

The Value of Proficiency-Based Learning

Currently, many schools do not use teaching, testing, grading, and reporting methods that require students to *prove* they have acquired the most critically important knowledge and skills. In fact, high schools give out thousands of grades, report cards, and diplomas every year, but these reports do not clearly state what the student has specifically learned or not learned.

Luckily, there's an alternative option for today's schools: Proficiency-Based Learning (PBL).

How It Works

All students must demonstrate what they have learned before moving on.

Before students can pass a course, move onto the next grade level, or graduate, they must demonstrate that they have learned what they were expected to learn. If students fail to meet learning expectations (Performance Indicators), they are given more support and instruction from teachers, more time to learn and practice, and more opportunities to demonstrate progress.

Teachers are very clear about what students need to learn.

In every class, students know precisely what teachers expect—no guesswork required. The learning expectations for the course are clearly described and communicated, and students will know precisely where they stand throughout the course. Importantly, parents will also know precisely what their child has learned or may still be struggling to master.

Common, consistent methods are used to evaluate student learning.

In many schools, different learning expectations (Performance Indicators) are applied from course to course, and different methods and criteria are used to evaluate what students have learned. Consequently, one Algebra I course in a school may be very challenging, for example, while another Algebra I course may be comparatively easy—and a B earned in the “difficult” course might actually represent stronger learning achievement than an A in the “easy” course. Proficiency-based learning provides consistent methods of evaluating and reporting on student learning—everyone knows precisely what grades stand for and what each student has learned.

While learning expectations are fixed, teachers and students have more flexibility.

Even though learning expectations and evaluation methods are common and consistent, teachers are given more flexibility in how they teach and students can be given more choice in how they learn. For example, teachers don't need to use the same textbooks, assignments, and tests—as long as their students learn what they need to learn, teachers can develop new and more creative ways to teach. Similarly, students are given choice and the ability to make active decisions in what they want to study or how they want to show what they've learned. As long as students meet the performance indicators, teachers can teach, and students can learn, in the ways that work best for them.