

Mill River Unified Union School District

2321 Middle Road, Suite 1
North Clarendon, VT 05759

Tel: 802-775-3264 <http://millriverschools.org> Fax: 802-775-8063

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Dear Parents and Guardians,

Last June we sent you a letter highlighting the changes in public education and how they will influence education philosophy in the Mill River Unified Union School District. This year we began initial implementation of proficiency based and personalized learning at the K-6 level and have been planning for a 2017-2018 roll-out of proficiency based/personalized learning grades 7-12.

Why now? The traditional model of schooling has been successful in many ways for many years. Yet, now, more than ever, colleges and companies are encountering high school graduates that lack the skills to be successful. We need a better way to ensure that our students are well prepared before they graduate.

Vermont law requires that students of the class of 2020 and beyond graduate under a proficiency-based system. So what does that mean? You may already be familiar with a standards-based system from some of our elementary schools. Basically, the state sets standards of learning (in VT's case, the Common Core State Standards) that tell us exactly what students should be able to do in each course and at each grade level. Then our district works with teachers to identify local standards that are based on those Common Core standards. Our local standards represent what we feel are the more important areas of learning for our students. A proficiency-based system takes those standards, and works to accurately identify a student's proficiency on those standards. In other words, it measures what a student knows or is able to do in relation to those standards--and does not let other factors muddy the water, such as attendance, behavior, or homework completion. While those are all important, they do not reflect a student's level of proficiency. Many of our elementary report cards already use these local standards, and students levels of proficiency are measured on a 4-point scale.

Starting with the graduating class of 2020, all students will attain credits needed for graduation based on their demonstration of proficiency in the following areas to graduate high school as outlined in the Vermont Education Quality Standards:

- Math
- English Language Arts
- Science
- Global Citizenship (Social Studies and World Language)
- Health
- Physical Education
- Visual and Performing Arts
- Transferable Skills (Clear and Effective Communication, Self-Direction, Informed and Integrated Thinking, Responsible and Involved Citizenship, Creative and Practical Problem Solving)

So what's different about that--besides the addition of Transferable Skills? Making the move from a standards-based system to a proficiency-based system does call for changes in how classrooms and schools are arranged. Unlike a traditional system, the a proficiency-based system must allow students to demonstrate proficiency under a flexible pathway such as work based learning, early college, or dual enrollment. A proficiency-based system must also allow students to progress at their own pace. We have already begun implementing many of these pathways and working with our educators to make these shifts.

Another important tenet of proficiency-based learning is that students are given multiple opportunities to improve their work as long as new learning has occurred. In other words, a student who fails a project may have the opportunity to relearn the material and present an alternate version of the project. This is a shift in many of our classrooms currently and something that we are working to implement during the 2017-2018 school year for students in grades 7-10.

Further, Proficiency-based report cards separate academic performance from work habits/behavior in order to provide parents a more accurate view of a student's progress in both academic and behavioral areas. Variables such as effort, participation, timeliness, cooperation, and attendance, are reported separately from academics--and will not affect academic grades. This is mostly current practice at the elementary level--but a shift for many of our high school courses.

You will see several changes in the 2017-2018 school year concerning student report cards, how GPA is calculated, expectations for graduation, and school policies. This year (2016-2017) the following transitions occurred:

- K-6 schools began their transition to a proficiency-based reporting system that is uniform across the four elementary schools
- The class of 2020, GPA calculations are unweighted
- Teachers began to make shifts in their instructional practices K-12

In the year 2017-2018 you can expect to see the following shifts:

- Grades 7-10 will transition to a proficiency-based report card and will report out on a 4-point scale
- Academic and behavioral scores will be separated on the report card 7-10
- Course credit will be attained through the demonstration of proficiency directly connected to standards (proficiencies) in grades 9 and 10
- Teachers continue to shift towards proficiency based and personalized instruction

This is an exciting shift in education for our students, but it will take time and collaboration to fully realize the intentions of Act 77. Please find attached our Graduation Requirements and Procedures for the class of 2020 and beyond. This document addresses sample graduation pathways, proficiencies as well as academic recognition and scholarships. If you have any questions or would like more information please feel free to contact your building administrators, school counseling office or myself.

Sincerely,

Brooke Farrell
Assistant Superintendent

