clear. Because it's all so tied into ranking and GPA that we don't do either. It's part of a system that is an approach to kids. If you convince parents that you're on the same side with them and it's in your interest as it's in theirs to get their kid in as many fabulous schools as they can. Why would we want to do something that would hurt them, we don't! And when I'm here, I'm able to say we doubled the percentage of kids who went to college at Poland in my seven years there. We had 100% of our kids get into college for our first class here. So the data supports us.

At the beginning they have to act on faith that you're not just some crazy snake oil salesman that's going to experiment on their kids. But then you start getting data that makes it a more compelling argument. We have a [Family Handbook](#) which I'll share with you

that we devised in year seven, so we didn't come out of the gate with it. It's not everything but it's a big piece.

I had a meeting just the other day with a parent who was missing a fundamental piece about why we do what we do and he was panicked about it for the wrong reasons. Once we cleared it up, he was no longer angry with us. He was like, I get it.

SPRINGPOINT: *So where did you start to build your competencies seven years ago? What were you using?*
DEREK: The [Maine Learning Results](#) and [Bloom's Taxonomy](#). Another thing that was easier for us is that we just had one English teacher and one Math teacher, and one Social Studies and one Science. So we didn't have five English teachers debating competencies. The first year we were just 9th grade. So we had about seven or eight people to build the learning targets with. Not tough for our teachers to get clear on the standards among themselves in their small teams. We had 80 kids, seven or eight teachers, and added a grade each year.

SPRINGPOINT: *How many students do you have now?*
DEREK: We have 330. We're going to 400 next year. We're moving from 70 to 100 per grade so next year we'll have 400.

I think the idea of learning targets—daily "I can" statements that kids are supposed to get from the end of the class. So every one of our classrooms, every day, posted in the same

place, is what we call a short-term target, like… I can write a compelling introduction with a clear thesis. And there might be a longer target there too like, I can write a compelling five-paragraph essay.

So those targets all connect to broader standards about quality writing or analytical writing or argumentative writing. That concept of having a very clear outcome for your class—spelling that out for kids—and making sure that your work in class ties to those targets and you're

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There's always new messiness and layers of sophistication and you decide that's a teacher based issue.

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actually doing formative assessment—that's where the rubber meets the road on standards-based grading. That's the fundamental daily practice. Once you start doing that, it shifts everything else. If it doesn't relate to the target, then why are you doing it? And if it's really important, why isn't it in the target?

SPRINGPOINT: *Do you go from standards to creating short-term and long-term learning targets. Did you include* Habits of Work *(HOW) in those?*

DEREK: When we first started there were some fundamental things to figure out. So we made the rough draft of a grading guide for faculty. What does it mean to meet a standard and

how many chances do you get. What is Habits of Work (HOW)? We definitely made a rubric pretty early on and we've revised it many times over what we mean by HOW. And we've gotten better over time over how you assess that. And what are the expectations of assessing that. What does it mean to meet standards with habits of work, in particular. I think there are fundamental choices you go through. And I think having a faculty-grading guide that's a living, breathing document that evolves. There's always new messiness and layers of sophistication and you decide that's a teacher based issue. We don't need to be uniform on that. Or this is confusing to kids. We need to have a clear, cross-faculty understanding.

SPRINGPOINT: *Is there an example you could give me?*

DEREK: Oh yeah. There's been lots of evolutions. We added a 2+. We realized that the language of 2, of approaching the standards was too big a planet. It didn't demarcate enough between a kid who was very close and a kid who wasn't so close. And we didn't want to get too fine because we don't want kids to live in the 2 world. So we have a 3 and 3.25, 3.5 and 3.75 and 4. That's all meets and exceeds stuff. We just have 2 and 2+. We didn't want to have 2.25, 2.5, 2.75. We want to be focusing on the standard not the grade there but we felt like we needed to add that in. Also as an indicator for kids in the middle of a trimester that, you're not there yet, but if you keep progressing as you are, you'll get there. It's a little less anxiety prone.

One of the things we've learned is that in a world without C and D work, you have a lot more of kids living in the land of "not there yet" for a lot more of the time. And that's anxiety provoking for kids. You meet it, it's quality, but it takes a while to get to quality so there's a lot of not meeting it. For some kids that can be demoralizing. The 2+ helps with that a bit. It lets you know you're closer. We've had to be thoughtful about how to keep kids in the game and change the whole culture around revision. And that's where Habits of Work comes in a bit. Because we say if you have a 3 in HOW by the end of the trimester we will never give you a failing grade, you will always get an incomplete and have, in theory, endless time to work on it. That never happens because kids that have good habits of work get there. But I think the psychology shift is significant in a school culture where just turning it in isn't enough and they'll have to live in the anxiety of not there yet a lot of the time.

SPRINGPOINT: *Or maybe they will stop being anxious?*

DEREK: Right. Exactly. And the other thing that's hugely important for us, though it's good and better to be clear about learning outcomes—and that can be motivating, I want to learn this particular skill that's spelled out in the learning target—what's equally but perhaps more important is that the work itself is compelling and interesting.

So the whole junior class is going to New York City on Sunday to do some service work and interview people affected by Hurricane Sandy. They've been prepped. They've learned all

kinds of interview skills. They know who they're interviewing and have some background information. When I go around and ask them what are you excited about, what are you nervous about the trip, they say, I'm worried about my

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Learning targets alone aren't going to make kids go, 'Wooo hoo!'

recorder malfunctioning so I can't do justice to this person's story. They're not saying, I want to make sure I meet the standards of doing an effective interview. Because that's going to come from the work and the work itself is meaningful to them. You need both. One without the other is not sufficient. Learning targets alone aren't going to make kids go, 'Wooo hoo!' I got a new target! You need both.

SPRINGPOINT: *So you had the standards, Bloom's, creating HOW, and were thinking interdisciplinary as well?*

DEREK: Yes, we devised these pathways to success. And we've had many iterations of this, too. And there are many schools that are more fully evolved on this than we. And we devised an earlier version that was cross disciplinary outcomes as well. It initially came from a kid saying don't tell us what we shouldn't do, tell us what we should do. It was a profound shift. And the term "pathways to success" came to symbolize that. And over time we've tried to get clear on what attributes are cross-disciplinary.

SPRINGPOINT: *And are these related to Habits of Work?*

DEREK: Yes. These involve Habits of Work. Some of these are academic. This is the stuff. And the idea is when you're pursuing personal best and acting on today's issue that allows you to better the world and get to these higher values. Perseverance is more the habits. We don't include wellness as a habit of work but we try to stress that.

SPRINGPOINT: *Get smart to do good?*

DEREK: It's an experiential learning phrase, it was a conference theme we stole.

SPRINGPOINT: *What are the challenges of separating HOW from LTs and showing that they're related?*

DEREK: Yes we're trying constantly to do that. There's definitely the perception that they [HOW] don't count that you have to overcome. In some ways that's true. If you know all the stuff and you were a jerk in class you still get the grade.

We have a HOW honor roll and HOW student of the week. And there are advantages to HOW. If I fail a test but I have a HOW of 3, I automatically get another shot at that. If I have a 2 HOW, minimally, the teacher will say, do all the homework and show it to me and then we'll talk. We also have summer school and if you have a HOW of 3 it's free, and if you don't it's not.

You can go to a fully individualized system, as some places do. That's not how we do. We believe pretty strongly. Part of the Expeditionary

Learning (EL) focus that I've really come to appreciate is there's a real power in the peer collective. This junior class that I mentioned. We're all in this together. They all did individual research projects on a particular fossil fuel issue they were interested in, but they were all studying fossil fuels and all had to write a research paper and give a presentation, so they were all in it together. Even though their levels of performance within the same standards are very differentiated and their passions were differentiated.

Given that togetherness, you still need to build structures into your school day so kids who need more time can get that and kids who don't

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We have an academic support block for the whole school all at once. About three hours a week.

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need as much time can go further and deeper so we try and do that. ([see school schedule](#))

We have an academic support block for the whole school all at once. About three hours a week. Very flexible time. But the math teacher can take the 10 kids. We have an "exceeds math" group that meets then and a "remedial math" group that meets then. So there's buffer time on each end. We have after school tutoring that is frequently used. We have summer school pieces at different times. We actually

have Mud School during the school year where kids who have met standards go home and kids who haven't come to school.

SPRINGPOINT: *How do you develop your curriculum here?*

DEREK: All internally developed. Primarily developed by us but we do have an EL school coach who's been with us from the first day. Our teachers love her.

We also have a summer institute which for startup schools is essential. We had eight days the first year and have had at least three days every August, mid-August rather than right

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We have a team-based system, a grade-level team of teachers and teachers work with a grade level of kids.

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before school, to do the big picture thinking with teachers. That big picture thinking can buoy you for the whole year.

About half of the expeditions we've done before and half are new. The ones we've done before are a little different because they're the 2.0 version.

SPRINGPOINT: *You have Intensives and Expeditions. Do you use Intensives for flex times sometimes?*

DEREK: We used to say you had to meet all

standards in all classes to participate in Intensives. But we found that that enabled kids. That they would say, oh, I'll just wait to do my work for Intensives. And besides the kids who would miss were the ones who would most benefit from Intensives. The other thing we found is that Intensives can be a tremendous motivator. Some kids do their absolute best work in Intensives. So we removed that except we have a graduation camp for kids that need to graduate by June 6. So five or six seniors will spend spring intensive in graduation camp. They have to be meeting all standards required for Semester 1 and 2 by the end of that week otherwise they're done. Except they're not because there's summer school.

SPRINGPOINT: *What's the process for onboarding teachers, for developing teachers in this system?*

DEREK: We have a team-based system, a grade-level team of teachers and teachers work with a grade level of kids. They have common planning time with one other teacher in that group every day. Like the social studies and English teacher will have time together every day. And collective time at least twice a week with the full team. And they have a big interest in being on the same page. A lot of the most important staff development in terms of grading and assessment practices happens "just in time" working together every day. Questions like, is it possible to give a quiz where there is no exceeds? Yes, in lab safety for us. Systematically in a network of teachers who have an incentive to be a good team. That's a natural team.

We also have classic new teacher staff development. I do three hours with each new teacher on grading, for example. But then you gotta do it. It primarily happens with colleagues and with resources such as the faculty grading guide.

SPRINGPOINT: *How do you integrate technology into the model?*

DEREK: We're one to one this year for the first time. Kids have iPads they can take home. Teachers have Airs. About a dozen kids had such distractibility issues that we had to get rid of their tech and close down their iPads for a time.

In terms of technology and standards based grading, we haven't found the magic bullet yet in terms of a way to clearly represent to parents and kids where they stand in relation to standards in a comprehensible way. Part of it is just teachers are human and they're not all so quick about when they enter grades. A bigger part of it is we're using Infinite Campus which wasn't designed for standards based grading. So we've retrofitted it in a way that's cumbersome. We don't have that part down yet for sure.

We don't have an LMS. EL has some templates and things that we use to make curriculum but it's not all housed somewhere. I have every teacher's standards but not their curricular stuff. We don't have a repository for all that.

We use ALEKS for math, not exclusively. But it's become a big part of the math program. Other than that we don't. We use READ 180 for a couple ELLs.

SPRINGPOINT: *What about performance assessment creation and training?*

DEREK: Any expedition goes through the leadership team.

We've been really good at the big performance assessments because Expeditions lead to Ta-da! And there's a process from building background knowledge to independent investigation, to product development to culmination, reflection. The big picture process and the big projects, we're pretty good at. What we've been working on more the last couple years is the daily practice that gets you to the big stuff.

We haven't found the magic bullet yet in terms of a way to clearly represent to parents and kids where they stand in relation to standards.

The formative stuff. We've been doing more learning walks the last couple years and developed a tool of what we're focusing on. And it's often formative assessment practices, checks for understanding. That's what we're targeting and trying to deepen the toolbox there. Tools teachers can use to make sure kids are moving towards the targets so they can adjust.

SPRINGPOINT: *What are the three biggest things you'd say to these new competency-based schools? You've said communication is a biggie.*

DEREK: Come to some agreement about the

principals that will underlie your grading, reporting and assessment system. Figure out what you're about. Then develop practices that build on those beliefs.

Then it's communicating, which is mostly the administrator's job but also the teachers'. Being clear about the principles and practices and proactively addressing their fears before they realize them.

Also, you got to sell it to the kids too.

One of the hardest things up front is, you just focus on meets [the standards] and forget about the exceeds [the standards] stuff because it's too hard to differentiate right off the bat. I'm just figuring out what the standard is,

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We have the expectation that there is the opportunity to exceed on every summative assessment.

now I gotta figure out what exceeds means. So in those cases, a lot of teachers' initial instincts is WOW, it's just better, but you're not giving guidance to those kids and those kids deserve it like remedial kids do and they're the ones that bark the loudest. So a lot of those kids could feel they don't get anything out of that system, like they don't have incentive to exceed.

You'll potentially be attacked from two directions. First, I can't meet this standard, why

can't my kid just get a C or D and pass. You can win that one over. The other is that my kid, there's no support for them and meets isn't enough, they can meet [standards] with their eyes closed and they're bored. So you have to be ready to address challenging kids at the top and meaningfully challenge them or you'll get hammered.

The two things you don't want to do is say they'll teach the other kids. Though that's a good thing and should be done in doses. And two, we'll give them an independent project, they'll do stuff on their own. Because they deserve instruction. So we've designed, we have the expectation that there is the opportunity to exceed on every summative assessment. It can't just be sometimes and it can't be just vaguely described. We've developed some language around how you would describe exceeds work. The other danger with exceeds work for newer people approaching it is that it's just more work and not more sophisticated work. Like, you do one through twenty and YOU do one through forty. I already got it at seven, why do I have to do 33 more? It's getting rid of the concept of extra credit. There's no such thing, it's just going deeper on standards. There's no outside. There's no work outside of the standards. It should become a standard if it's so important. A team based system can help with that. How are you challenging that kid? There could be some kids that you put on online for independent work but that's not going work for a lot of kids.

One of the other big struggles that's happened in both of my schools is finding the balance

between giving kids who deserve more time and not enabling kids who will take as much time as you give them in a standards based system is really hard. This is a tool we've used to try to be really clear on summative assessments that, when the whole group is doing a presentation and there's a public audience, you can't say I'm doing it next week. (See Summative Assessment Extension Request Form)

Most of the time we don't penalize, there's no -5 for late work. It's a HOW thing typically. But we've stopped taking late homework because it stops being useful. With summative assessments—tests and essays, you're allowed one per course where you're late. And after that, you can't meet standards for that trimester until this Mud School or Summer school and then you have another shot at it. If you're late you gotta fill out one of those forms and make a plan and show how you're going to make that up. We figure people are late on things but you can't make that a habit without significant consequence.

SPRINGPOINT: *And that's improved things?*
DEREK: Yeah, because before, your instinct as a teacher is to give them extra chances and then you find they hand everything in late. Trying to figure out ways to give kids enough latitude but not too much latitude.

We mess with that schedule a lot. And teacher teams because they control all the kids and teachers in their grade, they have the latitude to rearrange it and say, we're having a walls down day to all work on our projects.

One of our big learning for getting kids to high quality work was that, we have these school performance assessments. And some of the kids were good and some not so good. So we've instituted the concept of a dress rehearsal for all of our presentations and that's when you get graded. So 75% of kids meet the standards then and we can work on getting the other 25% over for the final presentation so they all get the experience of doing excellent on something. So you don't have that regret of, if only we'd had another week. By the end 99.9% of the kids bring their best.

Francis W. Parker Charter Essential School

TRANSCRIPT

*This is a transcript of a taped oral interview with **TODD SUMNER**, Principal of Francis W. Parker Charter Essential School in Devens, MA, conducted on May 5, 2014, by Melissa Giraud on behalf of **SPRINGPOINT**.*

SPRINGPOINT: *What does a day's schedule typically look like?*

TODD: We're in 2-hour blocks. Senior Exhibitions are today, so you'll see a couple of those. You're on a jury panel in this session after lunch. This is our week (pointing at schedule). And no one makes them sit for two hours. You'll see the kids up for much of the time. Do you know about the Coalition of Essential Schools? We're part of that network.

SPRINGPOINT: *Competency education, how do you start? How do you know you make a rigorous model?*

TODD: Ours is a performance-based promotion system. We've got 13 skill areas, each of which has a Criteria for Excellence description. I'm showing you the one for Oral Presentation because that's the one I have a rubric for in this slide deck.

SPRINGPOINT: *And these 13 skill areas are across content areas?*

TODD: Yes. Correct. Everything a student is asked to do maps back on to one of these 13 skill areas. Some of them would be more of a focus in Arts and Humanities (AH). Some of them would be more of a focus on Math, Science, and Technology (MST). For example, Mathematical Problem Solving is one of the 13 skill areas and that's something that comes up in MST rather than in AH.

SPRINGPOINT: *Do you start with standards? And these are the universal skills across content areas, and the projects they're learning through are more content area projects but these are cross curricular?*

TODD: So when the faculty designed the academic program, this is the level that maps back to the Common Core or the [Mass Curricular Framework](), depending on what was around when we were developing these. So the faculty has those external standards in view when they're creating things like the Criteria for Excellence in Oral Presentation.

SPRINGPOINT: *Was it rejiggered for the Common Core?*

TODD: As I said, when teachers are designing curriculum—whether it's a whole scope and sequence for a domain or an individual unit—they have external referents like the Massachusetts Curricular Frameworks, NCTM (National Council of Teachers of Mathematics), or the Common Core in view. But I would not say these drive the program; they influence but do not determine the choices teachers make. We're an Essential school. One of the Ten Common Principles of Essential Schools says (reading) "...details about the course of study, the use of students' and teachers' time and the choice of teaching materials and specific pedagogies must be unreservedly placed in the hands of the principal and staff..." So, rejiggered, yes. Fundamentally revisited, no.

SPRINGPOINT: *And I suppose if you had more trouble with the standardized tests, you'd have to pay more attention to them?*

TODD: That's right. We'd have to adjust, we have to pass them. And we do. We routinely review the results of the standardized tests and make appropriate adjustments. Deb, our academic dean, her eyes are on the academic data. So, if for example, nobody answered an absolute values question, she says, what's up with absolute values. Should we teach that a little earlier? That's how we approach it.

You want the student to have a chance to do over and move the work closer to the meets-level standard.

SPRINGPOINT: *The districts we're working with are quite large and need to have more of a focus on that.*

TODD: Fair enough. Our assumption is that every student can meet these standards. They don't all do so at the same rate. Our assessment language is on a continuum towards meeting standards. The idea is that the student is on a journey up a slope towards meets-level work. And she might not always get it on the first try. So I'm gonna give you some feedback and let you try again. So the reflection/revision process.... where did you get those data from, did you notice anything in your results that might change your data collection the second time around? This kind of thing. You want the student to have a chance to do over and move the work closer to the meets-level standard.

You had a question earlier about how Parker maintains consistency classroom to classroom around what qualifies as meets-level work. So, the curriculum is divided into four domains of inquiry. Math, Science and Technology (MST). Arts and Humanities (AH). Spanish. And Wellness. OK. Spanish and Wellness are in one block, so they share that block. Arts and Humanities, MST, both get a two hour block themselves.

Teachers are the ones doing the curricular planning, they begin with the end in mind, planning backward from the key understandings and skills they want students to have

SPRINGPOINT: *Are you talking about Wellness in Spanish?*

TODD: Nope. One hour of Spanish, one hour of Wellness. So any one teacher is teaching two out of these three blocks every day. So the whole domain has two hours of common planning time four days a week. That's eight hours a week. Part of what happens is that with every assessment, we get some student work, the six of us, or however many of us are teaching at that level are going to norm the assessment early on. Say the first due date is Friday, among the things we'd do early this week is say, here's a snapshot of how the kids are doing. Let's look at the rubric. So the internal mechanism for rater reliability is very well-established,

well-oiled, protocol-based, from habits really that the faculty has developed and cultivated around looking at student work and using it to support this assessment journey for kids.

SPRINGPOINT: *Are you thinking of* Bloom's Taxonomy*?*

TODD: Among other things. Because teachers are the ones doing the curricular planning, they begin with the end in mind, planning backward from the key understandings and skills they want students to have—Wiggins there—but of course they also have in mind a similar journey like Bloom's. We like to talk about curriculum, instruction, and assessment as an organic whole, and that's easier to enact because it's the same people—the teachers—designing the lesson, coaching student learning, and doing the assessment. And they're able to check in with each other as the unit unfolds, look at student work together, and make adjustments.

SPRINGPOINT: *So each faculty member is teaching in two of these three two-hour blocks. Then they're meeting with their fellow domain teachers in the other block.*

TODD: They have the opportunity to do so. They don't spend all eight hours together any given week. They have their own assessments to do. They have a regularly scheduled domain meeting. For example, there's a standing all MST teacher meeting Thursday mornings, all 20 MST teachers get together. So there's a mix. And then in Divisions 1 and 2, there's another teacher in the room. You are going to notice in MST, for example, that there's two teachers in

the room. One with a math background, the other, science.

SPRINGPOINT: *So they're in their divisions, as opposed to cohorts.*

TODD: Yes we call them divisions. What would be 7th and 8th grades in another setting are mixed in Division 1. 9th and 10th are Division 2. 11th and 12th are Division 3.

SPRINGPOINT: *How do you use time flexibly in a competency-based system?*

TODD: Each day starts with 15 minutes in advisory and ends with 10 minutes in Advisory. And Wednesday afternoon there's a whole hour for Advisory. These are the main purposes of Advisory. Each student has her own Personal Learning Plan, they're called PLPs. The Advisor hosts a conversation with the family and helps the student, depending on how old the student is, take more or less of the lead on that. One PLP conference in the fall and one in the spring. So let's say I'm going to try to Gateway or move from Division 1 to Division 2 at the end of this year as an 8th grader. That may be a goal I have. So great. Here are all these adults who know me well sitting around a table. How are you doing on that? How can we help you?

SPRINGPOINT: *What is Gatewaying?*

TODD: Kids are building portfolios of meets-level work in each domain. When he or she can regularly meet standards without too many revisions, and has built a body of work that suggests—and on average they do this in two years, so at the end of what would be 8th grade here—they're ready, she might say, "I think I'm ready to move to the next level of work in this domain." So if I'm your advisor and teacher I say, "what's your evidence for that? Let's look at your portfolio, look at what your teachers have been saying. Looks like you've got a strong case here. Let's set that up." Later in the year,

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It's also true that 25 percent of our students at one point or another in their journey through Parker take either more or less time between divisions.

in June, there's a whole week devoted to the students doing their gateway presentations. So you're going to exhibit your recent work. Give us the highlights of your portfolio that suggests why you're ready to make this move. What are you looking forward to in the next division. So on average, moving between divisions takes two years. Even in high school. It's also true that 25 percent of our students at one point or another in their journey through Parker take either more or less time between divisions. It's rather more common that kids that take more time, need an additional semester in division. Or they need another whole year. Each student is different.

SPRINGPOINT: *How do you accommodate that?*

TODD: The curriculum is on a two year rotation. There's no difference between 7th and 8th year. It's all Division 1. 1st year or 2nd year Division 1 student. When you visit classes this

morning, you won't be able to tell by what's going on who's a 1st or 2nd year. So let's say it's a 5th semester, what are you going to do with that student? Well, so, much of the material she might have seen before, but she's doing a

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So, much of the material she might have seen before, but she's doing a 5th semester because she's not mastered this content the first time around.

5th semester because she's not mastered this content the first time around. It's really quite tailored to what that student needs. For example, we might be doing the optics unit but I'm really focused on these key math skills so I can really burnish those in order to put my gateway portfolio together. I'm not going to focus on the telescope piece of the optics unit but more on the geometry.

SPRINGPOINT: *And that means that they graduate a semester behind?*

TODD: Division 3, what would be junior and senior year, is flexible. That's where the slack gets taken up. One has to spend one year but does not have to spend two years in Division 3. These seniors that we're all going to see in a little while, they haven't all spent two years in Division 3. Some have just been there one year. But that's a call that gets made junior year. We're not going to change your year of graduation or we are. That's a choice the kid can

make, I'm just not ready, I'm not gonna make it. We have 13 skill areas and in their graduation portfolios, they have to have meets-level work in 9 of those 13. So if it's the end of junior year and I have two pieces, so I need to do seven more pieces, plus my senior project, plus, plus, plus...

It's a wise student who knows her limitations [and] says, you know, I feel I could use another year. I'm going to change my year of graduation and take a 7th year because that's what makes sense for me.

SPRINGPOINT: *So it's that squishy division that allows it to be more personalized?*

TODD: Well, it's personalized all the way along but that's where some of the slack gets taken up. Does that mean there's a January graduation? No. The elasticity in Division 3 is usually enough to absorb the odd 5th semester.

SPRINGPOINT: *How many teachers are in each division?*

TODD: Typically, in Division 1 and 2, in AH there would be six teachers. In MST there would be six teachers.

SPRINGPOINT: *Is there any technology that's sort of facilitating grading or supporting performance-based education. Do you have digital portfolios?*

TODD: Not yet. We've got narrative assessments. We're not yet actively investigating what it will take to get to digital portfolios, but that's obviously the way to go. Our academic record keeping is supported by Rediker, Rediker is our vendor. It's modular. This is our 3rd year

of implementing it. We keep adding modules each year.

TODD: The whole shebang. Digital gradebooks are going to be the project next year. Teachers got iPads this year and are using it for attendance. It depends on where you are on the continuum of excitement about this kind of thing. Practitioners are on a predictable continuum. Narrative assessment instead of grades means there's a lot of words involved. What we've got right now is a back office, modular, student-record keeping suite of modules that support a non-traditional form of student record keeping.

Progress reports go home every quarter—the prose paragraphs that then, as a student gets older, gets ready to go to college or the army or whatever comes next—serve as the basis for a final transcript. The final transcript is a redacted, summarized, synthesized version of what's been said over the four years of high school.

Knowing students well is key.

SPRINGPOINT: *As far as tracking them then, seems your school is small enough that teachers know advisees and students pretty well.*

TODD: Knowing students well is key. At Parker and in the Essential School model more generally. In order to prioritize knowing students well and personalizing their journey, the student load is pretty low. For example, let's pretend you and I are co-teaching Division 1 AH. So we're going to teach two blocks out of three. You and I are going to have 24 students in each block. Our total student load is 48 kids. There's a practice in Division 1 that we split the assessment. I assess 24, you assess 24. I'm writing feedback and narrative reports for 24 kids. We're jointly responsible for four hours a day of high quality instruction and experience. But I'm not writing this much (points to narrative paragraph) for 120 kids.

SPRINGPOINT: *Do you do any sort of grouping, or are they heterogeneously grouped on projects?*

TODD: Students are heterogeneously grouped. But each summer, the Division level faculty spend a significant amount of time trying to fine tune what those groups would look like. Say you're a rising 8th grader and have a running conflict with another student. We're not going to put you in the same section as student B. It's more fine tuning for the social dynamics among kids. We don't put siblings in the same room. Special educators are occasionally the 3rd teacher in the room. So if we've got three kids in Division 1 who have similar issues in reading, we might cluster them together so the reading specialist can work with them together. But in general no. There's enough variability around the edges. But the division level faculty make those choices in the summer.

SPRINGPOINT: *What about the kids who want to exceed expectations?*

TODD: The word exceeds is a charged word here.

SPRINGPOINT: *And I notice you don't have exceeds on the transcript.*

TODD: Nope. And not all rubrics have exceeds on them. This is an area of our life as a school where there's not in consensus. Because if the universal standards are high enough, meeting those standards should be good enough. And it's also true that some kids who are very excited about one domain want to have an exceeds option. So, as a faculty and as a school, how to balance... because you don't want a ceiling on it, with the personalization piece and yet not everyone will want to go beyond meets level work. Whether the exceeds language institutionalizes that, I'm not sure. This particular question is not on the top of our list. You'll see that on many rubrics there's an exceeds option but it's not on our transcript.

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*We make mistakes all the time.
Make a mistake.
Reflect. Adjust. Try again.*

SPRINGPOINT: *People are all over the place with that one, in our visits.*

TODD: We're still all over the place with that one.

SPRINGPOINT: *So you're pretty far away, having been here for three years, from when the 13 critical skills were developed?*

TODD: Yes, I suppose. They're settled, by and large, reviewed and refreshed periodically, but pretty settled. Currently the Spanish domain is in the process of revising their criteria. They're going to integrate the ACTFL proficiency levels into their criteria. That's an example of where we're trying explicitly to align our criteria of excellence with an external standard.

SPRINGPOINT: *You probably worked in a more traditional school as opposed to in a competency-based school previously. I wonder if you can think about mistakes people make in a competency-based school. In part it's hard to tease out in a great school.*

TODD: It's hard to tease out because there was never a reform moment at Parker. We started this way. There was never that moment. There have been lots of how to but whether to was never in question. Lots of iterations of the how to. We make mistakes all the time. Make a mistake. Reflect. Adjust. Try again.

SPRINGPOINT: *What about onboarding kids, helping them adjust to this model?*

TODD: Funny you should ask. Our students come from over 40 cities and towns in Massachusetts. The fact of the matter is that their experiences before Parker vary widely. A big part of Division 1 is, "how do I do this? I'm not going to get out of this by taking this quiz. I have to show that I can do this." It's quite an adjustment. And if you look at our standardized testing scores, it's in 8th grade that we're all over the map. It's in part a function of trying to get kids from 20-25 school districts... they didn't all walk in with the same skill level. So we're skilling them up. By the time we get to 10th grade MCAS our students consistently do well. We're a little less consistent at 8th grade.

They've only had three semesters by then.

Everybody has to exhibit. You don't get anywhere without exhibiting around here! This is a period in the year when there are 60 exhibitions in one week—all the seniors are doing exhibitions. There's another week when Divisions 1 and 2 have their exhibitions for Gatewaying into the next division. The whole school stops at that point. That's a little later in the spring.

Interview joined by **DEB MERRIAM***, Academic Dean.*

DEB: So I think our context was different. We were a startup. The rubber was always meeting the road. There wasn't the process of convincing people to do it differently. The political

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What I say in our introduction to prospective families is that this transition is way harder for the parents than for the kids.

context has also changed in the last 20 years. There weren't as many models 20 years ago as there probably are now. That being said, the challenges are probably still similar.

SPRINGPOINT: *What are the challenges of on boarding students, parents, teachers?*

DEB: What I say in our introduction to prospective families is that this transition is way harder for the parents than for the kids. The kids live it every day, but it's really different for the parents. Parents know how they did in school and that's different from what their kids are doing. A lot of it is taking our word for it, or watching what their kids are doing, or reading about it. As far as figuring it out, parents have the steepest hill to climb. So there's always the conversation about objectivity vs. subjectivity.

SPRINGPOINT: *Yep, how you know whether a student is proficient?*

DEB: Right. And the standard argument is, well there's always a question of objectivity and subjectivity no matter how you grade and what your expectations are. A 97 isn't any more objective than a "meets", or what have you. It's about being clear about one's expectations and, for us anyway, having a series of virtually constant conversations about…. What does this mean, what does it look like, let's look at student work. Let's design a rubric together. Let's design exemplars. Let's constantly be in conversation with what we think it looks like and continue the conversation. Once this is, as you said, once you've come to some agreement, that doesn't mean you're done. There's a constant process of being in conversation with each other about standards to make sure you are… It's not objectivity per say, but it's norming in that, when I look at this I have confidence that I'm seeing give or take what my colleagues are seeing because we talk about it all the time. We look at student work all the time, we measure the work against the same rubric. We use that rubric language when we talk and design with each other and try to be clear about what we expect and try to be clear with students

about what it is that we expect or what meets-standards work looks like.

SPRINGPOINT: *When you first created your Criteria for Excellence, where did you start?*

DEB: Those were created in consultation with various national standards at the time. So what was out and about in '94-'95, and now, you know, some of them continue to be revised, most notably Spanish, with the standards of ACTFL at this point. We're looking at other national standards, other meaningful declarations of what people think kids can do or should be able to do or what we want to reach for. And talking about them, trying them on for size, figuring where they fit, where we agree, where it doesn't quite fit and what we want to say. The writing one was done in consultation with whatever at the time the National Council of Teachers of English had and whatever the National Writers Project, or, I can't remember all the exact institutions. We took what was at the time the Mass Frameworks, or the beginning Massachusetts Frameworks at the time. Looking at all those things, and saying what's the commonality, what does that look like, where does it hit what we want going forward, where does it not. So it was really looking at other people's work, figuring out where has that been done and where does it align with our hopes, where does it not? So I don't think we ever created something out of nothing, but we made real and personal for us what was true based on a consultation with an array of existing standards.

SPRINGPOINT: *So it seems that the, "what does proficiency look like?" question is really one that gets answered in these conversations.*

DEB: That's right.

SPRINGPOINT: *You can't actually skip the conversation.*

DEB: No! (laughs)

SPRINGPOINT: *Do you know what I mean? Because people sort of want to know before they're actually teaching this way.*

DEB: People want to say, just give me what it is. We can all agree that good writing is about knowing your audience well, we can agree that that's the standard. But if we don't sit down and talk about what that means when we give 9th graders a paper on Romeo and Juliet... But we gotta look at it. We have to talk about student work. This is where curriculum, instruction and assessment are all intimately intertwined. We have to look at "the what" of what students produce. Is this knowing your audience well? Is this sufficient grammar for a 9th grader or do we want the bar higher? Because, again, that's where we can go back to the objectivity/subjectivity conversation. People feel like if there's a stake in the ground it's true, it's objective. Well, no it's not! (laughs) There are statements of what we believe is true. But if we don't talk about and have our understandings about how we interpret it and what we see and where we are in relation to each other about what it means... That's where the work is.

SPRINGPOINT: *The conversation right now is about wanting standards-referenced assessments rather than norm-referenced*

DEB: There's no such thing. Reasonable people disagree all the time. Our stance as a school is that it's about getting in there and having the conversations, all the time. It's not like you have it and it's done.

DEB: We use ALEKS as a tool for some students, most notably, either for enrichment or remediation. It's not a standard tool that we use across the curriculum but we use it selectively if it's a tool that's going to be their best option

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I don't think the colleges are that aware of the exceeds piece. What we're passing on to them is the narrative description of the quality of work the student has created.

for their pathway at the moment. We don't have any one thing that we take off the shelf and use as is. We're using VHS now, Virtual High School—it's based in Massachusetts. It's an online classroom.

DEB: That's exactly right. To offer kids who are ready for it additional [work]. Or for students who, for instance, someone who's been in our Division 2 Math and Science program for a long time and still isn't able to do what we want them to do despite trying a hundred other ways. So if it's more suitable to their learning style or to the constraints of their attendance issues or medical issues. So certainly we have some go-to off-the-shelf things when we feel like a child is sort of at a dead-end and we want to try something different. But the program doesn't have any one thing it takes off-the-shelf and uses.

DEB: I don't think the colleges are that aware of the exceeds piece. What we're passing on to them is the narrative description of the quality of work the student has created. I think the words that we're using to describe what the student does are more important than whether or not they actually exceeded on a rubric somewhere.

But ultimately a piece of work that exceeds is going to get described in a way that shows the quality of the work. I don't think the standards are being viewed by colleges directly from our program so much as the description. The prompt we say we're answering when we write student narratives is, "what can that student do and what are the conditions under which she

can do it?" That's what we're describing in that college narrative.

SPRINGPOINT: *Do you think getting a meets is harder than getting an A when we were kids?*
TODD: Now that's the question!

DEB: You should definitely ask the kids. I'll loosely, anecdotally answer. If I were to give a massive generalization, I would say that kids who are going to second tier schools and lower say that Parker is way harder than college. Kids who are at the top tier colleges in the country feel like college is way harder. So it depends on the kid and the context. Where they've been and where they're going. But in general kids who got into those top tiers of colleges say 'they are kicking my butt the same way you kicked my butt'.

SPRINGPOINT: *Is everything portfolio based? Are there tests and quizzes?*
TODD: There are definitely quizzes, typically as formative assessments. How are we feeling on this? The hypothesis is, the commitment is, this is about students doing real tasks. And while it's OK to check for understanding using a quiz, it's not a real task, right. That optics task that we were watching the kids working on upstairs this morning. That's going to end up being... It's OK to test their understanding of that equation we saw them using with a quiz. But the money is in the application, the real world example. Can you use that equation to design a telescope? If this is the lens size, how long does the telescope have to be? So people do use quizzes for formative as-sessment only. To check for understanding and

make adjustments to instruction.

SPRINGPOINT: *But ultimately what you need to move on is not these checks but your portfolio, your gateway?*
TODD: Yes, the kids call them "pieces" because it's a piece of work that maps back to one of those 13 skill areas that's on offer at the end of the unit or towards the end of the unit. Maybe there are multiple pieces one could earn. That optics unit is pretty long, at least eight weeks

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long so I'm sure there's more than one piece on offer there. That's a systems thinking piece that they just started working on when we were upstairs earlier. It's not the formative, it's the real world task.

SPRINGPOINT: *And do they get to pick what's in their portfolio?*
TODD: Um, hmm. I'll go get you some portfolios if you want, they're in the next room. I'll show you one at random.

Returns with a student's Division 1 and Division 2 portfolios

TODD: This is Eliza's Gateway Portfolio. The first binder is to move from Division 2 to Division 3

in AH and the second binder is to move from Division 2 to Division 3 in MST. So you can see she has tabs for the different skill areas: writing, systems thinking. She's got multiple examples of times she has either met standards or, it can be work that she's really proud of but that she

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We definitely start the year by getting out the rubric we used last time to see if it needs tuning.

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didn't meet on—she might say, "this is a time I didn't meet that I learned how important it is to calculate correctly or how important it is to revise or to use figurative language in order to get my point across." Or whatever it is. Her portfolio as evidence of her learning over time.

SPRINGPOINT: *And there's always a rubric in the binder next to the project or assignment?*

TODD: Yep. And if you map this back, these rubrics will always map back to the Criteria for Excellence.

SPRINGPOINT: *Do these rubrics have a lot of staying power?*

TODD: Yeah. As long as the unit's around and in the rotation. Remember I told you the curriculum's on a two-year rotation. We definitely start the year by getting out the rubric we used last time to see if it needs tuning, especially if the unit itself has been adjusted or tuned.

SPRINGPOINT: *(looking at the student's portfolio) There's a lot of work in here.*

TODD: Right. She's making editorial choices among all the work she's done over the past years. "This is my best work. This is the case statement for why I'm ready to move on to Division 3." So the whole chunk of work is there.

SPRINGPOINT: *Do they get to take these home?*

TODD: When they graduate.

SPRINGPOINT: *Are the projects typically long, like the eight-week optic unit?*

TODD: Yeah, that's not an unusual length. I mean a kid may keep working on a piece until she meets even if the unit is done. If they do dissection or systems of the body, that's more from early in the year, Thanksgiving time. A student may still be engaged with that when everyone else has moved on. If she wants to keep revising, produce some product that's missing—a chart, or, I don't know—she can still maybe get that done before the end of the year and earn the piece even if the lab associated with it has long passed.

SPRINGPOINT: *What do you do for PD?*

TODD: Parker has a long-lived and substantive commitment to constructivist PD. We will have this month's Critical Friends Group (CFG), our last one of the year. But everybody is in a CFG. Critical Friends Group practice is centered on student work. People take turns bringing examples of student work to the table and the other eight to 10 people in the group. Here again it's a protocol-based experience where folks feel supported in taking risks. So they might say, I don't

know what's going on with this kid. And we have different protocols for different outcomes.

So that's really one cornerstone of it. We talked a little bit this morning about the domain structure. So some PD takes place within domains. So for example I know that the AH domain is working on a multi-month, probably multi-semester effort to learn about kids with decoding challenges. Some of that PD is taking place in their weekly domain meetings. Some of it's being laid out over time, a little bit each week. And then there's the opportunity for folks to study off campus, graduate classes, or workshops.

Those are the three kinds of major dimensions, if you will, of how that gets structured. We adopted, even though we didn't have to, the new Massachusetts teacher evaluation program. It's our first year of implementing it. It's portfolio based, people present their professional portfolios. I think we're happy enough with it. I think it's a good piece of work.

Making Community Connections Charter School

TRANSCRIPT

This is a transcript of a taped oral interview with **EDDIE MARCEAU**,
Head of School, and **KIM CARTER**, *Founder, of Making Community*
Connections High School in Manchester, NH, conducted on April 9, 2014,
by Melissa Giraud on behalf of **SPRINGPOINT**.

EDDIE: This is the second MC2. Here in Manchester, we're halfway through our second year. In the Keene area it was opened for about a decade.

SPRINGPOINT: *How do you come up with your competencies and tools?*

EDDIE: That's more of a question for Kim. I came in with all that done.

We've compiled the different competencies which are connected to the standards, all online.

The ELA one is a great one to show you.

Students aren't just going to sit in an English Lit or British Lit class especially today. So I can show you how we incorporate ELA across the curriculum.

Instead of grades we have phases—1, 2, 3, 4 for high school. There are certain things they need to demonstrate to pass through a phase. These are phase 1 checklist requirements. One requirement for ELA, for example, they're

required to maintain "End of Days" which are a daily reflection. So Monday through Thursday, they're required to complete a 200 word End of Day which reflects their smart goals and what they did that day and kind of their now what.

I will say doing something like this has been so vital not only to their own development, but parents have access to this so they get that daily communication. Also, it's a total forum, so when you talk about student agency and advocacy. This is a safe space for them to say to the staff, hey this is working for me, this isn't. Something's going on in my home life. I'm really sad about my performance. I can't tell you how many times a student who has had a behaviorly difficult day has explained it in their end of day. So we say, I get it now, let's move forward.

SPRINGPOINT: *This is available to parents?*
EDDIE: If you just go on our school website and click the End of Day (EOD) portal.

SPRINGPOINT: *Does that cause them to censor themselves at all?*
EDDIE: I would say the opposite. There are some expectations, like we want them referencing their goals, what they're learning about. But the other is be professional, advocate for yourself.

This is our portal. We're trying to make it look like Facebook. We badge stuff, so if they meet certain requirements, like the End of Days, this keeps track of all that data for us for each student. This is Monday, so we just got back from vacation so this student [who agreed to have

us look at her "End of Day"] is writing about missing vacation and about her school trip to Gettysburg.

Through our responses we can help coach about capitalization, punctuation, etc. You can say these are all staff members responding. We have an advisory, so advisors are responding, I try to respond to all of them. On this day, four adults responded to her post. Including her science teacher just asking her a question. Encouraging her with follow-up activities. General praise. There's that constant redirection. That constant holding them accountable. They're generally not censored. As long as you write in professional language.

SPRINGPOINT: *When did this school open?*
EDDIE: Charter granted in 2011 and the school opened in the 12-13 year. As far as when it opened in Keene? 2002. I was there from 05-07.

SPRINGPOINT: *How many students do you have?*
EDDIE: Basically 70. We've been hovering at the 70 enrollment.

SPRINGPOINT: *What is the age range for admission?*
EDDIE: Yeah, our charter is 13-16. We can specially admit 12 and 17 with my permission.

SPRINGPOINT: *Why only 13 to 16?*
EDDIE: Charter is for K – 16. We started with ages 13 – 16 as a foundation to grow from (too wide an age range is hard for a small staff, as we've found!).

SPRINGPOINT: *What grade levels do you have?*

EDDIE: Middle and high school. I was showing you the phases for high school but there are also two for middle school.

SPRINGPOINT: *Will you get more?*

EDDIE: We hope so. We have capacity for 130 students.

SPRINGPOINT: *Is there an LMS? SIS?*

EDDIE: We use that portal with attendance piece. We don't have like a [PowerSchool](). Fortunately we have a programmer, who is a graduate of MC2 and has been working with Kim Carter since he was in 9th Grade. He helped to build the EOD portal and our attendance system. Those are the biggest.

We've been trying to increase their capacity for numeracy and literacy.

SPRINGPOINT: *Does that cover grading and lessons?*

EDDIE: No, our digital portfolio would hold grading and lessons. The three pieces of our educational experience for kids are applying, documenting, and then defending their learning. So our digital portfolios are where Learning Studios post assignments and where students post their assignments in and out of school.

SPRINGPOINT: *What about off the shelf content and digital content?*

EDDIE: Specifically we use Khan and we have Plato. The big ones are for language. We don't have language teachers so we have student accounts with Rosetta Stone. We've been using Khan especially for the math component. It's very user friendly, we've noticed. We've been trying to increase their capacity for numeracy and literacy. Our assessments on that haven't been great. Khan Academy has worked very well for us. Through the week we build like little Khan studios for groups of even four students meeting with our math personnel and sitting together – they're getting direct instruction and they're using this interface which has that badging component (Khan). It's almost game-like.

We also have Plato licensing, which is comparable to Khan. For the older students who are under-credited, it's been appealing to them.

SPRINGPOINT: *Is that mostly for math?*

EDDIE: No, it has everything. Social Studies, languages, etc.

SPRINGPOINT: *Do you use Virtual Learning Academy stuff at all?*

EDDIE: VLACS? We have.

SPRINGPOINT: *What about technology for your students?*

EDDIE: Every student has access to a laptop or an iPad. As a staff, we're building our ability to use technology. We're not paperless but building that capacity.

SPRINGPOINT: *How do you develop your curriculum? I see you have Zendoodling among*

EDDIE: The first thing we try to do is foster student interest. Our school is called Making Community Connections because we're trying to foster community within the school as well as with the community outside. So we're trying to figure out what appeals most to the student interest.

So, in the case of Zendoodling, I must admit, when we were brainstorming, I didn't have a clue about it. That piece about reflective thinking is built into our EOD portal already. That pretty reflective thinking is what we're trying to channel. But the origin of that was students saying they are interested in yoga and meditation. There's also compelling evidence for the impact of mindfulness practice on student learning.

Our job is to take their interest and morph it into something that will motivate them, but also to connect it to standards and to the competencies so we can offer essential knowledge.

Here's the [Essential Knowledge Checklist](#) which is content driven. So the student instead of taking a civics class at a traditional school, we don't have a civics class, but, for example, I offered a Civil War course after school. I offered the ability to get the "civics in action credit." So students read two books which were college bound reading, so at a high level for their grade level. One was a memoir, the second was a secondary source—both non-fiction. The memoir was about a soldier who passed away at the Battle of Gettysburg. And we went to visit this site to see where his regiment was buried. One

of our students is writing a letter advocating posthumous recognition. Because he was promised one but he died. The student on his own volition is writing and saying this guy deserves it. That counts for "citizen action credit." He's not done with that.

We're not time based, we're competency based.

That's the other thing. It's not like, the studio is over and it's a missed opportunity. He can give it to me when he's done. We're not time based, we're competency based. What they're doing is building portfolios.

Here they have more choice around what they want to demonstrate with these College and Career Bound readings. The thing that's really neat is that with our mission for ALL kids to be college and career bound, there are some kids really interested in cars and we count some car manuals as college bound reading. It doesn't have to be more traditional reading. Some of our students who are learning to fix a Honda aren't attracted to Hawthorne. Now, we're not substituting car manuals for literature. We're very clear about the difference. At the same time, the reading level for car manuals is pretty significant!

SPRINGPOINT: *How do you group your students at first? How do you utilize your twice-a-year MAP (Measure of Academic Progress) tests?*

EDDIE: The MAP testing specifically is around

reading, writing, and math. So our literacy and numeracy scoring, that's the data we're getting. So regarding the Khan Academy, those groupings are intentional. We're 30% special ed so we need to be sensitive to those needs and goals and meeting those expectations. But as far as grouping, if you walk around the school today, it's the first day of the Learning Studios for the quarter, students selected pretty much

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But I cant speak highly enough about our staff and the advisors and the consistency they've had with maintaining expectations.

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on their interest. Most of them are Phase 1, or 9th grade, so they don't have a lot of credit yet. Thus far, whenever we roll out a learning studio, they can take whatever they want. Later in their careers, they'll have to be more conscious of what credits they need to move on.

I'd also like to say that we're inclusive. So we don't pull out for special ed. We don't have a resource room as far as that aspect. But as far as using the MAP's testing and using that data, it also helps us connect to Title 1. Our population is 50% free and reduced lunch so we are eligible to get the Title 1 funding.

SPRINGPOINT: *So kids are heterogeneously grouped and move according to interest. And the self-direction comes with these checklists and their interests?*

EDDIE: Regarding the habits, obviously they're going to have scaffolding. They have advisors. They're in advisory every morning and every afternoon. But self-direction is a huge part when you want to work on your interests.

SPRINGPOINT: *How do you work on scaffolding then?*
EDDIE: Well, we have the J-Curve. You might have seen it online.

As far as the scaffolding, having the families on board is easily the easiest lever for creating that tipping point. Not only for the individual but also for the community. So every day when we have that End of Day on the portal, and if a parent's responding to that, that's been huge. They know they're getting the language here. And if they go home and have a family who says, you need to be working on your research project, that's been huge with that scaffolding.

Some families are more active than others, which is tough. For some kids, we need to start a reset button every day to remind them they're in school. But I can't speak highly enough about our staff and the advisors and the consistency they've had with maintaining expectations.

The other piece is, since we're new, students are starting to understand the process and starting to gateway which is the process of going from one phase to the next. You have to do a portfolio and then you have to do a presentation to a panel saying I'm ready to move on. That's for the phase checklist stuff. For this phase, for example, [the gateway portfolio has included write

ups about] three learning opportunities that could be from your Learning Studios. To go from here to here you have to do the gateway portfolio. Then you're presenting to your parents, your advisor, myself, and then someone from the community that has no connection to you. If they're assessed proficient [or better] they can move to the next phase.

Regarding the scaffolding, we're trying to get to the point where the students are the ones who have more control about the community. As more students are going through the process, other students are perking their heads up and going, oh, that's how you do it. So, like anything, the students almost have more power with voice. Because I can say, you need to continue working on your research project. But seeing another student finish is a bigger motivator.

We're scaffolding that and we're trying to model that. One of our sayings is model up, model down. As a staff we are required to do a lot of the same expectations, we're trying to show that it's manageable and doable. But as the students become more visible doing it that's been the biggest culture shift.

About our history, at the old MC2 we had a student graduate in three years, having also completed two college classes. On the other end, we had a student take almost six years because he needed the time developmentally. So they drive it, they have a lot of impact on their progress. We're not time-based.

EDDIE: We have a series of learning opportunities. The Learning Studios are what they get here. There are Treks and Personal Learning Experiences. For example, we have a student

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One of our sayings is model up, model down. As a staff we are required to do a lot of the same expectations, we're trying to show that it's manageable and doable.

who's in DC with her family right now and she's turning that into a Personal Learning Experience. She's been going to a bunch of museums. She'll be able to turn that into a history project. Her trip has nothing to do with our school. We didn't arrange it. But shifting that mentality so that they see they're learning everywhere is important. It's tough with students sometimes so I just say take pictures and we'll build it from there.

The other big one is internships which are 40% of our program. Monday, Wednesday, Friday are the Learning Studio days. We have language block, one Learning Studio, 2nd block, 3rd block and then back to advisory.

Tomorrow right at 9 we're having a couple students go to Easter Seals to help youth.

Another student at Audubon. Another at a local shelter to help teach refugees how to use computers. They're teaching the adults—these are 16 year olds.

A strong internship experience looks like a mentor who can help support, develop, and enhance student's knowledge and skills in a career pathway of the student's choosing.

The moral of my story is it's 40% of our curriculum because that's been an avenue for acceleration for being college and career ready. The scaffolding is important. Having a really great mentor is important. A strong internship experience looks like a mentor who can help support, develop, and enhance student's knowledge and skills in a career pathway of the student's choosing. The relationship between a student and an internship mentor of a career of their choosing can have a profound impact on a student's academic and behavioral progress both at the internship and at school. The vision for Tuesday and Thursday here is that there are almost no students in the building because they're all at internships. We have seen Internships be transformational for students.

SPRINGPOINT: *Is it hard to find them?*
EDDIE: No, the biggest challenge is maintaining those expectations from the student perspective.

Because once we get an internship site we're good. We usually have a good relationship. So we're trying to build. We're part of the Chamber of Commerce and we're trying to gain more visibility for our internship connections. That's been pretty much our agenda right now. We want more internships. We do our best to foster internships to their interests but we have to also encourage career bridge paths. I'm not going to graduate college and become a principal. You gotta work your way up.

SPRINGPOINT: *Do you have a schedule I can have?*
EDDIE: Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays are academic. Tuesdays and Thursdays are internships. We must have one somewhere but I don't know where. I could make one for you.

Advisory, morning meeting (20 minutes, community builder, student share, announcements), language (online, self-directed, supervised, use community folks for portfolio assessment), snacks/break, 2nd Block Learning Studio, lunch, Sustained Silent Reading (15 minutes, very hard to get them to do it), 3rd Block Studio, Advisory —end of days, help clean up school, check in with advisor.

Student governance is almost on the same level with policy.

SPRINGPOINT: *How do you keep track of all of this?*
EDDIE: That's the advisor's job. Basically, there's the checklist. As an advisor, I would check in first thing with students and ask them, what are you trying to do today in regard to this, on your

checklist. Most of our students benefit from this visual. In the morning and afternoon, in advisory, they are with the person in charge of helping them keep on track.

They get most of this stuff on their own. We require a research project, and we've had students over break just do it and come in and say can you look at it and give me feedback. We embed the EK (Essential Knowledge) in our learning studios. So the Civil War studio I taught, I embedded this in it so part of this was learning awareness about good leadership and sacrifice. Those were the lenses. We were looking at habits and characteristics and how important being a good leader is. I only taught it for eight weeks after school so I didn't make the Civil War the scope.

If I wanted to teach a longer class about how the Civil War was about economics and slavery, I might say the course is going to be about this and we're going to aim at the Social Class and Diversity indicators to help build your American Studies portfolio.

To get even more in depth, a student could say, I have my social class and diversity sub-portfolios for my SS portfolio. So I'd probably change the angle with the student. Let's compare the US Constitution to the Confederate State Constitution. So then the conversation goes towards states' rights and many issues today. I have a focus but the student can take the initiative to shape something to fill a different credit with me. This checklist provides the transparency.

SPRINGPOINT: *Is that also true about the competencies? Not sure how you assess.*

EDDIE: We're trying to enhance our visibility around competency and standards. To be completely honest, if you asked a student what competency are you working on, they wouldn't be able to cite the standard. We're still building that visibility and capacity with our dialog and conversation.

Regarding the assessment, we're still developing rubrics to meet these particular criteria. So we have a project rubric but not a Citizen Action rubric. So we're not there yet but we're getting there.

We're trying to enhance our visibility around competency and standards.

SPRINGPOINT: *What about scale?*

EDDIE: Emerging to Lifelong: Emerging, Progressing, Proficiency, Exemplary, Lifelong.

SPRINGPOINT: *That's a lot.*

EDDIE: We're at the convince stage in terms of the scale. We're dialoguing with students around their work to help them understand the scale. I had an argument with a student who demonstrated more knowledge in conversation than he did in his report and I was able to show him how to include it and to give him credit for demonstrating his knowledge. He looked at sports statistics to write a report on who was

the best basketball player but didn't reference them. Learning to defend and document is an important part of our work.

SPRINGPOINT: *Why a five point scale? Doesn't that correspond too closely to ABCDF?*
EDDIE: It's more than a scoring guide. Our habit rubrics are intended to be learning progressions. Proficient is now our middle of the scale. It used to be higher. You need to ask Kim about that.

I think the starting point is what do you want a graduate to be able to do and how do you want them to act.

SPRINGPOINT: *PD?*
EDDIE: One, we're shifting away from the CEU thing, if you do 30 of PD in your content area. All you do in that case is find a week-long conference and build capacity wherever. To promote the lifelong learning and model for kids, we have a teacher checklist like the kids. So where we get PD is more selective. The whole group went to a Grant Wiggins workshop and we write reflections on it. The other piece that's neat is that our calendar is year round, ten weeks on, three weeks off for kids. Then eleven weeks on, two weeks off for teachers. Spend that week in PD.

KIM CARTER *enters.*

SPRINGPOINT: *What about developing competencies?*
KIM: We haven't even started that with this staff.

EDDIE: I told her most of our kids wouldn't know what a competency was if you asked them.

KIM: I'm trying to think of a few exceptions to that.

EDDIE: I didn't see all.

KIM: We're building capacity. We certainly want our graduates to know.

EDDIE: We develop rubrics and teach them in discussion with the kids about work, so it's still happening.

KIM: We've got a few people who are clear on our EK (Essential Knowledge) checklist but not everyone. Until teachers are clear how can our kids get clear. That's where most of the content lives.

SPRINGPOINT: *What's the process for competency development?*
KIM: We started that process 10 years ago. I think the starting point is what do you want a graduate to be able to do and how do you want them to act. If you'd be proud to say that's our graduate, what would you want them to possess? You probably won't say, be a good test taker.

And then the next thing is to look at how each

discipline, not subject, contributes to that outcome. And in looking at that you begin to define what your competencies are going to be. Competencies are clusters of behaviors and objectives but they're not either of those things.

I've been working with the Iowa DOE on their competency work so I've started developing a learning progression for competency writing that is what I think they should look like, frankly.

A high quality competency statement, part of what I'm developing for them is including their competency validation rubric but expanding it because I don't think it's sufficient. They're more like floors. If we're going to look at a progression towards quality, this is really in process. So it's a performance outcome. That's what's really important. In my mind—to give you the theoretical background—it's bringing together Wiggins and McTighe's performance assessment (www.authenticeducation.org) and Newman and Wehlage's [Authentic Achievement](). So how do you bring those pieces together? And Dewey's in there but he's way back.

So it's a performance outcome first of all and there's a progression. I mean, you can demonstrate application by proxy, which is pretty much what we have right now. We say we've got expectations that people can do things and that's standards, and we measure them by computer adapted tests or paper and pencil. Or it requires a product or performance and we're still working on this. But I think the ideal is application in a context that's beyond the scope of the classroom. So basically what you have is

a complex, ill-defined problem and novel situations. For me, mastery is the ability to identify what you need to do to address a problem that is probably complex and also novel. So it's not

When I think about assessment I think about gateways. We use the term gateway before you can move forward.

one you've practiced and rehearsed and you know I'm going to pull out this and you pull out a formula. So how do we move our performance statements towards that? It encompasses enduring understanding based on the cluster of related content, skills and dispositions that require academic rigor. And for me importantly it's learner-centered.

I think a competency has to be two-faced. It has to look to the adults and say this represents this area of expertise in the discipline. And it looks towards the student and says here's what you need to be able to do, in a way that they can understand it. It needs to do both in that one statement and it's hard. It's crafting.

SPRINGPOINT: *Do you have a term for competencies that are achieved on a continuum vs. competencies that need to be mastered before others can be learned? The building vs. the continuums?*
KIM: When I think about assessment I think about gateways. We use the term gateway before you can move forward. I haven't thought

about whether competencies have gates to them or whether they have a learning progression. I think it's a progression. But there are benchmarks along the way. And I think part of it is can we use that language that has other connotations. So, if your competency is to be able to investigate a problem and so you're going to

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If you say it's important for you to be an effective communicator, what does that look like in science, what does that look like in math?

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create an experiment in science and the science is going to require using a Bunsen burner, there's a gate to learning to use a Bunsen burner, to use it safely. But that's not the competency. The competency should be sort of the big statement that requires a cascade of different knowledge, skills, and dispositions.

I really love Quebec's model. As I understand it they're very traditional in their implementation. For their entire secondary, each discipline has three or four competencies and that's it. It's really elegant and I probably shouldn't be mentioning it because I haven't had enough time to play with it but I think it's still worth looking at. We've been working on our competencies for 14 years. And the more we learn about competencies and what their critical role is the more we want to revise them!

KIM: I think that's a great question. And I think that's where something like this learning progression, if I can get it done, would be helpful. But I think some very common starting points are to start with what we've known, and what we've known are classes. And so people tend to want to organize competencies by classes. And James Dean said very elegantly, probably 20 years ago now, that a subject is just a piece of the discipline that adults have decided is all right for kids to know. So we've already cut off all sorts of exploration opportunities and in-depth learning. So if we stay with disciplines and not subjects, everyone on the team has to be really good at a discipline.

The other thing is what we call universal constructs or 21st century skills or lifelong habits, I think those are the bridges into and between all the disciplines. So if you say it's important for you to be an effective communicator, what does that look like in science, what does that look like in math? Each has a different lens. How you communicate in math has a very particular set of structures to it. How you communicate in Social Studies has another particular set of structures. So looking at the habits not as the, "oh we want everyone to do this and we embed them throughout." But maybe they become the centerpiece that everything else comes through. That's where I'm headed right now.

KIM *[after looking up Quebec organizing graphic]*: I just think it's really elegant. And you

see the student is at the center. Here there's language and here are the three competencies for secondary ed and that's it. I want to go visit because as I understand right now they're pretty traditional and they've even got tracks. But that's a really elegant structure for an educational system. They developed it in 2000. But everything I can find about how it's implemented is pretty traditional.

SPRINGPOINT: *What else do you try to keep in mind when implementing competency-based systems?*

KIM: Have the system be about kids not about adults. Schools are built for adults. Everything about schools is built for adults. When our adults first get it, they start to feel really stressed and want to know when they matter if everything is built around kids. Actually, we are finding our students usually get it first.

I had a great mentor 20 years ago. Any question you brought to the table would ask, how does that impact student learning? Every single thing. And we forget that question.

We're in the process of moving Sustained Silent Reading into the middle of the day from the end of the day which is where it has a lot of validity and sense making. It's a great transition from lunch. It brings an element of mindfulness for the kids.

For the kids it does really important things from the mind-brain education science perspective. And that's the other thing. How to intentionally imbed mind/brain/educational science into the learning from the start.

SPRINGPOINT: *What are the things you try not to do at this MC2 that you did at the former?*

KIM: We started with clear structures, which we didn't have in the beginning in the first MC2. But while we have structures now, everyone has still had to learn how to navigate those structures. Startup is hard! Having our own space was one of the more important things we wanted to do differently.

EDDIE: I do agree with Kim saying everything in schools has been traditionally built around adults. That shift to student-centered is big.

Have the system be about kids not about adults. Schools are built for adults.

Breaking down that mentality is big and breaking down that traditional paradigm and restructuring virtually everything. So even little stuff. Like our rooms are named for our habits. There's no art room, it's the communication room. There's no science room, there's the problem solving room. Even little stuff like that I wasn't conscientious of. I had no pulse on that. So that's one thing that she's really tried and advocated to break down. That mentality around look, this is just for science. When I went to my room and saw lab tables I said, yeah, I'm doing chemistry or biology. Kind of breaking that down has been really important.

From my position now, it's been an interesting

experience. When I came to MC2 I came from a very traditional instruction, from college, that's how you're taught. So all that formative and summative assessment was pretty much tests, everything is very rigid. So if I thought something was interesting I'd teach about that. I feel

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Teachers are brought along the culture shift because like the students, they are given voice and are integral to creating the culture shift.

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like I was able to sell people because of my enthusiasm and passion about my degree which is history. But at the same time I'm curious, how many of them really benefited from that form of instruction which was really just lecture. So when I got the position at MC2 I thought, honestly I was like this makes no sense, it blew my mind.

SPRINGPOINT: *Yeah, how do you bring teachers along on this culture shift?*

EDDIE: Yep, I did ask, why did I have to do this? Which supports her argument about the teacher centered thing. Some examples. I had a family that fought for the military in the world wars and I was raised to be patriotic and proud of my heritage and stuff. But we had stuff called Staff Senate, we'd sit as a staff and students were invited and we'd talk about policies for the school. And I was like, why am I here? I grew up

in an authoritative school system. If I wanted to abuse my power I could say, new rule! No chairs! Or something.

MC2 helped me personally to see the importance of democratic practice in schools. Teachers are brought along the culture shift because like the students, they are given voice and are integral to creating the culture shift. Our Governance Structure emphasizes the checks and balances of staff and student voice regarding policy making and reform.

I feel comfortable with my position now. I try every day to shake every student's hand. I tell them, I'm so glad you're here. That's a norm. I've had students sit at my desk, the principal's desk—I'd never been in my principal's office—and say, hey, do you want to work on something together? And we'll just work on something. I work on my computer and they work on theirs and we listen to music. I've had other students say, "What!"

Breaking that down is pretty vital. Kim can give you more advice on the logistical stuff because she created the school. I just came into this at the right time. I barely knew this world existed. I'm involved in other programs where there's a cautiousness about it but the understanding is not aligned with what we're trying to do in practice. We do feel like leaders in this community, which is pretty rewarding.

SPRINGPOINT: *Back to assessment. How do you assess? You have rubrics or you're developing rubrics and you discuss the work with the students?*

And that's how you go over every piece of their portfolio. Do you do it with other teachers also or just the students?

EDDIE: It's with the student a majority of the time. So if the student's doing Social Studies they'll meet with me. If they're doing a writing portfolio, they'll meet with Angela. They're done by the certified teacher. It is important that we give rounds of feedback to student work and then have students involved in the assessment process.

We have to write weekly reflections just like students write them. And within the last week or two I've been saying we need to build our capacity to assess together. I think we should all look at student work and assess it from scratch. I think that is very important because it speaks to two things. One is just how we assess in general. But it also speaks to definitions of mastery, how to move them to mastery. Not to say anyone's a pushover. But I think that discourse is going to move us up more quickly. We're still at that point. I understand why it hasn't happened that way yet.

SPRINGPOINT: *So you're too divided for that to happen.*

EDDIE: Maybe right now. But I can't tell you how important I think that is. Building our artifacts and looking at work.

KIM: I don't know if divided is quite the right description as much as we haven't had time for collaborative assessment work. We're just beginning that now.

SPRINGPOINT: *Do you have common planning time to do that?*

EDDIE: Let me get back to PD. The students have ten weeks on and three weeks off. Week eleven is PD week. So we do professional development in that. The last one we were talking about feedback. What is good feedback, and what does that look like? We were talking about behavior.

We have to write weekly reflections just like the students write them.

So we do stuff around behavior management. So we're getting actual PD. That happens and we have meetings on Monday and Wednesday after school. Those PD weeks are structured. Our growth is accelerated greatly where we're all sitting in the same room for five days straight. That's when that happens. As far as these other things like assessment, we need to continue. It's not like, everyone here is working really hard. You're breaking down what people know to build them to learn something new. Kim does it to me, I'm new to this job.

SPRINGPOINT: *Breaking down their mental models?*

EDDIE: Breaking down their models of pedagogy.

SPRINGPOINT: *How did you choose teachers?*

EDDIE: Most of the staff was hired before me. But what I look for more than anything is, this one wants to learn. For me what's huge is learning.

I was validated in that choice. Also being conscientious about students, how they view students. I would ask questions to get a read on that.

If you're not willing to learn it doesn't suit our mission of modeling up and modeling down. Also, how could they adapt to a competency-based system. Not many of them came in with that experience.

SPRINGPOINT: *Do you have conversations about rigor? How do you know if you're on the same page?*

EDDIE: The biggest channel for the rigor component from a staff capacity component is that frequent communication. So rigor's supported for the students through Advisory but also in the instructional time and the Learning Studios we're trying to build evidence of what academic rigor looks like for other students to see.

The behavior component and building everyone's capacity to deal with behavior is taking up most of our time.

We have a Phase 4 student over there who's doing online courses outside of school. So as far as that kind of rigor. Yes. With rigor there's motivation. We're trying to shift that, students just do it to do it, from extrinsic to intrinsic motivation. As far as academic rigor, we still need to increase our capacity for that discussion.

As a very appropriate example of when we should have had that with that research project that looked pretty elementary. The conversation with the student was important for revealing knowledge that wasn't evident in the work. But at the end of the day do you want to hang up that work as an example [to other students]? So there's still coaching to be done and capacity to be built. If that's only happening individually there's no culture of rigor being built.

If I'm being completely honest, the behavior component and building everyone's capacity to deal with behavior is taking up most of our time. Just because of our population. Some are new to teaching. If it were just send them to me every time it'd be pretty simple for them. But we try to build their capacity to coach in the moment and give feedback and develop that discourse about what a professional environment looks like for everyone. We had a community meeting before our last break about what does professional use of these two spaces in particular look like? If you're a visitor to our school and people are lying on the couch or leaving trash on the floor, would you stay? I'd slowly walk out backwards. We've had issues there around swearing and trash. We've had to as a community have those conversations and define professionalism.

Pieces of it are that they're teenagers, you know. I've watched students spill their milk out and watch the trail of milk down the wall.

Talking to Student, **EDDIE** *(***ES:*** student;* **EM:** *principal)*

EM: So you just started this year?

ES: Yeah.

EM: And how is it different from your other schools?

ES: Way different. I went to Hartside for 6th, 7th and 8th. Here, the setup's different, the structure's different, and the space is difference. If you went to West High, you'd get lost!

EM: You like that it's small?

ES: I like it but I wish it were a little bit bigger. It'll get bigger. When we get more students.

EM: Which studio are you in?

ES: I'm supposed to be in Nate's. It's a studio about Manchester. I'm glad to get out of it because it is boring! I was doing Chalk Talk.

EM: Explain what Chalk Talk is.

ES: Chalk Talk is when you are quiet and you write down things that you think the essential question is about. The essential question was "Who do we think we are?" You break it down into what you think it is and what should be discussed.

EM: Did you participate?

ES: Yes, I didn't write stuff but I did talk. I have horrible writing.

SPRINGPOINT: *Your favorite learning studio this year?*

ES: Radical Topography was pretty cool. We were talking about where we'd want to live and how living there would affect you.

Something about Radioactivology. That is what would happen if there was nuclear waste in the ground. How would you explain to future generations about it.

SPRINGPOINT: *What phase are you in?*

ES: I'm in 1. If I get proficient in my Exhibition I'll go on to 2. I've done four Exhibitions so far. One I messed up on and did again and passed.

You have to do MOLO and when you do MOLO you have to do internships.

EM: Our school's, MC2's, Orientation Learning Opportunity. What was the purpose of MOLO for you? Why do new students have to talk MOLO?

ES: To learn to focus on work and not to goof off. My dad lectured me because it took me three weeks to do MOLO and my brother got through it a lot faster.

EM: It's our orientation to teach people about this kind of system.

SPRINGPOINT: *So you and your brother are in the same school.*

ES: Yeah, he lives with his mother. It's cool except when we get compared. EOD is end of day or end of week reflection. At the end of year it's

a 1,000 word reflection. End of Day is when you write about what you did in your day. You have goals and you need to write about them.

[Student interview ends]

KIM: We have a whole ecosystem. So how is MC2 different? If we're recruiting a kid, they need to know how different this place is. Number one. You're going to come in and your learning is a la carte. It's not you have to go through these in Biology and then you go through Chemistry, but you can do this and a piece of that and something else. [Number Two] Learner profiles are really important. [Number Three] Set your own pace, you're not time based and it's based on Phases and negotiated pace and there are habits. [Number Four] Learning happens anytime. [Here are] pictures of these different kids. So he did his Geometry portfolio and American Studies through quilting. And Jack did his trigonometry portfolio through his internship working on a CNC machine.

And the End of Day portal. Did you talk about that at all? We're working on badging that so it gives some motivational pieces. We have a professional checklist. This is the piece I wanted to get to, data, and having data for the adults. These are habits that are related to them doing their job well. These are indicators. But the evidence is in the data—how are they doing the incident reports to the team, how many learning team meetings, are they on top of those, did they do any replies to the kids, are they

doing their own reflections to the staff. How are they doing with assessments? These are basically assignments that they've been given by the school coach, by Eddie or by me. And then observations of their involvement in different things. So this is the data. They were doing great here. Not very well here. And then

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Set your own pace, you're not time based and it's based on phases and negotiated pace and there are habits.

there's another piece of data which is each teacher's profile. Here we see where they individually might need some help. So it's giving them data that makes a difference in terms of their being able to improve their performance with some real clear next steps to go with it. Learning progressions with impact standards are actually really valuable for that.

KIM: Actually these data will be evidence for them for their personal checklist. So the expectations we have for kids we have for staff on the appropriate level. So all of our staff just did their end of quarter exhibitions. And we had some kids attend but not as many as we'd like because it was over vacation. We'd like more kids and for parents to come. An annual evening for the community might work better.

At some point we hope to have a career path implemented, we'd have to be more than two years old! But that exhibition becomes part of the data, so this teacher can look at the data and say, this is where I was and here's how I've grown. So it's not about blame or being bad, it's about what's the data and what kind of continuous quality improvement tools can we use so that we continue to make progress.

SPRINGPOINT: *How does all this data get in here?*

KIM: That's Elizabeth! She does all that for us. But we're looking at how we code the back-end of this. We've made light years since the first MC2 when we tallied stuff by hand.

SPRINGPOINT: *As far as brain science and applying it to the model, are there things that are your go-to's for that?*

KIM: Yes. I'll start with one that QED owns which is "All Kinds of Minds," and that was originally developed primarily for [students with learning disabilities] but we use it for all our kids. That's with the Learner Sketch tool—that's this. And in here, there are mini-tutorials about what we mean by attention, by memory, by language. And then on the website there are more in-depth tutorials about memory, attention and language. Those are really good. What else...

My first place is James Zull. He's got two books out. The first is more accessible. It's called The Art of Changing the Brain. And he's at Case Western Reserve. And the book is profound. And the second one is From Brain to Mind. How do we create mind. I think that's pretty rich.

SPRINGPOINT: *I'm wondering about when you're building the competencies, how you use rigor matrices to help build the competencies—where they come into play?*

KIM: Teachers don't build the competencies. At some point people have to build the competencies. You have to have competencies. We haven't asked our teachers here to build the competencies. We've taken what we did at the old MC2. How much can you do at once? That's an interesting verb. It might be "craft" the competencies. The people who craft them

I will say that more and more of the national standards are really good examples of crafted competencies.

have to know the discipline well and they have to understand mastery. So if they have a really strong basis in UBD and Authentic Achievement they're probably also pretty good. But they have to have those pieces together with discipline expertise to really craft the competencies.

I will say that more and more of the national standards are really good examples of crafted competencies. If you look at NCTE—Council of Teachers of English. If you look at NSTA, science teachers, they're really good. They're well on the way. Social Studies NCSS-10. They call them themes but when you look at them, they're competencies. They can easily become the big competencies. So don't try to make everyone

create everything. There are existing resources to refine and revise.

When you're starting a new school, you start with something and you put work on the table and you have teachers continue to look at the work on the table and talk about it.

The real question is, how do you know if a student has proficiency in that competency? That's where I call on McTighe and Wiggins' work around what's sufficient evidence. I like Karen Hess's cognitive matrix. I think it's a really good tool. But you need to have student work for your teachers to start with.

When you're starting a new school, you start with something and you put work on the table and you have teachers continue to look at the work on the table and talk about it. We are professionals. We know it when we see it. But the real work is in unpacking what we're seeing so it becomes really clear learning progressions for students. So you can coach them and say, your work is here right now, here's what you need to do to get there. That's the goal. That's hard to have full-fledged without anything to work on. So if you have teams and you want them to be closer, have them bring student work to the table and have the conversations.

There are basically three ways, the fourth being a blend, to create rubrics. One is to go to Rubistar and pop it out—steal [borrow/adapt/use] somebody else's, those are both one. [A second way is to] Sit by yourself and fill something out, [and the third way is to] look at student work [and develop descriptors that identify quality performance characteristics and levels]. And the tendency is to do the first or second instead of the third which gives us quality rubrics.

SPRINGPOINT: *Other things our schools are going to get wrong that we want to warn them about? You've already spoken about starting with disciplines not subjects. And about being really student centered.*

KIM: That one's really hard, you really need someone to hold that at the center. Or just have student voices in the conversation from the beginning.

I think another piece that is really tricky is that students are going to need transition assistance. Unless you're starting in first grade. If you're starting in middle or high school, we're shifting expectations of how to play the game. We really want them to stop playing a game. And the shift is from being the objects of the learning to becoming the subjects of the learning. And that's a big shift. That's a hard one.

And the second piece is around the feedback loop and it's related. Because both our kids and our teachers have this mindset that you give an assignment, kids give it to you and you're done. But in a competency system, that's not it. There are continual feedback loops until the kid's

reached proficiency and maybe even exemplar if that's what the kid wants. So those are two really big gaps.

Our teachers think they're not getting papers home to grade so they're not getting them on the due date. But it should be a continuous feedback loop. And that becomes a really important thing.

It's about managing motivation as the kids are figuring that out and getting there.

And the other one is a shift in teachers' primary responsibility being one of managing motivation. On the kids' side, how am I measuring accomplishment, the things I used to look for, I can't look for anymore. And on the teachers' side, it's about managing motivation as the kids are figuring that out and getting there.

SPRINGPOINT: *What were the design choices that went into having your scale—why so many? I would think that people would be tempted to say, here's an A, here's a B.*

KIM: Yeah. In my early days with rubrics in high school we definitely had that. Teachers would write a C for Competent and the kids would say, I got a C!

Have you seen Robert Torres' chart of learning? It maps well with our J-curve. Novice, apprentice, senior, master. J-curve to high school gradu-

ation. I really love this. It's not a linear line. He's got these wandering pathways which is how learning happens. One other thing I wanted to mention. We have a gap analysis tool that you might find useful for your schools. So when you get here you have to put in an email and put in a password.

[Looking on portal] You get a grid that looks like that, that's based on my responses. My belief is this, my environment is this. Then it suggests things to try doing with more resources on Pinterest. You can link your facility. Link my results to facility. When you link you get a user code. I'm sorry this is so difficult! And what you then get is you can pick any of the twenty-two categories and see how much alignment you have. It's basically a place for dialogue.

SPRINGPOINT: *And you're suggesting having teachers do this?*

KIM: Yes, or school coaches, or administrators. It could start many conversations about culture. We're in alignment on some things, not on others. Let's talk about why. What are the three key levers that if we start with we'll start to make the changes we want to see happen. Or design for those things.

SPRINGPOINT: *QED Foundation is part of the school?*

KIM: QED Foundation came out of the first MC2. When we knew it was going to close, we wanted to keep the materials going. We are in our 7th year. We got bigger for a while and then realized it was hard to do this work without being able to have people see it in action. So

we opened another school. QED is pretty much Elizabeth and me and then Tyler.

SPRINGPOINT: *So it's a whole lot of you.*

KIM: It's a whole lot of me. I do the braining [conceptual/framework development] and she turns what I'm saying into visuals and other materials. And then Tyler codes it for us.

SPRINGPOINT: *Well I've gotten so much from both of you. Thank you.*

KIM: Hire us to design schools! Or to help people to design and with personalization and to where mind/brain science intersects with design. Competency based is where a lot of work has been. How do you develop learner profiles K-12? How do you teach for agency? How do you use ELO? And democratic practice. They're all a piece. School and learning system design is where I excel. And Elizabeth is really good at taking that and getting practical with the teachers.

Next Charter School

TRANSCRIPT

This is a transcript of a taped oral interview with **JUSTIN KRIEGER***, Co-Director of Next Charter School, conducted on April 9, 2014, by Melissa Giraud on behalf of* **SPRINGPOINT***.*

JUSTIN: We had a unique beginning as Joe [Crawford, Co-Director] and I are both from the K-8 District. We're housed in the middle school and receive in kind a lot of what would otherwise be overhead—the school nurse, the tech infrastructure.

Joe grew up in Derry and went to middle school here. Derry K-8 Cooperative school district board wanted another option from the one high school.

We opened in 2013. There are no grade levels, heterogeneous group. Kids move on when they're ready, when they can demonstrate performance. We have 1st years and 2nd years primarily—by when they started high school at all or not—and one 17 year old and one 18 year old that were exceptions to the enrollment policy. We purposely don't group kids by chronological age.

It's such a culture shift and such an innovation that it takes a long time for us as a staff to drill down in the language and know that we're talking about the same thing.

SPRINGPOINT: *What technology platforms do you use?*

JUSTIN: We use [PowerSchool](#) for demographic information. [Gradebook](#), the sister grade book program, does not work at all for competency

based stuff. We did a whole lot of legwork to get our own customized system but it was too expensive to take a chance on. We decided to use an integrated series of Google Spreadsheets that our staff has built.

This year we're talking to two organizations that are working towards competency. [JumpRope](#) is one, set up by Rose Colby.

The other is doing it too. [Project Foundry](#). They aren't educators. Our spreadsheets are cumbersome and not 21st century in terms of how we want our students to be interacting with them.

We use [Virtual Learning Academy](#) (VLACS) and Rosetta Stone for online languages that VLACS doesn't offer. Everything here is from scratch. No packaged stuff. Didn't feel there was a place that would fit all we needed. If you're taking individual kids through to the same outcome, why invest in packages? We make interactive Google Explorations for them. Stuff that will be important for that student. Kids have MacBook Pros. We are considering Chromebooks because we might not need the power and they're expensive. Maybe they just need internet access for inquiry, for communication, for video development. If that's all they're going to do they don't need all Apple.

SPRINGPOINT: *Where do you start with your competencies?*

JUSTIN: Our beginning points were the State of [NH competencies in Math and ELA](#), based on the core. We initially have adopted those. In Science we looked at NGSS [[Next Generation](#)

[Science Standards](#)] and developed competencies from there. In Social Studies, we used the [NH Curriculum Frameworks](#) and developed competencies from that.

What we have recognized this year very clearly is that most of those things developed at the state level tried to cram every possible standard into those competency statements. If kids

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Our view that we're going to begin to take is that if we want to do something very well we need to do less of it.

were to be exposed to every standard they'd be in school until they're 24, the research says. There's just too much.

Our view that we're going to begin to take is that if we want to do something very well we need to do less of it. So in math there are 80 specific indicators that kids need to meet in order to check those competencies off. We want to move away from this idea. What we do now is say there are two to 22 performance indicators under each competency. And when kids produce work that aligns one to one with those things, then the competency is checked. We would like to move to a much simpler system where the indicators are there for us as teachers for curriculum feedback and planning but don't necessarily need to be measured on a one to one ratio. This means we need to write

simpler, better competency statements, more comprehensive competency statements, and ones that don't depend on checklists.

Ones that don't depend on this checklist underneath it. This year we're using the [Hess Rigor Matrix](). So there's a level of performance you'd expect to be able to check an indicator to meet a competency. We've identified Strategic Thinking as that level that they need to rise to that level.

SPRINGPOINT: *For every competency?*
JUSTIN: For every competency.

SPRINGPOINT: *Did you create all the indicators?*
JUSTIN: No. The indicators for ELA and Math are Common Core. The indicators for Science are NGSS. The indicators for Social Studies and Humanities are the NH Curriculum Frameworks.

There needs to be work that is connected to a competency statement. That needs to be the evidence.

This is our Google reporting system. Tabs down here move from general to more specific. I teach English here. There are 52 discrete indicators that are tied to five competency statements. So, do the math, there are a lot of indicators. We've seen kids become more concerned with checking off indicators and losing the larger cross-curricular connections.

This is our English 2 credit and there are five competencies in English 2. Non-fiction reading. Explanatory Writing. Research component. Writing Argument component. And a technology component.

There needs to be work that is connected to a competency statement. That needs to be the evidence. Kids don't move based on age or extra credit of homework or being a good kid.

When they submit a product or performance we give feedback. The nice thing about Google is that when we revise it shows the history. Also a link back to the artifact. This piece demonstrates a back and forth between student and cross curricular between teachers and student.

Kids are used to doing something, handing it in, getting a grade, and rarely revisiting their work in context. Here we ask that you do less things but at a much higher level, many revisions. So kids struggle with that. They're used to something else.

SPRINGPOINT: *Are there competencies or performance indicators that are more open than others? Is there a continuum in terms of depth of knowledge on some of these?*
JUSTIN: I think we're going to move to that. Now we're not there. We're requiring all students rise to the level of strategic thinking whether they're a first year student or a third year student. And looking back it was probably done without a whole lot of thought. But the more we look at where our kids are after being with them for seven months, we're thinking of having—not

two schools or two houses—but some process of growth for kids so it's more scaffolded for them.

Your question is on point because it needs to happen. We've set kids up so that the bar is so high from the first day that it causes a lot of anxiety. This student has been here for seven months and she has 10 of 52 indicators. So she's not feeling great about where she is. We need to look at it as a four year process as opposed to 180 days. We are about growth over time. That fits into our philosophy.

We have the academic side of curriculum, those competencies. We also consciously have Habits of Mind and measure them and give feedback. Ours correlate with the Highly Effective Habits of Successful People. That's more important than the academic stuff. These things transition with you after you leave school. If you can demonstrate these things you can always find information. We have defined these seven and here's how we measure. We talk to kids about these a lot. If you are successful with these things you can go find knowledge you want. Active and Independent on the continuum from passive to dependent. We talk to kids about this and decide with them what we'll write about them.

SPRINGPOINT: *How do you group kids? What is your schedule like?*

JUSTIN: We're in our fourth incarnation of our schedule. We began the year thinking we were going to be creating scenarios which would incorporate all domain areas and kids would opt in to scenarios based on interest or need

for credit attainment. Very quickly, within two weeks, we realized our kids didn't have the wherewithal or endurance or motivation to be making those decisions. I would like to be clear

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We did interviews with kids and would look at past work and transcripts and point kids into areas, with their voice, that would help them get to where they wanted on their individual learning plan.

here that this is not their fault, it is more the direct outcome of an educational system that has made decisions for them over the past 9-10 years. It was far too loose and unstructured for them to be making those decisions. From there we made a more traditional time-based type schedule. We did interviews with kids and would look at past work and transcripts and point kids into areas, with their voice, that would help them get to where they wanted on their individual learning plan.

Not as quickly but that also quickly became something we realized wasn't what we'd set out to do here. So we started where everything was going to be integrated and kids were going to choose to attack competencies based on project ideas to a place where everything was compartmentalized and there was not much integration.

We've since moved to a phase which is much more of a blend of those two ideas. So there is some routine and ritual and structure for kids around time and how it's structured through the day. But there's a much more concerted effort among faculty to teach things together.

Math and science pretty much teach together. And Joe and I, the humanities department, teach everything together. There are times when all those kids are with us. Times when

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We're constantly having the conversation about what's our role to control and what's our role to collaborate with them in their learning.

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they're with us separately working on products and getting individual feedback. That's the best part of the model for me and in my view for kids is when we meet one on one with them. So three or four times a day I'll be in here one on one with kids. So there's individual meetings where we say, this is the plan we've set out for you. Where are you with it? What do you need to get there? Back to that idea of us helping them plan and also being able to give them feedback.

The flip side is when we're almost all one on one, there's many kids trying to find and fill space and use time. Some kids can self-regulate

and budget their time. Many of our students do not do that. We talk about choice a lot. If they choose to go to the lounge and watch videos and stay on Facebook, that's their choice. We will not shut them off of Facebook. Our philosophy is that they need to learn to self-regulate and us blocking these sites is making the decision for them. We're constantly having the conversation about what's our role to control and what's our role to collaborate with them in their learning.

SPRINGPOINT: *Is there some overview that helps us understand? A schedule? Or does it change too often?*

JUSTIN: We open and we close the day together. It is a time for kids to have a voice. It's a time when we don't necessarily talk about academic or habit things but those are integrated into everything we do. Typically you'll see kids share something in the morning. Whether it's a quote or a video for kids to think about for the rest of the day. It's a bookend structure.

Midday is the traditional lunch for them. It's an open time for them, so they have access to the entire building, a time for them to socialize and meet and for us to socialize and meet with them.

The other three components of the day are direct instructional time where our groups are really small. So I have two groups of English 1 and two groups of English 2. That class does not exceed five kids. This is a time for me to give direct instruction. Time to sit around the table with me and read something. It's formative, none of it is summative.

There's a secondary block for kids where they have to produce something under the guidance of an adult. So take what we learned last week and apply it towards a product or performance towards your project that you're doing. I use the term product and competency. It's pretty interchangeable.

The 3rd part of the day is flex for kids. Some of them have an hour, some have an hour and a half. It's a time for them to work with their mentor, typically a volunteer. It's really about them making decisions about outstanding projects and how they want to spend their time. Where am I going to go, who am I going to work with, what am I going to do? It's all about decision making. The following day we'll revisit that time with the kids. We have access to those materials and that conversation, we all have advisories.

We have advisories. So I'm responsible for seven kids from start to finish. Those are the kids where I'd revisit. This was your claim yesterday, show me what you did?

SPRINGPOINT: *How do you assess kids?*
JUSTIN: We only make them produce stuff targeted to competency. In terms of the formative stuff, we made decisions that we'll do what the kids need to be done.

There aren't tests or quizzes. It's all about doing things together in the direct instruction piece so that you can produce something later that is self-generated. We'd much rather set the framework. Competency is linked to performance. Like driving the car rather than taking a

test on it. Competency is about performance. You only move on when you've produced.

SPRINGPOINT: *How has culture shifted in response to a competency framework?*
JUSTIN: The kids that came don't necessarily believe in competency yet. They chose this school to not go to the main high school.

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*It's a binary system.
Met or not met proficiency.*

So there's still a culture to shift. We had 70 applications and none withdrew and we had a lottery. This year we talk to the kids about what the school's really like and some withdraw before the lottery.

SPRINGPOINT: *What is your approach to grading?*
JUSTIN: It's a binary system. Met or not met proficiency. We have a big bias against ranking and sorting kids. Whether it's a four tier or five tier system it's still separating out kids. The scale for us comes in feedback for the kids.

I believe that schools have those models to make adults feel good. That's where they are because that's where I've placed them. Such a limited view of what kids can do. Our evidence is not a number it's the work. The work stands on its own.

SPRINGPOINT: *How do you approach hiring?*
JUSTIN: Our teachers need to be learners. If you're not a learner, how can you possibly do it?

Like kids, the teachers needed to decide to come here. We didn't recruit, we allowed our staff to find us. They're looking for something more fulfilling. Really having connections and relationships with kids and being allowed to do what the situation requires. Again, it's the people that are important.

SPRINGPOINT: *How do you measure student achievement?*

JUSTIN: The Hess Matrix applies to everything, and that is our one rubric. When I look at this indicator, I'm going to apply this metric to that. Where in their work do I see it, where am I not seeing it? Next year we'll have 15 more kids. There's gotta come a time when a critical mass of students buy in. The whole thing is predicated on student voice so we can't lead it. We don't want to be adult-led. When we get to that point, our staff will feel successful. Competency stuff is hard! It's really hard!

Maine's Regional School Unit 2 (RSU2)

TRANSCRIPT

This is a transcript of a taped oral interview with **VIRGEL HAMMONDS***,*
Superintendent, **MATT SHEA***, Coordinator of Student Achievement, and*
JOHN ARMENTROUT*, IT Director, of RSU2 in Hallowell, Maine, and*
STEVE LAVOIE*, Principal of Richmond Middle and High School in Richmond,*
Maine, conducted on April 4, 2014 by Melissa Giraud on behalf of **SPRINGPOINT***.*
Melissa spent the day at RSU2 and these conversations were held first
in a sit-down in the Superintendent's Office, and then throughout the day,
organically, during tour breaks. Breaks in conversation are indicated.

SPRINGPOINT: *How do you come up with your proficiencies, learning targets, learning progressions?*

MATT: We actually did them through subject groups and we used Marzano's Taxonomy. And we set them up through the Maine Cohort for Customized Learning a couple years ago. We had a bunch of teachers get together, I was a math teacher back then, and so I helped write some of the math ones as a math teacher. And later we looked at the CCSS [Common Core State Standards] and they are written as "you will understand" to do this. "You will know" this. And some of the CC is "you will" DO this. So we took those that said "do this" into what's the concept behind it and attached

a rigor to it. And then we rewrote some of them but we based it all on the CCSS for ELA and Math. Science really took their NGSS [Next Generation Science Standards] and ran with those. So it's all by subject group. And we as K-12 teachers divided them up into progressions, working in subject groups.

One of the keys to how we were doing things is that the curriculum is completely transparent to all our community and students and parents and everyone.

SPRINGPOINT: *Are they available? Can you give me an example? What were the design decisions that went into making them usable?*

JOHN: One of the keys and what many teachers struggled with—one of the keys to how we were doing things is that the curriculum is completely transparent to all our community and students and parents and everyone. It's really important that all that context, all that language is written for the students because we want them to own those things. When they come into the district they belong to the kids. How they meet those proficiencies can vary but we want all of that transparent to them.

So I remember working with teachers and having to emphasize that you gotta remember that this document you're writing is for the kids.

These are the things they have to understand that they need to come away with. That transparency and kid-friendly language is important.

SPRINGPOINT: *How does it get communicated to the kids?*

JOHN: Through Educate [now Empower]. That exposes the Learning Targets (LTs) and Measurement Topics (MTs) to the courses directly. It depends on the building and the age level. A lot of teachers expose them to the kids visually in the room, there's many ways.

VIRGEL: A big change going back to my teaching days, when we were observed it was always about the teacher actions. Here we watch the kids. We tell our visitors ask the kids what they're learning and how they're going to reach proficiency. That tells us the LTs are being communicated and the kids know what they need to do to reach proficiency.

SPRINGPOINT: *Are you full-out Marzano?*

VIRGEL: For us, we use Marzano's taxonomy to align our rigor, that's the big piece. And we use best instructional practices to make sure we're giving our kids what they need to be successful. I know some districts have direct relationships with Marzano's team for PD, like Lindsay and Adams 50. We'll use the Marzano I-Observation tool next year and we use the Taxonomy which provides us some direction.

SPRINGPOINT: *What was the most important work behind operationalizing your MTs and LTs?*

VIRGEL: I think the big a-ha for me was the taxonomy level. That was a huge light bulb for our

school district. The idea behind a proficiency-based system is that all kids are leaving with the necessary knowledge and skills whether you're in this classroom or the one next door. Versus in a traditional model you never know if you're being held to the same standard in your algebra class as the one next door. It has to be the same. You have to be held to the same standard. So as we started using our LTs, the question became, are we holding our kids accountable to the same level of rigor and depth of knowledge? So we inputted those taxonomy levels and it really clarified a lot for our teachers, principals... our whole staff... about what depth of rigor our kids should be accomplishing with each task. That was a huge piece for us.

The evolution of our LT and MT were we had the Level 2 knowledge, that's the foundational knowledge, articulated, and the Level 3 knowledge, proficiency knowledge, articulated. So we said these are the skills or knowledge you have to accomplish, but we didn't identify a taxonomy level, a rigor level, the first year. So if you were a teacher and I was a teacher and these were our students your 3 may be different from my 3 because there's not an identified rigor level, taxonomy level. Once we put that in there it really clarified some of those collaborations that happened within our subject levels. They started to really talk about, OK, what does it mean when it's at an analysis level vs. comprehension level.

JOHN: Especially early elementary. We had a lot of targets that would scaffold each other and build on each other. So we had teachers that without necessarily understanding that whole progression right away, they'd say I'm going to get these kids in front of me and I'm going to get them to proficiency on this target. But without the taxonomy, they didn't

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It's important for the teachers not only to know their content area but also the progression of those targets around what they're teaching.

understand that they could just introduce that concept and the kids would get it reintroduced or built on within the progression. So they were spending a lot of time getting them to proficiency, to their idea of proficiency, when the taxonomy was retrieval, i.e., could they repeat something. So the retrieval part of the taxonomy might have been first grade target, for example. And step two in the progression might have been hit in the next grade level or later on. And that would be comprehension or analysis. It's the keystone to the archway. If you don't have that the whole thing falls apart. They'd spend a lot of time unnecessarily on a target that the student would be asked to hit again later in the progression. So it's important for the teachers not only to know their content area but also the progression of those targets around what they're teaching. So they know where they're going. And they also know where they've been.

MATT: The teachers are working more like spans than like a traditional teacher. They now are trying to think of themselves as a 3-5 teacher, rather than a fourth grade teacher. They're evolving into more of a team approach. And that's all based on the taxonomy. Totally agree.

VIRGEL: This is our Measurement Topic Key. So what you'll see in the top left is the content area. And these are the learning targets and these are the proficiencies.

These are some of the things I can work on as practice. It's really a roadmap in some ways to get to the proficiencies.

So the kiddos must prove proficiency on these three learning targets and do you see in the center, what level taxonomy do we want? We want the comprehension level. The Level 2 Knowledge is all the foundation—vocabulary, dates, formulas, details that help support the proficiencies. On the right you'll see types of assessments.

JOHN: And it helps the kids. If the student sees this they can say I know I have to get here. These are some of the things I can do and understand. These are some of the things I can work on as practice. It's really a roadmap in some ways to get to the proficiencies.

VIRGEL: And because this is really the first year

we've really focused on the taxonomy level, because the LTs have been revised for a couple years so we're at a good place with them, we can now focus on the depth of rigor we want to hold our kids accountable to. But we still really need to focus on teaching our kids about the taxonomy level. As you can see here this example is retrieval, Level 2 knowledge, which is typically what we do in a classroom. And then to take it to the next level for proficiency, you can see it going up a level and working up through comprehension.

We have ".5" scores too that indicate process towards the next level. Whether it's from a 2 or a 3.

SPRINGPOINT: *And that .5 is psychologically important to the kids.*
VIRGEL: Absolutely. It's about that feedback saying you're making progress. Same for our kids that want to go beyond proficiency.

SPRINGPOINT: *Is it a challenge knowing what to do to get from 3 to 4?*
MATT: That's something we're still working on but we're light years ahead of where we were a couple years ago in that we didn't develop the Level 4 knowledge and we didn't have the taxonomies articulated. So our teachers were creating these massive tasks for our kids to be able to score a 4 on a single standard. And it became overwhelming. And now with the taxonomy the rule again is just about going up one scale, and even one scale within each process level. Now if we're at analysis and comparing, to get a 4 you need go up at least one sublevel

within the analysis section. If the child doesn't want to classify they just want to construct supporting pieces, that's fine, that's still a 4.

JOHN: And once the students can read that and understand the taxonomy, and a lot of them do, a lot of them tape the taxonomy to their laptop lids, they can clearly say I want to show evidence of my learning in this way and I want to show these things that I know. So they're in the driver's seat if they're exposed to the taxonomy and proficiencies. They own the whole thing.

SPRINGPOINT: *How do you manage having so many kids living in the not-yet-proficient space for a while?*

VIRGEL: Even though we're proficiency based we still want kids to finish their levels on a typical nine month basis. So the teachers and principal are really focused on identifying what we call "teacher pace." So as you travel in the schools you might hear I'm not on teacher pace but here's what I'm doing to accelerate. That varies because we're grouping kids according to what they're ready to tackle. If they're not following they're behind teacher pace.

SPRINGPOINT: *How do you group students?*

VIRGEL: Kids in their core content areas especially are being grouped and regrouped based on how they're progressing.

SPRINGPOINT: *Within their cohort?*

VIRGEL: Not necessarily. It depends on the school and its dynamics.

SPRINGPOINT: *How does it happen at Hall-Dale*

Middle/High, for example?

JOHN: It may look more or less traditional on the outside. There are still some adult structures that I don't like that we have to deal with now. You know, we still have to give them a schedule and take attendance, which I don't like. Those

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Ideally the way we see it working is you have kids together who are ready to learn the same thing at once, no matter what their age or pace.

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are adult issues not necessarily related to great instruction. As they move and some go faster than others, and they start diverging, then we regroup. And those kids, based on where they are, may or may not be with their cohort. We have kids who are advancing from middle school to high school math often.

MATT: We're only in our second year of this. But ideally the way we see it working is you have kids together who are ready to learn the same thing at once, no matter what their age or pace.

JOHN: What's so fun is to let them tackle what they're ready for.

MATT: We always get the tracking question. But the difference is everyone is being held accountable to the proficiencies. And we're moving kids based on when they're ready to tackle it. It's not one class of high flyers and one class

of bluebirds and the other of crows. They're mixed and they're all receiving the same instruction and assessments.

JOHN: And it changes depending on their maturity level, too. There are so many factors that go into what they're ready to tackle.

SPRINGPOINT: *So they're with their cohorts during Advisory but otherwise they can move according to what they're ready for?*

VIRGEL: Exactly right, and that's how it functions in all of our schools. K-12. The biggest eye opener was in kindergarten when the kindergarten teachers finally said, we need to regroup

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One of the biggest culture changes was to change our curriculum groups to be the whole district rather than just our schools.

our kids. For the first two years of this transition the kindergarten teachers were hesitant and held on to a single group. But then they realized we need to regroup our kids. Because they were providing individual direct instruction with 15 five year olds and it was too difficult.

SPRINGPOINT: *How has this changed the culture and what supports have your teachers needed?*

MATT: One of the biggest culture changes was to change our curriculum groups to be the whole district rather than just our schools. So when we

met we had deeper discussion across more math teacher experiences. That was a big change.

Except for our elementary [teachers] who want to meet in spans rather than grade levels. Huge for the district. They came to that. The teachers tell us when they're ready. They're getting to the same place at different paces as teachers.

SPRINGPOINT: *So time together has been the most helpful thing?*

MATT: Yeah, and they want more.

SPRINGPOINT: *How do you structure it?*

MATT: We met on Google hangouts. Geography is always an issue for us so it was great.

JOHN: There's some structures within Educate where we can hopefully have asynchronous conversations within there.

SPRINGPOINT: *What is your approach to integrating technology into your model?*

VIRGEL: If you have an aligned continuum, you almost don't need anything. Any good teacher can take this target into that set of woods and teach these. There is a lack of mechanism to track proficiencies that are also aligned to a taxonomy scale. There are many gradebooks that reference standards and whatnot but none that speak to the individualization of proficiencies.

SPRINGPOINT: *Even Educate?*

VIRGEL: Even Educate. They've evolved a lot. It's much more user friendly now and more engaging. And the potential of the next version is even that much more rewarding.

JOHN: I've done a lot of research around what kinds of technology might help. It's really not like that. It's really a culture change and a philosophy change. Yes the software can help you track proficiencies. And yes it can expose the targets and the taxonomy to the kids so they can go as fast as they want with or without a school instructor. And that's important if you're embracing a learner-centered environment. And certainly software can help you do that. And the computer certainly helps students see what they're responsible for and research but also develop the proficiencies we're asking of them. But there's very few out there that have the structures that we use and think are important, including the taxonomies and the assessment items and resources and all of that that Educate has.

We still use Infinite Campus for SIS. Gradebook and LMS are Educate. We put some scores at high school level back in IC to produce transcripts but that will change.

SPRINGPOINT: *What about off the shelf digital stuff?*

JOHN: It's not about buying programs that you go through step by step where those steps are articulated. It's more a resource.

VIRGEL: We do want teachers and kids using Khan Academy. Read 180 is very prescriptive so it's hard to work in this system. Has to be a resource and not the guiding force in terms of what happens in my day-to-day instruction.

We have some teachers, very few, who put a lot of stuff up on the web. But it varies teacher to teacher. [Information technology is] used mostly for research where [they] have options to do a different project to meet the proficiency. 6th to 12th ["grade"] kids can take the computers home. Having the standards transparent to the students means they can double dip and choose to do a project that knocks off several standards.

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Having the standards transparent to the students means they can double dip and choose to do a project that knocks off several standards.

VIRGEL: There's so much collaboration that happens among teachers. If we have to buy time to plan for teachers to collaborate on stuff they want to do together, we give them that time.

JOHN: In one of our high schools they've developed a Humanities department where they collaborate so much. Depends on the teachers and the school.

MATT: We don't have a number of times you need to meet proficiency. If you hand me perfection, you don't need to do it multiple times. If you have some mistakes, I'll let you do another test before you move on. It's up to the teacher. Not about homework, about moving towards proficiency. Not about showing lateness or not doing homework. Teachers back in

the day knew how you'd do on the test before you took it. Then why give it? Give it when they're ready.

SPRINGPOINT: *What about that motivation piece?*

VIRGEL: We're only in year two of this. But I think when you group kids based on what they're ready for, there's peer motivation to move so now I'm seeing my peers moving and I'm not. Typically there's worry about motivation for kids who are right where they need to be or who are already in college so perhaps they say if we make a mistake we can do it again. But if we regrouped every month or two weeks and not just every semester or trimester, there's pressure to move with peers.

We're holding kids to a higher standard than ever so it's on us to contact parents and say your kid's not moving as they should.

When we're this transparent educators sometimes think parents have it all so they should be driving it at home when they see their kids aren't progressing. But we're holding kids to a higher standard than ever so it's on us to contact parents and say your kid's not moving as they should. It's almost to the point where principals are mandating contact logs because even though we're not time based we still want the kids to finish on time and not scrambling once they're in high school. Not that they have to move at teacher pace but we want them to progress.

JOHN: Having the parents know what the proficiency language is is really important because then they can have a conversation about where their kid is in their proficiencies. Sure it doesn't happen in every home but being transparent about it makes it possible. It's not possible otherwise. We have to enable those conversations by having all the LTs and MTs and how your child is progressing on Educate. I think it's important.

VIRGEL: The education of parents about our system is huge. It's something I need to help our principals with. Ideally we'd like to not have to send progress reports ever. John and Scott created a hot button on the front page of Educate so parents could print out a progress report for that day if they want.

Without John, I don't think we'd still be using Educate. John had really helped the Educate folks improve the product and customize it for us. But there are problems with it and without John it would have been hard.

SPRINGPOINT: *What do you use to assess kids in the first place?*

VIRGEL: We're building common formative assessments now among teachers.

SPRINGPOINT*: What structures do you put in place to ensure teachers know where students are academically?*

VIRGEL: Class sizes here are about 16 in high school and 18 for elementary. So there's that. Also, our increased common planning time and meeting means teachers are communicating about particular kids and where they are on the

continuum. Grouping kids by where they left off the year before. We're creating our master schedule around what our kids are ready for and then assigning teachers afterwards.

We've mandated eight hours of outside curriculum team meetings a year and then we buy a lot of sub time to give them more time.

JOHN: Scheduling is a big thing. It's always been one of those adult structures that is difficult to deal with. We've come to some conclusions, where if students need more time you can provide a science class with two consecutive periods so they can really get into it. Planning common team time within a schedule is important. A lot of that is giving teachers time to collaborate.

Having that transparency is key. And focusing on the adult structures that get in the way.

SPRINGPOINT*: How do you serve special needs and ELL students?*

VIRGEL: Parents get excited that special ed students are being held accountable for meeting proficiency same as other kids. Also very difficult to do, we need to work on that. The parent feedback has been, thanks for giving them the same opportunities as the other kids.

JOHN: Once it's transparent they feel motivated to compete with their special ed peers.

MATT: What's most important in this system? First establishing great instructional practice, then, second, the taxonomy. Those are the two things. Other than having Learning Targets which are a must.

JOHN: Having that transparency is key. And focusing on the adult structures that get in the way. If you look at it that way student centered solutions come to light. There's a lot of culture change in this and you can't make all those changes at once. So there's a lot of these adult issues that hamper student progress.

VIRGEL: The simple things like attendance and lunch that you'd think would be easy to fix.

SPRINGPOINT: *What's the problem with "adult structures" like attendance and lunch?*
VIRGEL: It's not a problem except that we have to do it.

JOHN: The problem is when Jimmy's mom calls to say she's picking him up immediately. It doesn't go over well if you can't page Jimmy in the class he's in because he's no longer in his scheduled math class because he went ahead. Or because he's done with math and so he's gone to English where he needs more help.

VIRGEL: But in a world where we definitely need to keep our kids safe and know where they are, we can't do that yet. But that's an adult problem. We need to figure it out.

Then on the other side, when I was principal in California I'd get a call from the County Office

of education and they'd say Mr. Shea is teaching English 10 but he's credentialed in Social Studies so we're holding his pay until you reflect him teaching SS in the master schedule. But Mr. Shea is teaching a research process at that time and I've changed my master schedule so I know where kids are in the master schedule.

JOHN: I've been through many systems and I can see a progression from 10 years ago to now—it's a progression to a student centered approach. We know there are still some things we could do to be even more student centered. What does it take to make all those things happen. It's a cultural change. You have to embrace the culture of student-centered, transparency and proficiency-based.

VIRGEL: And it doesn't happen without strong site leadership. We like to say we're proficiency based but we're not as learner centered as we need to be. We still need to tap into student passions and goals. What do our students want to develop, pursue, be? We're a really good proficiency-based system that is making significant progress at becoming more learner-centered.

JOHN: Teachers sometime tell us we don't give them enough guidance but they get so much more than in the previous system. We've articulated as a district everything that we're expecting them to do to get their kids to proficiency. We've given teachers and kids all that transparency.

SPRINGPOINT: *A lot of work up front? Especially if they're moving ahead?*

JOHN: Yeah, that can certainly happen but

what's fun is they can have those conversations with the kids. Then it becomes a facilitation process rather than anything else. The teaching happens. As it happens in some classes, students learn to do it in their other classes. When I think of what we did before, we do so much more for support.

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Maine is moving towards having all choice schools so we're thinking about how to attract students to our system when it's choice.

JOHN: It's important to note that they went to standards based all at once, K-12. They were supposed to phase it in but Virgel couldn't stand that idea. Teachers had to go from 0 to 100 in terms of becoming proficiency based and student centered. Great way to do it, although hard. Great because it would have been very hard to have two systems at once.

Ultimately this is a profound culture and philosophy change. Making that change and having a good grounding in sound instructional practices is essential to making this work.

Maine is moving towards having all choice schools so we're thinking about how to attract students to our system when it's choice. We think dual enrollment will be a big part of that. We're in the people business here on so many levels.

College acceptance with a proficiency-based transcript hasn't been a problem and will not be a question next year when all Maine schools will use a proficiency-based transcript.

Classes now are really an adult structure, just a roster of kids, not a Carnegie unit, not time-based.

[Break]

MATT: All the standards are power standards. We basically teased out or combined certain CCSS. Some of the standards relate more to assessment, so rather than learning targets, we incorporated those into assessment. All the "explain" standards, for example. So they're all addressed but in friendly language.

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We spent two years before switching to proficiency-based just sharing best practices in teacher groups during meeting time.

They separate performance from ethics and behavior. We used to fail kids for not doing homework or for not attending. We don't anymore and that's been a hard cultural change for some teachers.

JOHN: In terms of using the standards classification, that's all back end facing because it's not user friendly. It's only useful on the backend in

terms of correlating with external products and assessments. Otherwise they shouldn't be used.

The Learning Targets are all tweaked after a lot of teacher and student feedback.

SPRINGPOINT: *What about not getting 4s?*
MATT: The difference is, in this system, 3s are hard! Not the same as the old ABCs.

JOHN: Also, remember they have no time limit on proficiencies. So if they want to go back and revisit proficiencies they've gotten 3s in and submit 4 work they can.

MATT: Also, 4s aren't necessarily much more work than 3s, just deeper work. So kids will choose LT to LT whether to try for 4 or not.

SPRINGPOINT: *How do they differentiate themselves for college?*
JOHN: Taking dual enrollment courses. Developing their interests within their academic career.

SPRINGPOINT: *Last best advice for starting a proficiency-based school?*
MATT: It needs to be grounded in good instructional practices. We spent two years before switching to proficiency based just sharing best practices in teacher groups during meeting time. Also had some Marzano PD.

JOHN: There is no software for this. It's foundationally all about being student centered, culturally.

SPRINGPOINT: *So do you have rubrics in addition or are the LTs the rubric?*

JOHN: The LTs are the rubric. Having additional rubrics for the assignment is confusing and, obviously, takes away from the LT. Transparency of the LTs is the whole thing. If you can't tell what proficiency you're moving towards, you shouldn't be teaching it.

JOHN: Also, I'd say, normal tech departments in districts are not supporting or used to supporting a student centered, proficiency based mission and philosophy. They are more about keeping the network functioning and filtering. Tech departments need to be service agencies working in service of the school mission. They must all row the boat in the same direction. It works best when all aligned to move in this same direction.

[Break]

STEVE: I used to be principal at Hall-Dale until this year. The population at Richmond is different than Hall-Dale. There's much more remediation needed here. We struggle holding kids to proficiency and addressing their gaps at once. The jump to the CCSS has been rough on this group. We should have taken a year to remediate at the PK to 8 levels. Problem is that the old system hid deficits. We should be ashamed of what kids could skate by with. We used to say that being 60 or 70 percent proficient was fine (in the old system). Now everyone has to reach proficiency. It's a much more challenging, rigorous experience for them.

I think we've done a really good job deciding what was non-negotiable. Holding kids to proficiency was non-negotiable. We said fine if the community wants GPAs, honor roll, class rank. As long as we can be proficiency based.

There's a big public piece where we have to explain the new system and talk about what was wrong with what we were doing before. We tell them our kids were graduating but only getting 50 percent or 60 percent on the NECAP [New England Common Assessment Program]. That's just wrong. We have a moral imperative to change that. It's not OK.

Appendix: School Artifacts

Appendix: School Artifacts

Boston Day & Evening Academy

- **Roadmap to Graduation**

  This map describes the progression of courses students must complete before graduation. Students advance through this material at their own pace.

- **Common Grading Protocols**

  This rubric describes the criteria for ranking students "highly competent", "competent", or "basic competent" in a course. Students advance through this material at their own pace.

- **Habits of Mind**

  This framework of expectations for habits and behavior underscores student work in every course. Students are assessed on these habits, alongside course completion.

- **Experiential Learning and Symposium Description**

  This document describes BDEA's Experiential Learning Symposium, a three-week, school-wide project focusing on an essential question. The culmination is each student's presentation of his/her project to the BDEA community.

- **"Making Mastery Work" Profile of Boston Day and Evening Academy, Including Sample Competency Tracking Report**

  This paper, profiling Boston Day and Evening Academy's approach to mastery, was published in 2012 by the Nellie Mae Education Foundation. The appendix on pp. 102-104 contains screenshots of BDEA's competency tracking report.

- **Individualized Learning Plan Sample**

  This sample Individualized Learning Plan lists each of the benchmarks students must reach in science at BDEA. NOTE: This artifact is not Next Generation Science Standards-based.

- **Master Schedule**

- **Click to download all of Boston Day & Evening Academy's artifacts**

Casco Bay High School

- School Schedule
- Faculty Grading Guide

  This document details Casco Bay High School's mastery-based grading system.
- Sample Casco Bay/Expeditionary Learning Tools

  This is an appendix to a Nellie Mae Education Foundation "Making Mastery Work" report which featured Casco Bay. The appendix includes guidelines for designing student expeditions (mastery-based projects).
- Summative Assessment Extension Request Form

  Students use this form to request summative assessment extensions. The second page contains a sample student transcript.
- Casco Bay High School Brochure: Get Smart To Do Good
- Expeditionary Learning Core Practices

  As an Expeditionary Learning school, CBHS embodies the practices described in this document.
- Family Handbook
- Universal Habits of Work Rubric

  Teachers and students use this rubric to track alignment with CBHS' Universal Habits of Work, which focus on work ethic, citizenship, and collaboration.
- Casco Bay School Profile
- Click to download all of Casco Bay High School's artifacts

Francis W. Parker Charter Essential School

- Daily Schedule

  Parker's daily schedule features interdisciplinary domain blocks (Arts & Humanities, and Math/Science/Technology).
- "Who We Are—and How It Translates into What We Do"

  This article by former Parker Charter Head of School, Teri Schrader, articulates Parker Charter's design and early development.
- Parker Charter Criteria for Excellence

  This document lists standards for each subject area. These are informed by the Common Core, though they do not mimic the CCSS.
- How Assessment Works
- Student Handbook
- Senior Exhibition Letter

  This document describes Parker Charter's basic student exhibition format

along with juror roles and responsibilities.

- Click to download all of Francis W. Parker Charte Essential School's artifacts

Making Community Connections (MC2)

- MC2 Design Elements
- Daily Schedule
  The days at MC2 are divided into "learning opportunities" or "Learning Ops" that are taken up with Learning Studios, small group literacy and numeracy work or self-directed work on non-internship days.
- Exhibition of Learning Rubric
  This rubric is used to assess students' "Exhibition of Learning" presentations on a scale from "Emerging" to "Life Long." These presentations take place at the end of each phase in a progression of four phases of student learning at MC2.
- QED Foundation – Personalized Learning
  This document outlines the QED Foundation's processes and tools to support personalized learning. This was developed based on work at MC2.
- Learning Opportunity Design Template
  Teachers work with students to design their Learning Ops via this template.
- Sample End-of-Year Reports
  This sample End of Year report includes learning opportunities, graduation requirements met, and progress comments from a teacher.
- End-of-Day and End-of-Week Reflection Guidelines
- MC2 Resource Wiki
- Click to download all of Making Community Connections' artifacts

Next Charter

- Next Curriculum Framework
  This document describes Next Charter's curriculum and graduation requirements, including standards for each subject area.

RSU2

- Hall Dale Middle/High School Daily Schedule
  The block schedule at RSU2 Hall Dale Middle/High School is divided into "Red" and "White" days. Most classes meet either on only "Red" days, or on only "White." Some classes meet on both days.

- Hall Dale Middle/High School Master Teacher Schedule

  In Hall-Dale Middle/High School's district RSU2, students are placed in classes according to where they have progressed to, and teachers are assigned classes according to student need.
- Standards-Based, Learner-Centered Framework
- Capacity Matrix

  At RSU2, teachers outline all assignments in the district's capacity matrix format. The capacity matrix is a roadmap for students and teachers, making clear what needs to be accomplished to reach proficiency. Students can also design and negotiate with teachers to create different assignments to reach the same proficiencies. Often the "exceeds proficiency" requirements (4 in their scale) are left blank to be determined by individual students and approved by teachers.
- Measurement Topic Key

  This document illustrates proficiency indicators and assessments for a sample measurement topic.
- Taxonomy of Learning

  Drawn from Marzano & Pickering's "Dimensions of Learning," this taxonomy describes a continuum of student learning.
- Sample Student Transcript
- Click to download all of RSU2's artifacts

Acknowledgements