



Personalized and Proficiency Based Learning at RU:

A Guide for the Randolph Union Middle High School Community



2022 RUHS graduate Alden Berkey demonstrates the blacksmithing skills acquired through his 30+ hours of experiential learning during his Senior Project.

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Introduction

Dear RU Community Member,

In 2013, Vermont's Act 77 brought us the new Education Quality Standards (EQS), which required schools to move away from determining when a student is ready to graduate based on the number of credits earned. Instead, schools were called upon to implement systems to support students in setting goals, and determining their pathways toward graduation while showing proficiency in predetermined skill areas along the way.

A lot of what we do at school still looks pretty traditional. For example, in general, grade 10 students follow the same pathways toward graduation. However, there are more hands-on, work based, project based opportunities for our students than ever before. Members of our Student Services team as well as our Directors of Project Based and Applied Learning in partnership with Advisors and families can help students develop a pathway that makes the most sense for them.

Additionally, research indicates that proficiency-based learning is best practice for student learning. This system of assessment allows students opportunities to practice what they are learning and demonstrate learning in a variety of ways that demonstrate deeper understanding. It is also an expectation built into this system that teachers clearly communicate what is being taught and assessed and which assessments are practice versus assessments that will be reported on report cards. Clarity about expectations in the classroom is one reason why this system works so well.

This guide is designed to ensure that all members of this community understand how scores will be arrived at and what the expectations are for communication related to grades.

Please reach out if you would like to discuss proficiency-based grading further.

Sincerely,

Lisa & Herb

Principles of Proficiency Based Grading at RU

1. Supporting and Providing Opportunities for Students:

- Students should have multiple opportunities to show what they know and can do
- If students are struggling to meet Graduation Standards, they deserve more time, practice, and support.
- All students should have the opportunity to reach proficiency.

2. Assessing Student Learning

- Assessment practices should be transparent including *formative* practice tasks that inform classroom instruction and *summative* tasks that communicate learning to students and parents.
- Academic knowledge and transferable skills are both important to be successful in college, career, and life.

3. Reporting and Communicating Clearly:

- Regular communication with families about student progress supports deeper learning.
- Reporting student learning must be done in a way that is clear, specific, and understandable to multiple audiences.
- Grades should clearly communicate what students know and are able to do in each class.

Graduation Standards and Habits (AKA Transferable Skills)

Graduation Standards are the expectations against which student proficiency is measured. The Agency of Education has provided schools with model Proficiency Based Graduation Requirements in each of the subject areas that the Educational Quality Standards require schools to address. These are in alignment with the OSSD Ends policies and provide us with guidance for our curriculum, including what and how we teach.

Student Report Cards will Include:

- Scores on Habits of Work and Heart
- Scores in content areas reporting on progress toward proficiency on content specific Graduation Standards.
- Comments from the teacher indicating whether or not the student is on track to successfully complete the class.

The most current drafts of content area Graduation Standards can be found in each department and can be found in the Course Catalog for the current school year.

Performance Indicators

Every Graduation Standard is broken down into measurable parts called Performance Indicators. These are “sub-standards” that make clear what the student must know and be able to do in order to show proficiency. Students should expect to see content that aligns with these Performance Indicators and take part in a variety of formative and summative assessments to monitor their growth and need for additional support.

Grading Scale

In general, words and numbers will be what we use to communicate with students and families about proficiency levels. Numbers are used to calculate whether or not a course is successfully completed, honor roll, and to calculate GPA. They are also what is reported on progress reports and report cards.

Exceeds Proficiency	4.0
Skilled Proficiency	3.5
Meets Proficiency	3.0
Partial Proficiency	2.5
Approaching Proficiency	2.0
Below Proficiency	1.5
Insufficient Evidence	1.0

Score Calculation: Scores entered for the Performance Indicators are averaged in our Student Information System to create the Graduation Standard scores, which are then averaged to determine course completion. Scores on Graduation Standards are averaged each quarter.

Quarterly scores are then averaged to equal a final score for the course at the end of the semester or the year, depending upon the length of course.

GPA

GPA equivalents are as follows:

Proficiency Scale	Exceeds Proficiency	Skilled Proficiency	Meets Proficiency	Partial Proficiency	Approaching Proficiency	Below Proficiency	Insufficient Evidence
GPA Equivalent	4.0	3.5	3.0	2.5	2.0	1.5	1.0

Course GPA is an average of all content-area graduation standards graded in the course. Graduation standards are an average of all graded performance indicators.

For instance, if a student earned the following scores in the graded standards of a course....

- Grad Standard 1: "Meets Proficiency" (3.0)
- Grad Standard 2: "Skilled Proficiency" (3.5)
- Grad Standard 3: "Partial Proficiency" (2.5)
- Grad Standard 4: "Approaching Proficiency" (2.0)

...their GPA for that course would be: $(3.0 + 3.5 + 2.5 + 2.0) / 4 = 2.75$

Cumulative GPA is an average of all final course GPAs. This is sometimes used by colleges, but most competitive colleges recalculate their own GPA for each student based on certain courses and not others. Please see a college/school counselor for more information about this.

Weights: Only AP classes are given added "weight" in calculating the GPA; this is unchanged from past practice.

Marking Periods

For years, RU has had two semesters, divided into halves, with each quarter having a "Report Card." You can access your child's scores through our PowerTeacher portal at any time. Your login credentials for this program are sent home annually, or are available by contacting Student Services. Also, you should expect prompt communication from teachers or your child's advisor if they are struggling in a class or classes.

	School Year			
Semester	First Semester		Second Semester	
Quarter	First Quarter	Second Quarter	Third Quarter	Fourth Quarter

Graduation Readiness

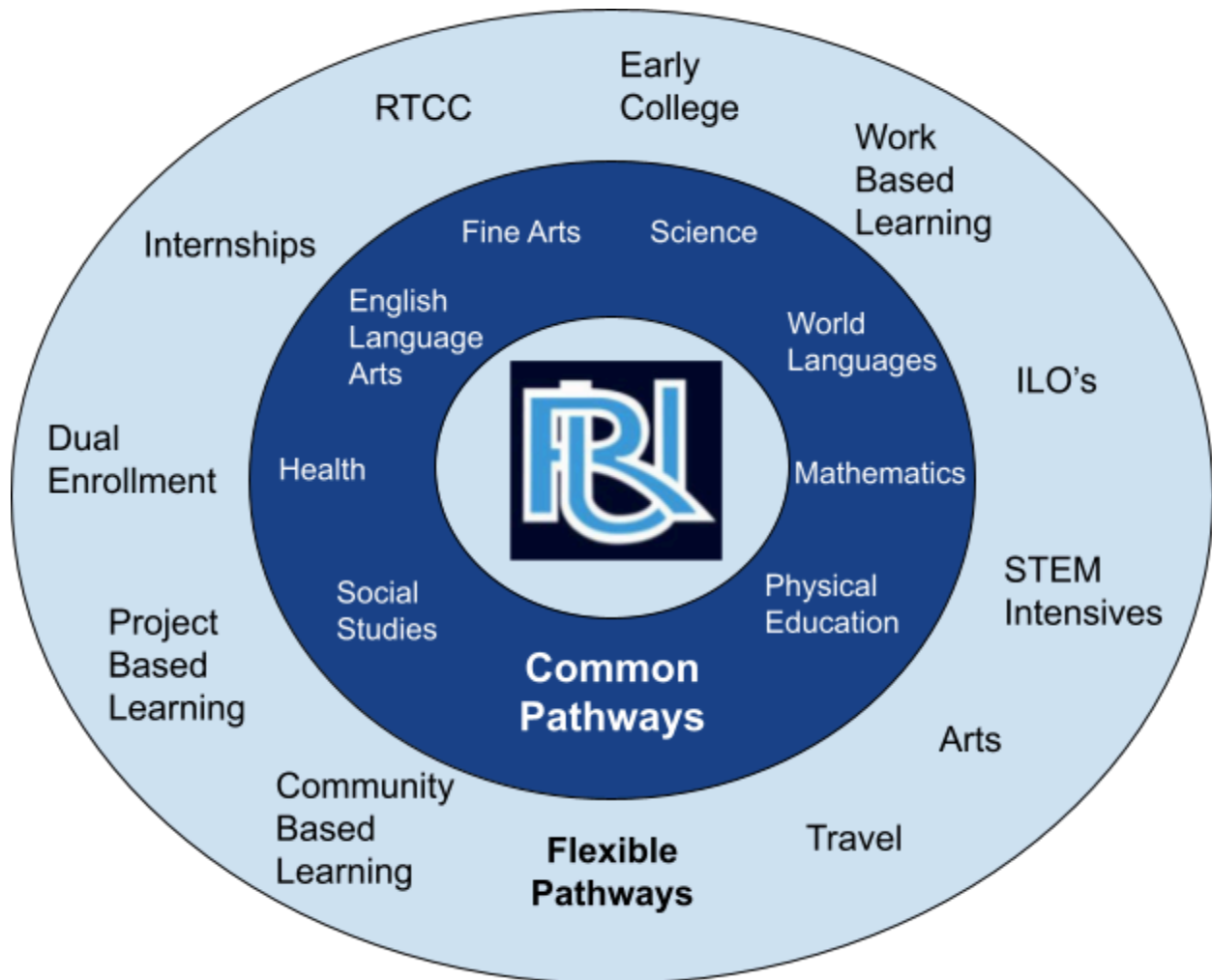
Graduation readiness is different than being proficient in a grade level performance indicator. A 9th or 10th grader can be proficient in grade level expectations, but not yet be graduation ready. To be graduation ready typically means that you have demonstrated proficiency over a multi-year pathway:

- 4 full years of successfully completed English courses
- 3 full years of successfully completed Math courses
- 3 full years of successfully completed Science courses
- 3 full years of successfully completed Social Studies courses
- 2 full years of successfully completed World Language courses
- 1.5 years of successfully completed Physical Education courses
- 1.5 years of successfully completed Fine Arts courses
- 0.5 years of successfully completed Health courses
- Additional elective credits are required

RU, like other Vermont schools, is working flexibly with students and families to give students credit for relevant learning experiences. As a result, students may earn school credit for experiences that are well documented through our Independent Learning Opportunity (ILO) process, therefore they would not be required to complete the expected number of courses in that subject area in order to be eligible for graduation. Students and families should communicate with Student Services if they have questions about flexible opportunities.

Students must also successfully complete a Senior Project in order to receive a RUHS diploma. Please see our [Senior Project Manual](#) for more details and documents related to Senior Project.

Common and Flexible Pathways at RU



Course Completion

While there are many opportunities for flexible pathways at RU, such as Independent Learning Opportunities or ILOs, most of the work students do to develop proficiency in standards continues to happen in traditional classrooms and courses.

- The score in a standard is the average of performance indicators in that standard
- Habits of Work and Heart are not included in the calculation to determine course completion but indicate a student's approaches to learning.
- Individual teachers and course syllabi should be consulted for more detail on meeting expectations in each course.

There are four levels of course completion:

Course Completion Level	Content Standard Scores	Numeric Scores
Complete with High Honors	"Skilled" and "Exceeds Proficiency" scores	3.67 or higher
Complete with Honors	"Meets Proficiency" and higher scores	3.25 or higher
Complete with Proficiency	"Meets Proficiency" scores	2.75 or higher
Complete	"Partial," and/or "Meets Proficiency"	2.5 or higher
Not Complete	"Approaching", "Beginning Proficiency" or "Insufficient Evidence"	Below 2.0 or below

Revisions & Re-takes

Proficiency-Based learning usually involves multiple opportunities and ways to demonstrate a skill or understanding, but it doesn't mean that students can re-do, or revise, or retake anything at any time.

- Teachers will explain on their syllabus what their procedure or what the grade level team's procedure is for retakes
- Our common Habits of Work description indicates that students are expected to request deadline extensions prior to the deadline in advance and that late work is not accepted in the final week of any marking period

Awards & Recognitions

A proficiency-based grading system recognizes that Habits of Work, or transferrable skills, are not the same as academic skills standards, and that it is important to find ways to assess and honor both. Our awards and recognitions honor both Habits of Work/Heart and academic achievement. These awards are celebrated at school and in the paper:

Quarterly Academic Awards: Each academic department honors one “student of the quarter” for exemplary achievement in the subject area.

Quarterly Habits Awards: Each quarter, every grade team honors a “student of the quarter” for exemplary Habits of Heart (Personal Responsibility and Respect for Others) and for exemplary Habits of Work (Organization and Productivity).

Annual Recognition of Honors & High Honors: All students who complete courses with Honors or High Honors are honored for this and have it announced in the paper at the end of the year. These levels of achievement are also, of course, noted on student transcripts.

Graduation Honors: Seniors are recognized at graduation for their achievement on Senior Project and their overall cumulative GPA: Honors (3.34 - 3.66), High Honors (3.67 - 4.0).

Other Notes

- Comparison to past practice: Our experience in recent years has taught us that an honor roll solely based on GPA is less appropriate for a proficiency-based system, especially early in the year, when it is expected that students will still be developing proficiency in grade-level expectations. At the end of the year, however, it is important to honor where students end up, and our system allows for this.
- Students generally will not receive the same award from a grade/dept team more than once in the year. However, no student who achieves well in a class will be missed: all students who complete courses at Honors or High Honors levels are recognized for this in the paper and on transcripts.
- Special Middle School Notes: Teaching and learning about what our expectations and awards are is an important, intentional task in MS. Therefore, there is added emphasis, including special MS “Upstander” Habits of Heart awards, based on a peer nomination process, at the end of each Semester. The peer nomination process is an important way that students reflect upon and understand these expectations in relation to daily actions

of self/other. Additional incentive programs also exist at the MS level to reward classes/grades for positive behaviors vis-a-vis our Habits. Grade teams can provide more specific information.

Co-Curricular Eligibility

All students are eligible to participate in co-curricular activities at Randolph Union as long as they are in good standing in their classes. Teachers should be in good communication with the Athletics and Activities Director and administration. Contracts will be created for students who are not in good standing and are aimed at getting them back on a solid academic and Habits track.

Junior and Senior Open Campus Privileges

Juniors and Seniors at Randolph Union who are in good standing have the opportunity to participate in Open Campus Privileges. Those privileges are:

- Being able to sign out and leave campus when one doesn't have a scheduled on-campus class or other obligation, for Seniors
- Being able to sign out and leave campus for lunch for Seniors and Juniors

To qualify a student must:

1. Be permitted to participate by parent/guardian
2. Be in good academic and behavioral standing. Criteria are the same as for Co-curricular eligibility. Evaluation of eligibility for Open Campus Privileges is ongoing and can be revoked at any time should a student's academic or behavioral standing necessitate a change (students start the year with these privileges)
3. Be in regular attendance
4. (Seniors) Be in good standing with all components and related deadlines of the Senior Project

Students will agree to the following:

1. Always sign-in and sign-out
2. Always use the appropriate entry/exit by the main office
3. Once signed out, do not loiter in the building
4. Only leave the building at the appropriate and permitted times

Additional Resources:

Here are some other places to go for learning on these topics:

- The VT AOE continues to offer/refine their guidance to the field; e.g. this [research brief from 2018](#) and this doc, "[Why is proficiency based learning important?](#)"
- [Assessment Pathways Simplified](#): a great way of looking at commonality vs personalization in our curriculum content, learning pathways, assessment methods, etc.
- [Designing summative assessment tasks](#): this document helps in the design and evaluation of summative assessment tasks. So does this, from Wiggins, with an emphasis on real-world application: [GRASP](#).
- Standards-based grading:
<http://www.competencyworks.org/analysis/what-is-the-difference-between-standards-based-grading/>
- Portfolio assessment K – 8 school, [Mission Hill](#). This video offers a vision of what an 8th grade public portfolio defense can look like.
- Portfolio assessment, HS Senior:
<https://www.teachingchannel.org/videos/success-portfolio-defense-eed>
- Calibration of portfolio assessment:
<https://www.teachingchannel.org/videos/calibrating-for-portfolio-defense-eed>
- Student Led Conference and Portfolio Defense [Videos](#)
- Proficiency/Competency/Mastery-based instruction at BHS: traditional-ish teaching with a standards-based frame of mind: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qFD10rFAjdA>; at EL schools: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RckLD9A0pqc> ;
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bn_sCLoQNVs.
- Private schools pursuing proficiency (mastery-) based transcripts: [Boston Globe story](#).