STANDARDS AND ASSESSMENTS TO SUPPORT PERSONALIZED LEARNING

Rodel Teacher Council Policy Brief
Introduction

Over the next decade, Delaware is uniquely poised to radically change the way we teach and assess our students. As our working group examined standards and assessments through the lens of personalized learning, we found a few key components ripe for improvement.

As educators, our focus is on students mastering content, not just moving through it based on an arbitrary timeline. Our current education system is built around students moving through curriculum at the teacher’s pace. Sure, we provide support and enrichment along the way, but the curriculum drives a pace that does not reflect the individual learning needs of students. To truly challenge and inspire all students on their way to mastery, we’ll need to employ different tactics for individual students.

In the pages that follow, we’ll describe our ideal system, where time is variable, and students move through standards at a pace that matches their needs, without fear of failure.

What is Personalized Learning?

Great teachers already know that students have different learning styles and learn at different paces—what works for one student does not necessarily work for the rest of the class. Personalized learning offers a new vision for education—one in which students become the center of the learning environment, and where students and teachers work together toward students’ individual learning goals.

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Maya is a 14-year-old student in Delaware in 2020. For the past two years, Maya has been enrolled at the Delaware Community School (DCS), a public school.

**Assessment for, as, and of learning:** At DCS, Maya and a team of educators work together to collect and analyze information about how Maya learns best and what she is ready to learn next. Maya works through content, guided by educators, and periodically has opportunities to demonstrate her mastery of specific content standards. Maya can even decide when and how to demonstrate her mastery based on her own analysis of her data.

**Grading and reporting:** Rather than receiving a grade based on how well she performs on an assessment given to all her classmates at the same time, Maya's report card gives a snapshot of which standards she has mastered. Through this tool, Maya, her teachers, and her family all understand what she has accomplished and where she needs to go to stay on track.

**Learning progressions:** As Maya works through course material at a pace that suits her needs, a digital portfolio within her personalized learning plan tracks her progress and helps her stay on track. As she masters each competency from a menu of different ways to demonstrate her knowledge, she earns badges to note her accomplishments and moves on to the next logical step to keep building her knowledge base.

**Technology tools:** DCS has thoughtfully integrated technology to support the learning of Maya and her classmates. Technology supports Maya's mastery of learning progressions by providing access to individualized practice and specific feedback in real time. Maya's teachers work with her to determine how technology can best support her learning needs and interests.

Maya’s experience at DCS shows how student progression through content will evolve, and the recommendations in the following pages will show how standards and assessments currently in place will also evolve to keep pace with this shift.
In a personalized learning environment, assessment shifts from sometimes feeling unengaging or anxiety-inducing to an opportunity for students to receive ongoing feedback in real time to show progress and demonstrate mastery.

**Making it Possible: Assessment As, For, and Of Learning**

**AS Learning**
- Student-driven
- To determine what to do next in my learning (e.g., strategy, focus)
- To provide descriptive feedback to peers and self (peer and self assessment)
- Goal is to become reflective, self-monitoring learner

**FOR Learning**
- Teacher-driven
- To determine what to do next instructionally (strategies, differentiation)
- To provide descriptive feedback to students (what they are doing well, what needs improvement and how to improve)

**OF Learning**
- Teacher-driven
- To determine student’s level of achievement of overall expectations at a given point in time
- As evidence to support professional judgment

Maya’s Progress
**Making it Possible: Assessment As, For, and Of Learning (cont.)**

**Recommendation:** Schools and districts should communicate the relevance of all types of assessment (of, for, and as learning) to students, families, and educators, and implement findings from local assessment inventories.

**Recommendation:** To support the transition to mastery-based learning, DDOE should develop:
- Waiver options and/or pilot programs for schools and districts to allow students to progress through content based on mastery.
- A statewide database for educators of standards-based assessments that are “as” and “for” learning focused, accessed via Schoology, Delaware’s learning management system.

**Recommendation:** DDOE should take advantage of opportunities at the federal level to pursue innovative assessment and accountability models through the Every Student Succeeds Act. Ultimately, this flexibility should be extended to pilot districts which opt to utilize competency- or performance-based assessments in place of the annual statewide summative assessment at every grade level.

*In a student-centered environment like Maya’s, assessment is increasingly project-based, giving students the ability to apply their knowledge in relevant, real-world scenarios.*

*Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA):* The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was signed into law by President Obama in 2015, and is a reauthorization of the 50-year-old Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), the United States federal education law. Many provisions of ESSA provide increased flexibility to states.
Making it Possible: Determining Mastery and Defining Learning Progressions

In order to learn at her own pace and ensure mastery, Maya has to master specific competencies—content and skills—with support and feedback from educators.

### Recommendation:
Delaware Department of Education (DDOE) should support LEAs to build on existing standards-based grading initiatives and the transition to mastery-based learning through a pilot program. Pilot LEAs should:
- Engage students, families, and educators in the transition
- Ensure the process is transparent, rigorous, and equitable
- Ensure alignment with standards
- Develop guidelines for staff to assess digital and other tools
- Offer training to staff, parents, and students

### Time-Based Education vs. Competency/Mastery-Based Learning*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ADVANCEMENT</th>
<th>Age and grade levels</th>
<th>Mastery</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>COMPETENCIES</td>
<td>Variable</td>
<td>Explicit, measurable, transferable learning objectives</td>
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<tr>
<td>ASSESSMENT</td>
<td>May feel punitive for students</td>
<td>Meaningful and a positive experience</td>
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<tr>
<td>FEEDBACK AND SUPPORT</td>
<td>After-the-fact</td>
<td>Timely, ongoing support and feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEARNING OUTCOMES</td>
<td>Little or no ability to advance based on mastery of standards</td>
<td>Emphasize competencies that include application and creation of knowledge</td>
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Learning progressions: learning progressions are based in learning sciences research and map out commonly traveled paths that students take as they learn content and skills based on intellectual, social, emotional, and physical development. They can be used to design or modify instruction. Source: http://www.achieve.org/files/Achieve-LearningProgressionsinCBP.pdf

Local educational agency (LEA):
A local school system pursuant to local board of education control and management. May be a school district or public charter school. Source: http://www.ed.gov/race-top/district-competition/definitions
As Maya progresses through content, she has some control over how she learns and how she demonstrates what she knows, in developmentally appropriate ways. This sense of control increases her engagement and helps her acquire skills and disciplines such as time management, goal setting, collaboration, and self-advocacy.

**Recommendation:** Schools and districts should foster a culture that integrates student agency and supports students’ social emotional development by providing professional development opportunities to educators and authentic engagement with students and families. Ultimately, opportunities to demonstrate social emotional development should be incorporated into teaching and learning.

**Recommendation:** DDOE should provide incentives to schools and districts to develop and pilot innovative programs to support and measure student agency. Pilot schools and districts should be encouraged to share their results and impact statewide.

**Student agency:** the ability to make choices about and take an active role in one’s life path, rather than solely being the product of one’s circumstances. Agency requires the intentionality and forethought to derive a course of action and adjust course as needed to reflect one’s identity, competencies, knowledge and skills, mindsets, and values.

The MISSION OF THE RODEL FOUNDATION OF DELAWARE IS TO HELP DELAWARE BUILD ONE OF THE FINEST SYSTEMS OF PUBLIC EDUCATION IN THE WORLD BY 2020.

- Promoting policy changes that can have a huge impact statewide, such as raising academic standards, using timely data to make decisions, and investing in our youngest learners.
- Provide seed funding to innovative, potentially high-impact initiatives. Whether our ideas come from Seaford or Singapore, our strategy is simple: Do more of what works.
- Creating and leading diverse statewide partnerships that catalyze action, such as the Rodel Teacher Council.

The RODEL TEACHER COUNCIL was convened by the Rodel Foundation of Delaware in 2013 to elevate the voices of teachers, represent the diversity of the teaching force in Delaware schools, provide a venue for teachers to weigh in on important issues affecting their work, and help set the course for education improvement in Delaware. The council is a group of teacher leaders dedicated to finding solutions, improving their craft, and leveraging their voices for the benefit of their students.

In October 2014, the Rodel Teacher Council published the Blueprint for Personalized Learning in Delaware, which identifies state and local policy improvements that would enable personalized learning. The document is one of the first examples of educators developing policy recommendations for personalized learning in the nation.

To read the Blueprint, and to learn more about the RTC, visit: www.rodelfoundationde.org/who-we-are/teachercouncil/