



RSU #34 – ALTON, BRADLEY AND OLD TOWN

**OLD TOWN HIGH SCHOOL
203 STILLWATER AVENUE
OLD TOWN, MAINE 04468**

207/827-3910

FAX # 207/827-3918

COVER SHEET

FAX DATE: Oct. 18, 2014

TO: 1-877-227-9838

FROM: COTT GORDON, PRINCIPAL

NUMBER OF PAGES INCLUDING THIS PAGE: 13

MEMO: _____

Thanks!

7. Describe the proficiency-based system in place at the middle school or K-8 level as evidence of the SAU's preparedness to expand the proficiency-based system into the secondary level and its preparedness to award diplomas based on proficiency in the standards of the eight content areas and the standards of the Guiding Principles after July 1, 2020.

During the fall of 2008, Leonard Middle School embarked on what was then a revolutionary change for middle schools within the state of Maine. Building on the work of Richard Dufour around Professional Learning Communities, the staff took the leap to transform learning for students. They began the process by reading and researching Dufour's work and used resources from the Maine Association for Middle Level Education (MAMLE) and the Department of Education to move their staff forward. They developed a pretty aggressive four-year plan to have everything in place.

They began by creating a continuum of consistent grade level benchmarks that all staff in all content areas could embrace and agree upon. These benchmarks were sequential and based on the Performance Expectancy Indicators (PEI) found in Maine's Learning Results. Clear goals and standards were developed for all grade level teams of educators. Throughout this process, the leadership team relied on a core of teacher leaders to keep the progress moving forward. Classroom based assessments were developed, piloted, and revised.

Throughout this process, parents and community members were educated about the process. Leonard Middle School worked consistently and diligently with all area elementary schools to create a smooth transition bridge for students to be successful. They solicited the help of facilitators through organizations such as MAMLE and they worked with other middle level colleagues to learn from others who had taken this step to change their schools.

Leonard Middle School relied on data to inform and promote the need for change. They were savvy in their use of not only classroom assessment data, but also NWEA and NECAP data to measure student progress before and during the change process. They developed staff, student, and parent surveys, and spent a good deal of time in conversations with parents as they hosted several parent forums to keep them informed all along the way.

Five years after beginning the process, Leonard Middle School sent progress reports and report cards home to parents reflecting the complete transformation to standards-based grading in the fall of 2013. Even with the extensive preparation work that LMS had done over the preceding years, the change was a very big one for staff and community. The change touched on things that had been familiar to families for generations, e.g., earning straight A's, honor roll, extra credit. While the

shift is succeeding and is causing good impacts for students, it requires still more adjustment and community communication to help this become familiar, accepted, and hopefully welcomed at the middle school level. Leonard Middle School made the change in five years, and I would contend that at the high school level there are even more moving parts to consider, and even more familiar or "sacred" factors for students, staff, and community. We want to do this very well and very strategically. For that reason, we have developed a strategic timeline with the OTHS Faculty Leadership Team, leading to full transition to a proficiency-based diploma over a period of years. This would require us to get the full extension of waivers currently allowed by the Maine Department of Education.

As you can see, RSU 34 has a history of not backing down from change, so long as it is best for our students. Our students in K-8, and their parents are already becoming accustomed to these grading practices. It is reasonable to think that the transition might be made it easier for Old Town High School thanks to the work done by the K-8 schools within RSU 34.

- 8. Provide a description of the overall plan to meet the goal of awarding diplomas based on proficiency in the standards of all eight content areas and the standards of the Guiding Principles after July 1, 2020. The description should include benchmarks and metrics for the 2014-2015 school year and benchmarks for each year for which the extension is requested.**

During the summer of 2014, seven teachers and three administrators from Old Town High School attended the MPA Leadership Retreat. This experience was designed to provide a large chunk of time and support from the Great Schools Partnership to work on a plan for the implementing of a proficiency-based diploma. This retreat allowed us to have dedicated time to this venture, which is something that is very hard to accomplish during the day in a busy school setting. In addition, we were afforded support not only from the Great Maine Schools Partnership, but we also received feedback from colleagues at other schools in attendance. The retreat was structured to offer informational sessions around policy, best practices and community engagement for a portion of each day, and then time for school teams to work together with feedback from a coach assigned to each of them.

We were fortunate enough to have seven teachers with us who have taken an interest in proficiency based learning and are a part of our leadership team at Old Town High School. During our time at the MPA Leadership retreat, we set out to develop a set of core beliefs that we could put down on paper that would articulate our beliefs around this very important transition in how we do business within our school. Further, our aim was to create a plan for action in this school year and in the coming school years to gain feedback from and prepare all stakeholders.

We have shared our timeline and plans from our hard work over the summer with the remainder of our teaching staff. Last year, we began working with our staff around aligning our current curriculum to the Common Core, Maine's Learning Results, and Science's Next Gen standards. We had speakers present to our faculty, and we did multiple book studies to provide our staff with some professional development to prepare for the changes necessary in their classrooms.

During the remainder of this school year, we have a pretty aggressive set of goals to get ourselves out of the gate quickly on this new and exciting change in our practices. Each of our content area departments will spend some time looking at current grading practices and come to some agreements on how student work will be assessed going forward with standards as opposed to number grades.

We anticipate some good conversation. We will lean on some of the resources that were provided for us through the MPA Leadership Retreat and the Great Maine Schools Partnership Consortium.

In addition to all of this work around assessments within each department, they will also be expected to spend some time within the standards. Each department will need to make some determinations around which standards will be assessed at each grade level. Throughout these conversations we will invite not only the middle school within our own RSU, but also area middle schools that also send students to Old Town High School. It will be critical for future student success that we do our due diligence to inform our middle school colleagues of the expectations for students who attend our school as grade 9 students.

Beyond this work, our staff has also done a bit of self-assessing on their own and they recognize that they are weak in the area of rubric creation and use. Despite some rubric use on our way through the accreditation process with the New England Association of Schools and Colleges, our leadership group understands the importance of our entire staff to know as much as possible about these assessment tools. We have been seeking professional development for our staff in this area, and this is not something that we can expect them to be proficient within a short period of time. They will need on-going professional development in this area.

While each RSU 34 School Board member has at least a cursory knowledge of proficiency-based learning, our leadership group recognizes the importance of educating them through this all important change. We have begun that process and will continue to regularly inform them of our progress and educate them about proficiency-based systems as we move forward. We will also be identifying policies that will need to be re-visited to reflect our change in practices. Our graduation policy, and our policies outlining the requirements for students to participate in extra-curricular activities are just two examples of policies that will need refining.

In fairness, our aggressive plans for the 2014-2015 school year probably represent more than is reasonable to expect in one school year. This is particularly true when you consider that all of these things will be done in the midst of already busy schools throughout each passing day. While we are proud of our schools in RSU 34, we work with a growing population of students who receive free and reduced lunch, a growing McKinney-Vento population, and a healthy population of students with special needs. Within the RSU, our free and reduced lunch rates have climbed steadily since the closing of our local paper mill nearly ten years ago. These rates now annually approach 50%-60%, up from

below 20% at Old Town High School in the early 2000's. While we are committed to making sure all of our students can learn and succeed, these parameters do make our daily job that much more challenging. LD 1422 represents a very different approach for our schools, and we need as much time as possible to make it a reality for our students.

During the 2015-2016 year and beyond, we will continue our conversations with area schools, and refine common language around proficiency based learning. It is reasonable to think that there will be some carry-over of tasks to complete from our current school year. In addition, our leadership group will introduce our staff to backwards planning, which is an essential change that our entire staff will move toward understanding and implementing. The transformation that happens within the classroom will need to involve teachers having a thorough understanding of the end point for students and then working backwards in an effort to determine the best path to get each of them to a proficient level. We will begin our process of educating our community members, our parents, and our students about the impending change. With a middle school that has already taken this step, we have plenty of data around what worked for them and what did not work for them in correctly informing our constituents.

For the 2016-2017 school year, we will continue to work on any unfinished business from above, and develop a system for reporting student progress to parents and community members. While this is of vital importance, and will be given thoughtful consideration throughout, it is truly one of the last steps to be taken within this entire process. Further, we will need to develop a very healthy and robust menu of interventions for students who do not meet proficiency.

Finally, we will need to determine what is to be done with grade books, transcripts and record keeping for our students. While this is going on, we will be refining all of the aforementioned processes to make certain that they are the very best they can be for our students.

As you can see, there is much to do, and I could certainly make guesses on metrics of when some of these items will be accomplished, but truly they would be little more than speculation. Our goal is to accomplish each of these tasks within the years mentioned, but change and progress in schools happens at a very slow rate. We know from experience that the best changes for our students will be done thoughtfully and methodically. The task is large, but it is important; we are far from where we need to be, but we will get there. We need as much time as possible to put together the best system possible for our students at Old Town High School to be successful.

9. Describe the system of supports you have in place for middle school students when proficiency is not demonstrated. Describe your plan for growing the system of supports into the high school.

Several of our staff members at Old Town High School have recognized that any system that we put in place for awarding proficiency-based diplomas at Old Town High School will only be successful if we have a solid plan for a system of interventions and supports for students who do not reach proficiency. We currently have an after school support program for students, but we understand that this will need to be enhanced as we move forward to give our students all that they need to meet proficiency. Over the course of the last two years, we have added academic focus periods for our freshman and sophomore students during the regular school day. We have deliberately focused on the early years of the high school experience at Old Town High School. We felt confident that if we could support them early, and provide them with a good start, the odds of finishing would be greatly enhanced. To date, our graduation rate and dropout rates have improved steadily, which shows the value in the changes that we have made.

Our middle school has provided all of their students with academic focus support for all students who need extra help during the school day. When students do not respond to academically, staff meet with parents on a regular basis to see what can be done to improve learning opportunities. Further academic supports are in place for students who still do not respond despite academic focus and meetings with parents, including, but not limited to after school teacher interventions and Black Bear mentors, which is a collaborative effort with the University of Maine. Beyond this, when students still do not meet these standards despite all of the best efforts of all involved, there is consideration given to 504 or special education referrals.

Old Town High School has the capacity already to do some or all of the aforementioned supports offered at Leonard Middle School. Our fear is being a high school, there will be greater urgency to complete the defined proficiencies within the traditional timespan to earn a proficiency based diploma. We will need to consider summer offerings, particularly for middle school students who do not arrive with the skills ready to meet the proficiencies designed for 9th grade students. We will need to continue with after school offerings, and enhance them. We will need to provide transportation, as it will be very important to us that these students have every opportunity to be successful. We will need to strategically and proactively build more time into individual students' schedules, so that they can get extra support to succeed in areas for which they are not ready to meet the grade level standards we set. RSU 34 has

several students who live in very rural settings, with our previously mentioned free and reduced lunch rates, transportation is a serious concern. The appropriate amount of funding must be in place for our students to be able to access any supports that are offered outside of the school day. While we will exhaust all supports available to us within the regular schedule within the school day, it will require some creative and unique opportunities outside of the school day to really see success for students. We are committed to getting it done and our middle school has provided a nice model for us to build on.

We will focus on the issue of after school supports by year 3 of our current plan to implement proficiency-based diplomas.

10. Identify the approximate percentage of the 2013-2014 proficiency-based transition funds and how these were applied to proficiency-based education expenditures in the following areas:

a. Policy:	0
b. Practice:	\$6,779.01
c. Community Engagement:	0
d. One-year Carry Over:	\$6,566.29

We spent just over half of our money from the 2013-2014 school year, and we spent it on practice. We had a presenter come to Old Town High School from Bangor High School to speak to our staff about aligning our current curriculum to the Common Core. She provided on-going resources for our staff, and we will keep in contact with her over the next several years.

The remainder of our money was spent sending our Faculty Leadership Team to the MPA Summer Leadership Retreat. As I said earlier, this opportunity provided our staff not only with seminars around best practice, policy and community engagement related to proficiency-based learning, but the experience also provided time. Time is truly what will be needed most for all schools, not just Old Town High School to create a thoughtful and productive path from where we are to being ready to award proficiency-based diplomas. We will take advantage of this opportunity provided by the MPA each year, not just for the resources, learning, and feedback from colleagues, but mainly for the dedicated time that it provides to this important transition.

Also related to practice, we are sending some members of our English departments and some member of our Social Studies departments to conferences centered on proficiency based learning in each of their content areas. The plan is for each department representatives to return with information to share with not only other members of their department, but also the entire teaching staff.

While our one-year carry over looks large, it seems fair since we spent the money to develop a plan to move forward. To have spent this money before the development of a solid plan would have been potentially a waste of resources.

- 11. Provide a description of the intended impact for your transition funds. Attach a budget for the 2014-2015 transition funds and any 2013-2014 transition funds that were carried over after June 30, 2014. For each expense, identify the amount and date by which it will be expended.**

The biggest impact for the transition funds within the early part of our plan will be centered on ensuring that our teaching staff are exposed to the best practices for transforming their classrooms to be ready for proficiency based learning. The bulk of the money will be spent in this manner, though we will begin looking at policy work and community engagement as well.

Carry Over from 2013-2014	\$6,566.29
2014-2015 Funds	\$13,608.40
Total	\$20,174.69

Plan for the 2014-2015 school year:

Books - Book Study spent by 12/31/2014	\$2,500.00
MPA Summer Leadership Retreat spent by 6/30/2015	\$7,000.00
Presenters for Rubric Use spent by 6/1/2015	\$2,000.00
Visitation to Schools spent by 6/1/2015	\$1,000.00
Teacher Time - outside of school day spent by 6/30/2015	\$4,000.00

Core Beliefs for Proficiency Based Learning (PBL) at OTHS

DRAFT

(Adapted from the Great Schools Partnership, 10 Principles for Proficiency-Based Learning)

In practice, proficiency-based learning can take a wide variety of forms from state to state or school to school—there is no universal approach. To help schools establish a philosophical and pedagogical foundation for their work, the Great Schools Partnership created “Ten Principles of Proficiency-Based Learning,” which describes the common features found in the most effective proficiency-based systems. Using that document, a team from OTHS developed the following core beliefs on PBL:

1. All learning expectations are clearly and consistently communicated to students and families, including long-term expectations (such as graduation requirements and graduation standards), short-term expectations (such as the learning objectives for a specific course/unit, or, as appropriate, lessons), and general expectations (such as the performance levels used in the school’s grading and reporting system).
2. Student achievement is evaluated using common learning standards and performance expectations that are consistently applied to all students regardless of whether they are enrolled in traditional courses, pursuing alternative learning pathways, or receiving academic support.
3. All forms of assessment are standards-based and criterion-referenced, and success is defined by the achievement of expected standards, not relative measures of performance or student-to-student comparisons.
4. Formative assessments evaluate learning progress during the instructional process; formative-assessment information is used to inform instructional adjustments, teaching practices, and academic support.
5. Summative assessments evaluate learning achievement and are graded; summative-assessment scores record a student’s level of proficiency at a specific point in time.
6. Grades are used to communicate learning progress and achievement to students and families.
7. Academic progress and achievement is monitored and reported separately from work habits, character traits, and behaviors such as attendance and class participation.
8. When students do not show proficiency with expected standards at the first opportunity, they will have additional opportunities to show proficiency. However, they may need to show that they have met certain criteria (such as support sessions) before they are permitted to consume time by retaking an assessment or demonstrating proficiency.
9. Students can demonstrate learning progress and achievement in multiple ways through differentiated assessments, personalized-learning options, or alternative learning pathways.
10. Students are given opportunities to make important decisions about their learning, which includes contributing to the design of learning experiences and personalized learning pathways.

In closing, I would be happy to answer any questions related to this waiver application narrative for Old Town High School.

If you have further questions with regard to our timeline for implementation, we have developed a web-site for staff use. The link is here:

<https://sites.google.com/a/rsu34.k12.me.us/proficiency-based-learning---oths/>

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Scott Gordon', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Scott Gordon

Principal, Old Town High School

Option 3 Authorization Page

Annually the SAU will provide evidence of progress and will submit an extension renewal request to the Maine DOE by July 1. This request will include:

- evidence of progress toward the identified annual benchmarks;
- goals and benchmarks for continued progress over the next school year toward the awarding of diplomas based on proficiency of the standards of the eight content areas and the standards of the Guiding Principles; and
- a budget for use of additional proficiency-based diploma transition funds.

We certify that the information contained in the extension application accurately reflects the current status of our implementation of proficiency-based diplomas.

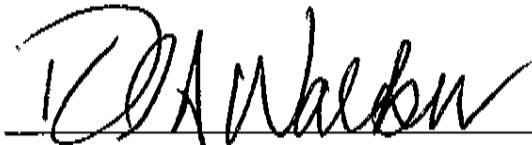
We certify that the criteria for awarding a diploma beginning after July 1, 2020 will be the following criteria from Maine Revised Statutes 20-A §4722-A:

A. Demonstrate that the student engaged in educational experiences relating to English language arts, mathematics and science and technology in each year of the student's secondary schooling;

B. Demonstrate proficiency in meeting state standards in all content areas of the system of learning results established under section 6209;

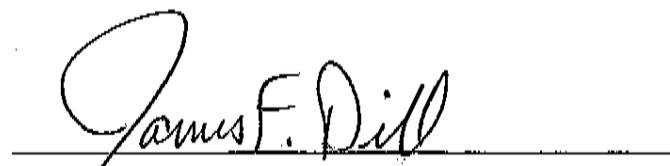
C. Demonstrate proficiency in each of the Guiding Principles set forth in department rules governing implementation of the system of learning results established pursuant to section 6209; and

D. Meet any other requirements specified by the governing body of the school administrative unit attended by the student.



Superintendent of Schools

10/17/14
Date



Chair of School Board

10/17/14
Date