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RSU 13 Embraces Proficiency-Based Education

The District Is Committed to Graduating Every Student Prepared for College, Work, and Life

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Since the 2012–2013 school year, Regional School Unit 13 has been developing a proficiency-based education system that will equip our students with the knowledge, skills, work habits, and character traits they will need in adult life. The challenges facing today’s youth are unprecedented, and a high-quality education has never been more important than it is right now. RSU 13 is unwaveringly committed to preparing every student for success in the colleges, workplaces, and communities of the 21st century.

The School Board, staff, and public weighed in on goals for the district to work towards in the 2013 adoption of the RSU 13 Strategic Plan. Lead Objective 2 for Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment states that the district will “transition towards proficiency-based teaching, learning, and accountability regardless of State mandates.” Teachers at St. George and Oceanside West had already been building from the idea of proficiency-based instruction and have been experiencing the powerful potential of this approach. In order for the district to fulfill its mission statement “to engage all students in the acquisition of the knowledge and skills necessary to be successful and contributing citizens,” the old idea of “seat time” had to change. Just because a student sat in class and completed the bare minimum of assignments does not mean that student had a successful educational experience.

In May 2013, the district decided that guidance was needed to ensure a coordinated approach for the implementation of standards and proficiency, with regards to instruction and reporting, so it approved a half-time project manager from federal grant funds. In August 2013, Carissa Veit was hired. Expanding upon the district’s collaboration with Craig Kesselheim of Great Schools Partnership, a timeline was developed for the immediate, and future steps needed to ensure a proficiency-based system.

Ms. Veit, who works closely with Director of School Improvement, Neal Guyer, currently leads a Proficiency-Based Steering Committee which was established in September 2013. The PBSC is a group of teachers and administrators representing all 10 schools in the district and various content groups and grade levels. Working as a team with Ms. Veit and Mr. Kesselheim, they have identified the major concerns of changing education, and have developed ways to address them. The team has created a common educational language for the district, spearheaded K-12 content team meetings, enabled access to regional conferences for staff, and facilitated dialogue to each school. Ms. Veit has also held voluntary professional development after school for faculty who wish to learn more about best practices in proficiency-based settings. Twenty percent of teachers from kindergarten to 12th grade attended these sessions. Pockets of teachers at Oceanside High School, East and West campuses, are implementing proficiency-based practices for instruction and grading. Their work is driving the conversation about what the system means for students preparing for work beyond high school.

There is still work to be done, but one accomplishment to note is the draft Graduation Policy that goes to the School Board for a second reading on April 3rd, 2014. Following the State parameters, fulfilling the district’s strategic plan goals, and continuing current traditions in place, the policy will be a guide for the class of 2018. On April 1st, 2014, the district will hold a community night for questions regarding the policy at Oceanside High School West in Thomaston.

For more information about the committee and work being done in RSU 13 please visit their website <http://sites.google.com/site/rsu13pbsc> or contact Carissa Veit at 207-596-6620.

What Is Proficiency-Based Education?

Proficiency-based education refers to systems of instruction, [assessment](#), grading, and academic reporting that are based on students demonstrating understanding or mastery of the knowledge and skills they are expected to learn as they progress through their education. In RSU 13, the [Maine Learning Results](#) will determine academic expectations and define “[proficiency](#)” in our courses, subject areas, and grade levels. The goal of proficiency-based education is to ensure that all students acquire the most essential knowledge and skills they will need to succeed in school, higher education, careers, and adult life. If students fail to meet expected [learning standards](#), our teachers and support staff will give them the additional instruction, practice time, and [academic support](#) to achieve proficiency and meet the expected standards.