

NY Inspires | Portrait of a Graduate

Gradual Transition Model and The Belt System



A Teacher Capacity-Building Framework for Competency-Based Learning, Performance-Based Assessment, and Project-Based Learning

Why the Belt System?

New York Inspires is moving toward competency-based learning that maintains academic rigor while helping students demonstrate the skills and dispositions in the Portrait of a Graduate. For teachers, however, moving directly into the widely promoted project-based learning can feel like a major leap. It requires changes to instruction, assessment, and classroom culture all at once.

Our **Gradual Transition Model** makes that shift manageable. Through **the Belt System**, teachers build one set of practices at a time, starting with their existing curriculum and progressing toward more authentic, interdisciplinary, and competency-based learning through PBL. Each belt recognizes demonstrated classroom practice, gives teachers a clear path for growth, and provides administrators with a shared framework for supporting implementation across a school or district. The system complements professional learning and does not replace APPR or any other NYSED-approved evaluation process.

The Belt System at a Glance

Belt	Stage	What It Looks Like
White	Aware	Explains and understands NY Inspires, PoG, PBA, PBL, and other concepts.
Yellow	Applies	Integrates PoG into the existing curriculum unit and instructional flow; builds curriculum-embedded performance tasks and performance-based assessment with confidence.
Green	Integrates	This is the transition into project-based learning. Teachers co-lead with PBL coach and facilitate one sustained PBL cycle with meaningful student agency, feedback, and revision.
Black	Leads	Repeats and improves independent PBL practice; leads multiple implementations and builds other educators' capacity.

Our teacher training focuses on White and Yellow Belt, the entry point where teachers build first practice and consistency.

Belt-by-Belt Detail

White Belt — Aware

Understands the purpose and basic design of competency-based learning, performance-based assessments, and the Portrait of a Graduate.

Demonstrated-Practice Checklist	Minimum Evidence Checklist
☐ Identify the six PoG competencies. ☐ Distinguish a performance task from a conventional test or activity. ☐ Explain relationships among standards, competencies, outcomes, criteria, and evidence. ☐ Identify accessibility, cultural responsiveness, privacy, and tech considerations. ☐ Analyze an existing performance-based assessment and identify one improvement opportunity.	☐ Knowledge check or facilitated explanation. ☐ Annotated assessment and preliminary standards/PoG alignment map. ☐ Personal implementation goal.

Yellow Belt — Applies

Integrates one standards-aligned performance-based assessment into existing curriculum with minimal disruption to materials or classroom flow.

Demonstrated-Practice Checklist	Minimum Evidence Checklist
☐ Replace or substantially improve one existing performance-based assessment. ☐ Align the task to standards and at least one PoG competency. ☐ Establish clear learning targets and success criteria. ☐ Provide multiple accessible ways for students to demonstrate learning. ☐ Communicate task purpose, directions, and rubric to students. ☐ Collect student work, give feedback, document an instructional adjustment.	☐ Implemented task, student directions, and rubric. ☐ Standards and PoG alignment map. ☐ Accommodations, accessible formats, or response options. ☐ Anonymized samples across at least three performance levels. ☐ Feedback examples and a brief reflection on the resulting change.

Green Belt — Integrates

This is the belt where teachers make the transition into project-based learning. With coaching and guidance, teachers co-design and facilitate one complete, sustained PBL cycle, from a challenging question to a public product, performance, or solution.

Demonstrated-Practice Checklist	Minimum Evidence Checklist
☐ Frame learning around a standards-aligned challenging question. ☐ Facilitate sustained inquiry, not just theme-based activities. ☐ Provide meaningful student voice and choice. ☐ Connect learning to an authentic context, audience, or need. ☐ Build in collaboration, critique, revision, and self-assessment. ☐ Assess disciplinary learning and PoG competencies with clear criteria. ☐ Analyze participation/learning patterns; adjust scaffolds as needed. ☐ Apply coach/colleague feedback and reflect on the full project cycle.	☐ Complete project plan: question, milestones, inquiry, public product. ☐ Standards/competency map plus formative and summative assessment plan. ☐ Evidence of authentic context/audience and student voice and choice. ☐ Anonymized student work across stages, including drafts/revisions. ☐ Student reflections and audience/stakeholder feedback, if applicable. ☐ Teacher analysis of learning, participation, and adjustments. ☐ Coach or peer feedback and the educator's documented response.

Black Belt — Leads

Independently designs, facilitates, evaluates, and improves rigorous, equitable project-based learning across repeated implementations, then uses that evidence to build other educators' capacity.

Demonstrated-Practice Checklist	Minimum Evidence Checklist
☐ Lead at least two PBL implementations; refine design between cycles. ☐ Sustain alignment among problem, inquiry, agency, and assessment. ☐ Transfer responsibility so students manage more of the process. ☐ Demonstrate growth in learning/agency across learner groups.	☐ Evidence from 2+ PBL implementations, with changes between cycles. ☐ Cross-implementation analysis of learning, agency, and outcomes. ☐ Validated exemplars, student-work samples, and reusable tools. ☐ Project-review, validation, or calibration records.

☐ Use stakeholder feedback to improve subsequent project designs. ☐ Lead project review, assessment validation, or scoring calibration. ☐ Coach colleagues through planning, evidence review, and revision. ☐ Develop and validate reusable project models and tools. ☐ Promote responsible, ethical, transparent technology use. ☐ Contribute evidence/resources to school- or district-level improvement.	☐ Coaching plan and evidence of supported educators' growth. ☐ Evidence at least one supported educator improved a project. ☐ Stakeholder feedback and a resulting improvement plan. ☐ Leadership reflection identifying impact and next steps.
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Award & Review Process

- Portfolio includes teacher-practice evidence, anonymized student evidence, and at least one example of feedback or revision.
- Teacher self-rates; a trained reviewer independently rates; differences resolved in an evidence conference. Borderline and Black Belt portfolios get a second review.
- Outcomes: Awarded; Awarded with next-step goal; Revision requested; or Not yet demonstrated.

PBL Evidence Standard: a complete project cycle includes sustained inquiry, voice and choice, formative feedback, critique/revision, reflection, and a product or solution for authentic use. A themed unit or culminating product alone is not PBL.

Privacy: student evidence is de-identified unless disclosure is lawfully authorized, per district policy, FERPA, and NY Education Law §2-d. Educators review AI-generated materials; platform activity alone is never treated as achievement evidence.

Platform

The Curriculum Genie platform houses the artifacts and evidence teachers create for PBA, PBL, and students' portfolios. Districts need to document belt progress and NY Inspires / PoG milestones in one place, giving leaders visibility into capacity growth and connecting classroom-level work to district accountability reporting.

Expert-Led Professional Development

Delivered by our expert faculty team across two tracks: Leadership PD (vision-setting and progress measurement for superintendents and principals) and Teacher PD (hands-on coaching focused on White and Yellow Belt).

Faculty	Focus Area	Background
Angela Di Michele Lalor	Teacher Capacity Building & Classroom Implementation	National consultant with 20+ years leading school-wide PD; author of Ensuring High-Quality Curriculum and Making Curriculum Matter.
David Ross	Performance-Based Learning & Assessment Design	Former CEO of the Partnership for 21st Century Learning and Senior Director at the Buck Institute; co-author of the PBL Starter Kit.
Dr. Kate Anderson Foley	Leadership Capacity & PoG Strategy	Founder/CEO of the Education Policy and Practice Group; nearly 30 years leading districts and states toward equitable systems.
Lisa Weber	PBA Design & Instructional Coaching	Retired Assistant Superintendent for Instruction, Suffern Central (NY); 30+ years in K-12 systems improvement and coaching.
Tim Needles	Teacher Engagement & Creative Implementation	25+ year art/media educator, two-time TEDx speaker, author of STEAM Power; NYSCATE and NYSATA board member.

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