

Presentation Audio Transcript

Question #5: How do you scaffold a proficiency so that there's a viable path for student success?

Slide 1: The fifth question of the course is: How do you scaffold a proficiency so that there's a viable path for student success?

Slide 2: As we learned from the last question, proficiency development does not stop with the proficiency statement. Proficiency development requires defining a subset of skills that (when applied together and often) help students meet the overall target. The proficiency statement describes a destination, and from those proficiency statements, we chart paths for students to travel to the destination through the performance indicators.

Slide 3: Charting this path (creating benchmarks of achievement at various developmental levels) is one form of scaffolding in proficiency-based, personalized education. The other form is what you do in class with individual students to help them succeed.

Slide 4: An important question is: How often should we place these benchmarks for students to check their progress (and for teachers, too)? Three typical configurations are shown here.

The first shows benchmarks existing at every grade level. Meaning you've written a clear description of what proficiency looks like at the end of third grade, fourth grade, fifth, etc.

The second configuration posits fewer benchmarks: one at the end of each grade, but less frequently after that.

The third configuration uses a typical grade span spread, describing proficiency at the end of second, fifth, and eighth grades, and then graduation.

Slide 5: In some proficiency-based systems, advancement of students is not bound to age-based grade levels at all. This may seem like a big leap, and it is certainly a big idea. But I'll ask you to imagine it just for a moment: What if you looked at a graduation proficiency statement and saw that there were (for example) ten natural levels of development that led up to ultimate proficiency? Then you defined these levels, and then allowed students to meet these at their own pace, regardless of their age or the time of year? Most kids, maybe, would still

meet the targets when they are “supposed to,” but those who are ready to accelerate would be able to do so, and those who learn at a slower pace would be provided support. For some skills – say, writing – the levels of achievement would be many and would be expected to run through the student’s entire career. For others – like spelling, computation, or calculus – there may be fewer levels, because those skills are generally addressed for shorter periods in a students’ career.

Slide 6: Believe it or not, this decision about “how to organize” learning and levels like this is quite important and has many implications. The decision between grade-based distinctions and achievement-based distinctions, for example, addresses a fundamental change in how the structure of schools and learning intersect. One way to check your work against research-based practices is to take a close look at standards, which rely heavily on research in development. It might also be helpful to refer to some research-based learning progressions to ensure that your expectations are on the right track. There are many resources on research-based learning progressions in the More Resources section.

Slide 7: The first step in the scaffolding process is to consider the pros and cons of different models. There are no hard and fast rules here and different philosophies abound. In Vermont AOE's sample proficiency documents, for example, Transferable Skills have only one level of performance, relying on content proficiency to develop distinction in skill. In contrast, the content proficiency samples have three levels of performance. Remember, these are sample documents and are there to be a springboard for your local decisions.

Slide 8: Once you have considered the shape of the scaffold, the next step is to consider the content of it. Again, referring to standards and research at this point is a good check for alignment.

Slide 9: Let’s look at an example that we developed for the Collaboration skill. Here you can see the graduation proficiency statement we mentioned in the previous question, and then a proficiency statement for eighth grade, and one for fifth grade and for third. Notice that, just like the graduation statement, these are specific, observable, and measurable. They also parallel the structure and components of the graduation statement. This is usually a good idea, though not always true, as there might be considerations at a fifth grade level, for example, that don’t apply at graduation level.

Slide 10: The tasks and activities that help you explore this question will ask you to think about scaffolding for vertical alignment and to write or rewrite performance indicators. This can be a difficult process and, as always, we hope you will collaborate with a colleague in this work. The Text-Based Reflection will be especially helpful as you consider how research fits in. One thing to keep in mind, although some research-based learning progressions are available, the research is less available at certain levels and certain subjects. Don't get bogged down with making sure your system is perfect. Most likely it won't be—that's where a cycle of continuous improvement comes in.

Slide 11: Thank you for watching. Remember to record your work in the Evidence of Learning Tool and to check out More Resources below. If you have any questions or want to share additional resources you think might help others, please contact the Center for Collaborative Education at vtclg@ccebos.org.