

Performance-based Learning Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Why the need for change? This isn't how we were taught in school.

A: Everything in our world has changed since our childhood except for the way we educate a lot of our students. Technology has rapidly advanced, our economy has become increasingly global and the jobs of tomorrow require a much higher set of skills. Across the country, there are many efforts underway to remodel our education system to better align it with modern needs, in the same way that we would rewire a hundred year farmhouse to bring it up to code. A shift to a Performance-based Learning system is one of the most important changes under consideration.

Q: How is a Performance-based Learning system different from more traditional approaches?

A: A Performance-based Learning system presents learning objectives as a series of building blocks that stack upon each other. Students move through the course material focusing on one block at a time. What's different about this approach is that the student does not move on to the next block until he or she demonstrates proficiency of the block that precedes it. Instead of getting a grade that averages a student's performance across a range of topics without ensuring mastery of all (or any), under a Performance-based Learning system, a student is evaluated based on his or her ability to master individual skills or bodies of knowledge.

Q: How will Performance-based Learning benefit my child?

A: Because education under a Performance-based Learning system is personalized, it is harder for students to fall through the cracks. Teachers and parents have more complete information on any areas where a student is struggling and can therefore provide the support needed. The personalization of this approach also allows students to move through the course material at their own pace. That means that students who master a particular skill or knowledge set won't get bored waiting for others to catch up, and students who take longer to learn a particular skill or knowledge set won't be pushed ahead before they are ready.

Q: Will there be letter grades and GPAs like we are all used to?

A: Performance-based Learning systems do not rely on traditional letter grades to measure student progress. Instead, student performance on individual skill levels is measured on a scale based on level of mastery (from 1-4, for example) despite the differing format, the resulting performance record gives an accurate description of the depth and breadth of learning each student has achieved. Some schools are translating their evaluation systems into GPA equivalents, while others are using different approaches to communicate overall student performance.

Q: How will colleges and universities react to our transcripts?

A: We will continue to provide the classic transcript, but over time, we will also be providing a translated version that is applicable to Performance-based Learning. We believe our students need to be presented on an equal playing field regionally and nationally. For example, we will continue to include weighted grades for AP classes. Additionally, we are working with colleges and universities to help them understand a Performance-based system.

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Q: What about the standards – are we ignoring them?

A: In District 51, we will still be teaching on all Colorado Academic Standards. We have an obligation to do so, believe standards are important and are designing a highly rigorous system. We will seek ways to engage students in how they learn and show mastery of those standards.

Q: How will students be assessed/ what do we do about mandated tests?

A: We will continue to take mandated tests, and use the results as a data point. We will also put a greater emphasis on timely classroom assessments that track progress and provide the right type of personalized feedback to our students.

Q: Can teachers just teach whatever they want?

A: As professionals, teachers know their students the best and can artfully customize instruction. Teachers will still be held to Colorado standards and District expectations. A teacher will have great flexibility to respond to individual needs and set a personalized pace for their learners.

Q: Will technology replace a teacher?

A: No, blended and online learning will be one component and a tool that we will be able to utilize more creatively and effectively with a Performance-based Learning System. Teachers will still deliver content, teach, facilitate, and be participants and leaders in a classroom.

Q: If this is a multi-year journey, how can I incorporate this into my classroom tomorrow?

A: Across all schools we are implementing best practices within a Performance-based model, and ensuring personalized learning is occurring. We firmly believe that through a Growth Mindset and the use of Habits of Mind, all classrooms will begin to make education more relevant to their students and responsive to the 21st Century Workforce.