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## Proficiency-based High School Diploma Systems in Maine: Educator Perceptions of Implementation

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A faded background image of a graduation ceremony. A large crowd of graduates in blue gowns is visible, with many throwing their caps into the air. The scene is outdoors with trees in the background.

# **Proficiency-based High School Diploma Systems in Maine: Educator Perceptions of Implementation**

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**June 2018**



**Center for Education Policy,  
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# **Proficiency-based High School Diploma Systems in Maine: Educator Perceptions of Implementation**

## **Executive Summary for Policymakers**

*Background: Why was this study conducted, and what does it include?*

In 2012, the Maine legislature passed a bill requiring public school districts to implement proficiency-based high school diploma requirements. Amendments were passed in subsequent years, and several additional bills related to this policy were introduced in the most recent 128th Legislative Session in early 2018. These bills were considered by the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, but have not yet had final action by the full Maine legislature at the time of this report's publication.

Beginning in 2012, the Maine Legislature's Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs has annually requested that the Maine Education Policy Research Institute (MEPRI) conduct empirical research studies designed to compile data, examine progress and explore impacts regarding implementation of this state policy within school districts across the state. In 2017-2018, Phase VI of this ongoing research included two separate research studies examining the impacts of implementing proficiency-based diploma systems within the immediate and wider contexts of public schooling in Maine. The first study, presented in February 2018, included case studies of high schools to examine the practices, challenges and facilitators as well as the perceptions of high school educators and administrators about meeting the needs of students and their district's requirements for earning a proficiency-based diploma. That report included a synthesis of key findings to date and a summary of current related literature. This second study used survey methodology to identify levels of progress and attitudes towards implementation of Maine's proficiency-based diploma policy and related education approaches from PK-12 educators in public schools. Prior research has shown an important distinction between teacher beliefs about proficiency-based and standards-based educational practices in general and the specific state policy requirement to award high school diplomas only to students demonstrating proficiency. This survey study focused primarily on the latter. As a companion study, it does not reiterate the background and contextual information already provided in the February 2018 report.

### *What did we learn?*

Results of this exploratory survey of a sample of 442 Maine PK-12 public school teachers were consistent with conclusions in prior research that practitioners vary widely in their perceptions of implementation progress, necessary resources, and attitudes regarding proficiency-based diploma systems. The range of responses likely stems from several factors including the diverse conditions of individual schools/districts/communities, variation in underlying teacher beliefs, and the specific situations present across different grade levels, content areas, and/or programs.

When asked about the status of implementation of several key components of standards-based teaching and reporting systems that are necessary to implement the current proficiency-based diploma policy, teachers across all grade levels reported substantial progress. However, none of the practices were fully implemented as of spring 2018, and a few areas were particularly lagging. Figure 4 and Table 2 in the full report depict the progress in these areas. Table 2 is replicated below as a summary of implementation at various grade levels.

**Report Table 2. Percent of Teachers Reporting “Full Implementation” of Selected Practices, by Grade Level\***

Grade Level (N=391)	Grades K-2	Grades 3-5	Grades 6-8	Grades 9-12
Specific learning standards that students are expected to meet have been identified.	61%	<b>84%</b>	69%	65%
Assessments have been developed and aligned to the learning standards.	30%	33%	<b>44%</b>	<b>44%</b>
Systems are in place for tracking student proficiency in each learning standard.	32%	<b>52%</b>	32%	42%
Student progress (or course-taking pathway) is guided by demonstration of proficiency.	23%	<b>38%</b>	24%	29%
Student proficiency levels are being reported to students and parents/guardians.	52%	57%	51%	48%
Data on student proficiency in each learning standard is used to guide curriculum development.	32%	<b>40%</b>	22%	23%

*\*Percentages in bold are significantly higher than other grade levels*

Teachers were furthest along in identifying specific learning expectations for students, and reporting proficiency levels to students and their parents. Less than half of teachers reported full implementation of other key practices.

Teachers were also asked for their beliefs about certain key questions that have been found in our prior research to relate to the core underpinnings of proficiency-based diploma systems. Responses to these items reveal that teachers have varying levels of agreement with some of the foundational principles upon which the policy is built. Their responses are depicted in the full report in Tables 3 and 4; Table 4 is replicated below with a breakdown by grade level.

**Report Table 4. Percent of Teachers Reporting they “Agree” or “Strongly Agree” with Certain Statements of Beliefs about Proficiency-Based Diplomas, by Grade Level\***

Grade Level (N=387)	Grades K-2	Grades 3-5	Grades 6-8	Grades 9-12
High school graduation requirements should be consistent from district to district in Maine.	<b>87%</b>	<b>86%</b>	79%	68%
Proficiency-based graduation requirements increase academic rigor.	33%	19%	31%	18%
Maine school districts are likely to reduce course offerings in content areas that are not specifically included in high school graduation requirements.	67%	64%	<b>71%</b>	<b>78%</b>

*\*Percentages in bold are significantly higher than other grade levels*

Teachers were also given the opportunity to respond to the shifting policy landscape that was present at the time the survey was conducted, with competing legislative bills pending that would each alter the state policy in substantial ways. Only one in three teachers believed that their school district should continue to implement proficiency-based requirements for earning a high school diploma if the state mandate were removed. While many factors are embedded in that question that make interpretation difficult, it is an important indication of the shift in district practices that may result if the state policy requirement is removed.

In additional open-ended survey comments, two themes were foremost in survey items inquiring about successes, challenges, and needed supports: 1) professional collaboration and collective work were essential and effective factors of developing and implementing a proficiency-based high school diploma system, and 2) teachers believe they need more embedded professional time, staffing, and resources dedicated to the substantial work required to implement a proficiency-based high school diploma system.

In addition, other themes were prevalent, although not universally shared by all survey participants. The challenges of reporting clear, standards-based student achievement and inconsistency in definitions and implementation approaches across the state were evident. Significant successes shared by many educators included improved transparency and

understanding with regard to achievement, student data, and learning targets. When asked about unmet needs, teachers most frequently expressed a desire for additional professional resources for supporting students who are not on track for proficiency. They also sought tools for tracking student proficiency, and for more concrete examples of existing successful models of proficiency-based learning systems.

### *How robust are the findings (and what don't we know?)*

The survey response rate was acceptable and resulted in a pool of respondents that adequately represented Maine's public school teachers. This provides reassurance that the data are a fair picture of teacher perceptions. The survey findings were also consistent with teacher feedback in prior case study research, which lends credibility to their validity. However, several factors should guide interpretation of results.

First, the state policy is still being phased in, with current requirements in full effect for the graduating class of 2021. Thus teachers reporting less than full implementation of certain practices could still be on track for meeting the policy expectations. In fact, prior studies have established that practitioners who reported implementation challenges often still felt they would have systems in place to meet state deadlines (although they sometimes questioned the expected quality of their initial systems).

Second, teachers' responses were likely influenced by the policy context at the time of data collection, in which several bills were under consideration to amend or repeal existing statutory requirements. Teachers in favor of proficiency-based diploma requirements may have been more likely to depict certain practices as "fully implemented" and to report agreement with core tenets of the policy, and vice versa.

Lastly, teachers' perceptions are heavily influenced by their own experiences and beliefs, as well as by their individual school and classroom contexts. Survey data alone are insufficient for explaining all the reasons behind their responses. Teachers want the best outcomes for their students, but their perceptions of what is best are highly dependent upon how the policies are being implemented in their local settings, and how students and parents are responding. Because the state policy is still being implemented, there is not yet any empirical information about the impacts of the proficiency-based diploma policy and its accompanying educational strategies on different types of students in different implementation environments. This area of future research will allow further exploration of the factors that contribute to successful student outcomes.



### *What are the implications for policymakers at the local and state levels?*

In all, the spring 2018 survey of teachers provides a snapshot of the complex implementation of a far-reaching state policy. It reveals substantial progress and also areas of tension in efforts to ensure that Maine students who earn high school diplomas have met state learning expectations. Teacher feedback suggests that there is need for additional work:

- Many teachers reported only partial implementation of key practices such as using assessments that align to state standards and having systems for tracking student proficiency. These strategies are necessary components of standards-based learning systems, regardless of whether or not students are required to achieve full proficiency to earn a diploma. School districts and the Maine Department of Education should continue to monitor implementation of these practices and to provide supports where necessary (including compensated professional time), even if state policies are amended. Regional collaboratives could serve as a resource in this ongoing work.
- Only one in five high school teachers agreed or strongly agreed that the proficiency-based diploma policy was increasing academic rigor in their schools. This will likely raise questions for those proponents of the proficiency-based diploma policy who see it as a means for improving Maine students' readiness for college and careers. Policymakers may wish to consider whether the existing implementation path is accomplishing its intended goal(s).
- Given the frequently-cited desire for additional professional learning to support students who are identified as not meeting proficiency, researchers suggest additional study to explore the extent to which Maine schools are implementing state requirements for multi-tiered systems of support such as Response to Intervention. Simply improving ways to identify students who are not proficient will not guarantee improved outcomes; schools must also build adequate supports to help students catch up after having been identified.
- The State, researchers in the field, policymakers and education leaders should continue to provide support and guidance to increase consistency and clarity among all stakeholders with regard to practices and policies *required* by state law and practices or approaches *recommended* as possible implementation models. This will be particularly important if existing policy is amended.

It is important to support public schools, school districts, and their communities with guidance and resources to develop key components their education system, achieve greater alignment between practice and policy in the local context, and improve communication among stakeholders to facilitate successful policy implementation. In turn, these steps and dedication actions should increase performance and efficiency as well as improve learning opportunities for Maine's children.

# Proficiency-based High School Diploma Systems in Maine: Educator Perceptions of Implementation

Amy Johnson & Erika Stump  
Maine Education Policy Research Institute

## Context: Proficiency-based Education Policy & Research in Maine Standards-based and Proficiency-based Education Policy in Maine

Culminating standards-based work from earlier decades, the *Maine Learning Results* were adopted by the Maine Legislature as statewide K-12 education standards in 1997 with the passing of *Resolve, Regarding Legislative Review of Chapter 131: Rules for Learning Results, a Major Substantive Rule of the Department of Education* (H.P. 1093 - L.D. 1536). These standards, developed by Maine educators and educational leaders, included eight academic content areas as well as "Guiding Principles" that reflect expectations of high school graduates to demonstrate civic engagement in addition to certain habits of work and mind. In 2011, Maine adopted the Common Core State Standards in Mathematics and English Language Arts as the state standards in these content areas while retaining the [Maine Learning Results](#) standards in other areas. Although state law and the Maine Constitution prohibit a mandatory statewide curriculum, the Maine Department of Education provides ongoing support for local efforts to align curricula and assessments to these state standards.

In May 2012, the 125th Maine State Legislature passed the chaptered law, *An Act to Prepare Maine People for the Future Economy* ([S.P.439 - L.D.1422](#)). This policy amended Maine's Title 20-A, Chapter 207-A, adding [Subsection 4722-A](#) which requires high school diplomas to be awarded based on demonstration of proficiency in standards, replacing exclusively time-based, credit-based graduation requirements. Initially, all public Maine school districts were expected to implement this graduation policy by 2018.

In the 127th Legislative Session's work in 2016, *An Act to Implement Certain Recommendations of the Maine Proficiency Education Council* ([S.P. 660 - L.D. 1627](#)) was passed into law in Chapter 489. This legislation amended the original 2012 proficiency-based diploma law in several ways. Some of these changes included adaptation of the mandated

timeline for implementation, definition of expectations of students with disabilities, explication of language regarding multiple pathways and opportunity to achieve proficiency, and allowing exception to the high school graduation requirements for students completing certain career and technical education (CTE) programs of study or credentials.

Several additional amendments related to Maine statute were introduced as bills in the most recent 128th Legislative Session; the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs recommended for most of these bills "ought not to pass." Specifically, the only bill to be recommended by the Committee as "Ought to Pass" with amendments was LD 1666 (HP 1152) "An Act to Ensure the Successful Implementation of Proficiency-based Diplomas by Extending the Timeline for Phasing in Their Implementation." As amended by the Committee, this bill would change the mandated element of proficiency-based diploma requirements to be optional for school administrative districts to implement. However, none of the related bills have been acted upon by the House or Senate at the time of this report's publication. In unusual circumstances, the Second Regular Session of the 128th Maine Legislature "adjourned without day" on May 2nd, 2018. Pursuant to the Constitution of Maine, Article IV, Part Third, Section 16, the general effective date for nonemergency laws passed in the Second Regular Session of the 128th Legislature is Wednesday, August 1, 2018" (Maine State Legislature, 2018). There are numerous bills from all legislative committees that have not been acted upon. A special legislative session is being considered, but has not been authorized at the time of writing this report. This is a significant context to identify, as it is the situation in which participants responded to the survey for this study in May 2018.

It is also important to note what is addressed and what is not addressed in Maine's current statute with regard to implementation of a proficiency-based diploma and standards-based education. Appendix A contains a summary of the practices and policies that are statutorily required at the time of writing.

Evidence from MEPRI's empirical research across the state as well as anecdotal evidence provided to the Maine Legislature in public testimony suggested that many educators, administrators, and other stakeholders incorrectly perceived that the statutory requirements included certain educational reform approaches that were often described as "proficiency-based" instructional practices, a term with seeming similarity to the state law. Supporting resources from the Maine Department of Education and other organizations working with schools have

encouraged assorted approaches to learning to support policy implementation, such as student-centered, anytime anywhere, experiential, personalized, customized, and others. Various instructional and assessment practices have also been promoted or adopted at the local level, such as use of a 4-point grading scale (versus 100-point or A-F grading scales), student-paced progress, blended or online learning, increased use of technology for instruction and/or data management, and others. While these practices may prove useful, these **approaches are *not* required within the current state statute** and are not implemented in all Maine school districts. In some districts, schools or classrooms, these methods have been recommended or adopted with the intention of providing guidance and support for implementation of a proficiency-based diploma system, and most of these approaches explicitly endorse proficiency-based or competency-based education. Select schools and districts adopted these approaches in local policy and/or were required to engage in corresponding practices as part of grant-funded agreements or professional support contracts.

### Research to Date Examining Maine's Proficiency-based Diploma Policy

Maine's education history reveals a strong tradition of standards-based education with on-going, complex implementation occurring in schools and classrooms across the state. These efforts have been reinforced by substantial investment and support from various local businesses, organizations and education reform agencies. This work was underscored by the proficiency-based high school diploma systems mandated in state legislation. To further understand these proficiency-based diploma policies within the state, national and global context as well as the implementation work in local schools and school administrative units, the Maine Legislature's Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs has requested that the Maine Education Policy Research Institute's (MEPRI) work plan for the past six years include studies designed to compile data, examine progress and explore impacts regarding implementation of this state policy.

In 2017-2018, Phase VI of this ongoing research includes two separate research studies examining the impacts of implementing proficiency-based diploma systems within the immediate and wider contexts of public schooling in Maine. The first study focused on case studies of *high schools* to examine educators' and administrators' efforts to implement proficiency-based diploma requirements, and their perceptions about the challenges, supports, and impacts of their practices. This case study research from Phase VI can be found in the report:

[Proficiency-based High School Diploma Systems in Maine: Getting to Graduation \(Supporting Students in High Schools Implementing Standards-based Education and Proficiency-based Graduation Requirements\)](#) (Stump and Doykos, 2018). The report included a current review of related literature, including a history of proficiency-based and standards-based education policies in the U.S., the economic and societal importance of high school graduation, and a brief summary of the implementation challenges that accompany education policy reform. It also provided a concise summary of each prior phase of this ongoing study's findings in 2013 to 2017.

This current report describes the second study of Phase VI which used a survey of a random sample of Maine teachers to identify *perceived levels of progress and attitudes* towards implementation of Maine's proficiency-based diploma policy and education approaches. The survey used findings from the high school case studies to identify topics to explore with a representative sample of teachers across the state. It also included items intended to inform potential future policy changes based on the legislation pending at the time of the survey's administration in May 2018.

## Methodology

The spring 2018 study described in this report applied survey methodology to explore the perceptions and attitudes of Maine's PK-12 educators in public schools as they worked to implement the state proficiency-based high school diploma policy as well as related instruction and assessment approaches. This study was guided by the following research questions:

- What are the perceived impacts of implementation of Maine's proficiency-based high school diploma policy and related education practices?
- What are perceived as the challenges and successes in implementation of Maine's proficiency-based high school diploma mandate?
- What are the resources and professional learning support needed in Maine's PK-12 public schools to support students as they work to demonstrate proficiency?
- To what extent are schools and educators in Maine's public schools implementing proficiency-based diploma and education practices, including standards-based curriculum and assessment systems?
- What are Maine public school educators' general attitudes towards the state's proficiency-based high school diploma mandate?

Following an examination of existing related research and literature, including the FY 2018 case studies described above, a fourteen question survey was created to address the research questions. Demographic information about the participant's school as well as questions related to the respondent's professional position were included to allow analysis of the representativeness of the respondent pool. The survey was piloted with experts in the field before being administered electronically.

### Sample & Data Collection

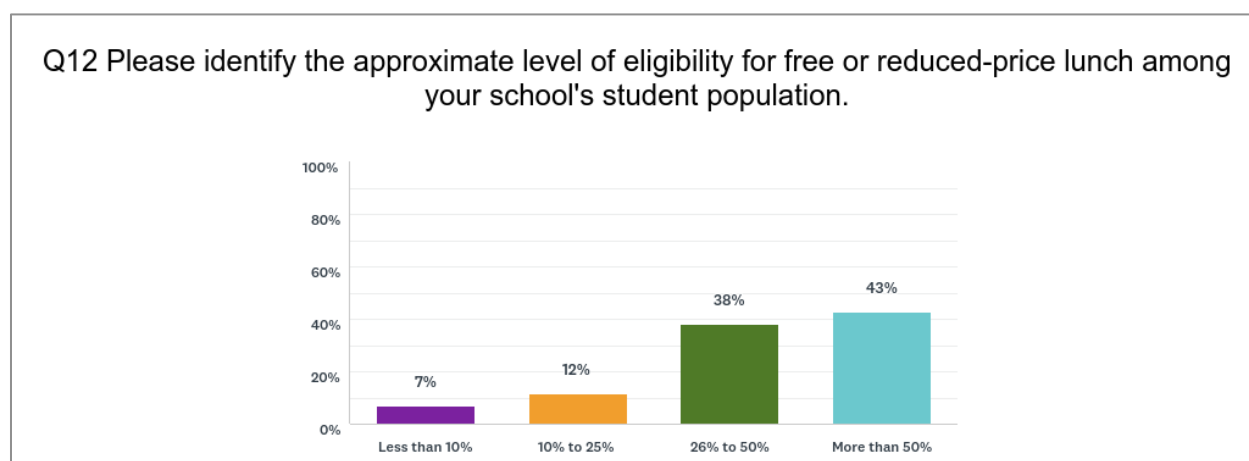
For this study, a random sample of 1,500 educators currently certified to teach in Maine's PK-12 public schools were selected for invitation to participate in this survey research. Utilizing emails provided by the Maine Department of Education, educators were contacted directly by MEPRI via Survey Monkey. A brief introduction email describing the confidentiality and purpose of the study asked recipients to select a link to the survey. The survey invitation was sent on May 9, 2018, and the survey was closed to new entries on May 24, 2018.

A total of 1,084 recipients accessed the survey; 52 emails bounced, and 351 emails remained unopened (presumably filtered out by email handling protocols). No incentive for responding was offered; recipients received two reminders to participate while the survey was open. A total of 442 participants, or 41% of those accessing the message, responded to items in the survey. Respondents could skip any individual question in the survey, so total respondents to any individual item ("n") may be less than the total number of participants (N = 442). Percentages are rounded up, so totals may not always add up to 100.

### Sample Descriptives

The 442 respondents were from 113 unique school administrative units (districts) and reflected a range of school-level enrollment and student eligibility for free/reduced-price lunch (FRPL). Figure 1 below indicates the respondents' self-reported descriptions of their school populations.

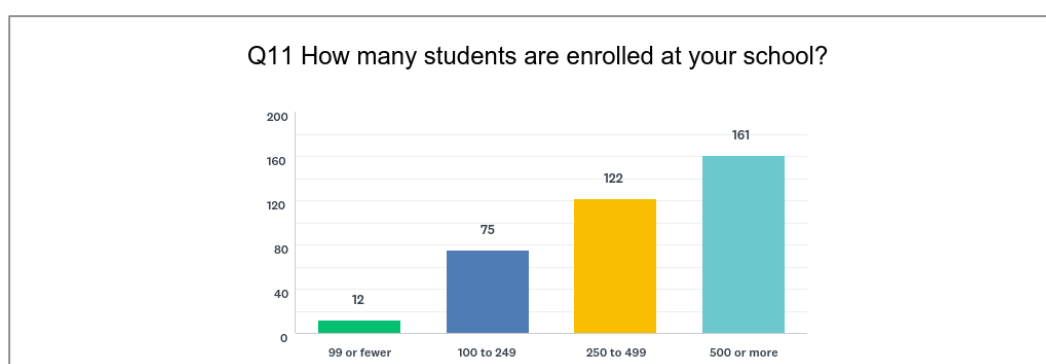
**Figure 1. School-Level Student Eligibility for Free/Reduced-price Lunch (n = 363)**



A large majority of respondents (81%) indicated that more than a quarter of their students were eligible for FRPL, including 43% of respondents with over half of their students eligible. Only 7% of respondents identified their school as affluent, meaning that less than 10% of students were eligible for FRPL. These responses suggest that a large majority of respondents were in schools with significant numbers of students living poverty. The responses are roughly representative of Maine school demographics, with 87% of all Maine schools having FRPL rates above 25% in FY2018, including 48% of schools with rates above 50%.

Figure 2 below identifies the respondents' self-reported description of their school enrollment level.

**Figure 2. School Enrollment (n = 370)**

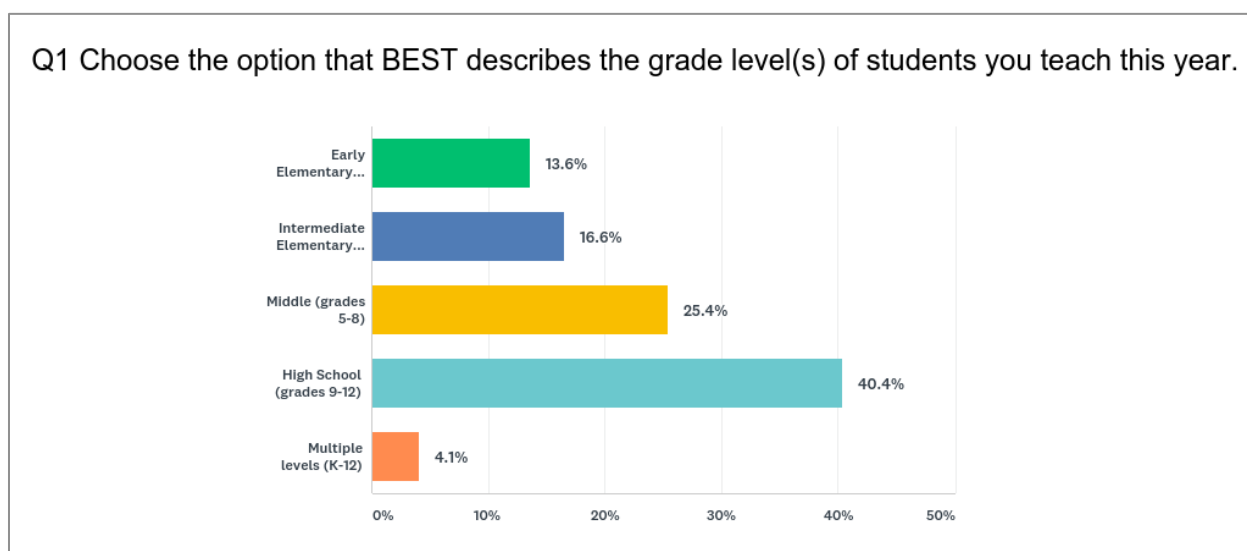


These data indicate that over 3/4 of respondents (76%) were from larger schools with enrollment of 250 students or more. In FY2018, only 54% of Maine public schools enrolled 250 or more students. This means that the respondent pool was less representative of smaller schools than the overall pool of Maine teachers.



The descriptive statistics of the sample of educators responding to the survey is also important to note with consideration of how each respondent's professional role (grade level and content area) may affect his/her responses. Further analysis of this significance as it may relate to themes and trends is discussed in the findings below. It should be noted again that the sample of recipients receiving email invitations to complete this survey was a random sample of PK-12 classroom educators, not including any targeted sample of specific professional groups or teaching areas. Figure 3 below describes the self-identified grade level of the respondents' students in this academic year.

**Figure 3. Grade Level of Students Taught in 2017-18 Academic Year (n = 441)**



High school was the most common level, with over 40% of respondents teaching in this grade span. Elementary grade level was identified by approximately 30% of respondents (14% at early elementary, grades PK-2, and 17% at intermediate elementary, grades 3-5). Twenty-five percent of respondents identified their students at the middle level (grades 5-8), and 4% of respondents identified multiple levels (K-12). In the 2017-2018 school year, about one third of Maine's approximately 12,500 classroom teachers were at the high school level. This means that the respondent pool modestly overrepresented high school teachers. This is perhaps not surprising, as the proficiency-based diploma policy is of pressing interest to high school teachers. Because high schools tend to have larger enrollments than elementary schools, the larger proportion of high school teacher respondents helps to explain the larger school sizes shown in Table 2.

Among all respondents to a survey item about teaching content areas (n = 440), Elementary - Multiple Content Areas (26%), Social Studies or History (22%) and English Language Arts (21%) were the most common areas selected. Respondents could choose more than one option. Mathematics (18%), Science (15%) and Visual/Performing Arts (8%) were the next most common selections. All other options had 25 or fewer selections.

Of the 178 respondents teaching high school level students, English Language Arts (n = 38), Social Studies or History (n = 37), Science (n = 33) and Mathematics (n = 30) were the most common content area identifications. Table 1 below describes the content areas taught by educators with students in grades 9-12.

**Table 1. Content Areas – High School Teachers (n = 178)**

<b>High School Content Area</b>	<b>Number of respondents</b>	<b>Percentage of respondents</b>
English Language Arts	38	21%
Social Studies or History	37	21%
Science	33	19%
Mathematics	30	17%
Visual and/or Performing Arts	16	9%
Career Education (including Career & Technical Education)	15	8%
World Languages	14	8%
Health and/or Physical Ed.	11	6%
Technology and/or Computer Sci	4	2%
Special Education	3	2%
Other	4	2%

Respondents identifying "other" content areas at the high school level described their content area as "Alternative Education," "Business," "English Language Learning," "Gifted and/or Talented."

The responses to the next demographic survey item (n = 370) indicated that respondents had been working in Maine as public school educators for various lengths of time, ranging from one to fifty-three years and averaging seventeen years of experience. This is on par with the average Maine teacher's 15 years of experience. Respondents (n = 368) indicated in another survey item that they had been working in their current school district for various lengths of time, ranging from one to fifty-three years and averaging fourteen years in the district. The average respondent had been working in the state and their current district for over ten years.

In summary, the sample of teacher respondents was fairly representative of all Maine teachers, although high schools teachers were modestly more likely to respond to the survey than elementary or middle-level teachers. The overall number of respondents (442) and response rate (41%) were robust for survey research expectations. This response pool satisfied researchers that the responses were generally representative of Maine teachers across a variety of settings.

Data regarding participants' perceptions was then analyzed and examined for reliability in relation to emergent themes and themes in existing research. The MEPRI research team established key areas of focus as well as significant findings within all research data that were unique or divergent. Findings from this survey research are discussed in this report in the section below. This research reflects only data provided by educators to survey items; researchers did not observe schools or classrooms, and data reflecting administrators' beliefs were not included.

## Findings

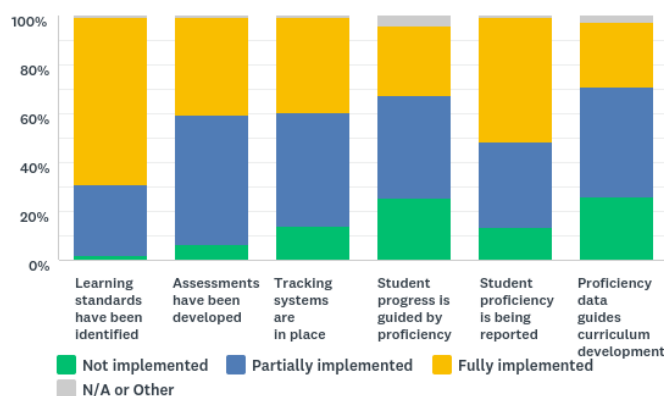
It was evident from these survey responses as well as data from prior related research that implementation of Maine's proficiency-based diploma system was generally perceived with a **variety of attitudes, insights and beliefs**. Teachers at different grade levels may have divergent experiences engaging with the state policy due in part to differing academic standards, and variation in the number of students they teach. High school teachers were faced most immediately with changes to graduation requirements, student performance expectations and curricula due to the nature of the state mandate as a high school graduation policy. It has been noted in prior MEPRI research that elementary level educators were more familiar than high school level teachers with the practice of standards-based grading as this more closely aligned to commonly accepted elementary pedagogy. Similarly, teaching a caseload of over 100 students on a semester schedule with only forty-minute class meetings (as is the context of some high schools) poses unique challenges and opportunities for differentiation, assessment and alignment to standards. On the other hand, working with multiple content areas is often a context unique to elementary or middle-level educators. Therefore, most shared themes that emerged from the responses of Maine PK-12 public school educators represent prevalent perceptions but could vary for different subgroups of teachers.

## Implementation of Proficiency-based Education Practices

As noted, variation was present in survey responses related to perceived implementation levels. With this in mind, the evidence from this study indicates that **teachers were generally implementing practices related to proficiency-based education fully or partially**. The most prevalently implemented practices were identifying learning standards and reporting student proficiency levels. Figure 4 below identifies teachers' reporting of implementation levels.

**Figure 4. Implementation of Practices Related to Proficiency-based Education\*** (n = 407)

Q3 To what extent have the following practices been implemented in your school for the content areas and grades that you are currently teaching?



\* Chart labels have been abbreviated from original question text; see Table 2 for full language.

The data reveal that over 80% of respondents indicated that most of these practices were being implemented at some level. However, some respondents reported that implementation was not active, as explained in the following comment on this item: "The systems in place for tracking student proficiency are left to the teacher. No time has been given to do this work." The **most commonly reported practices to be "fully implemented" were the identification of learning standards and reporting of student achievement in levels of proficiency**. Several respondents qualified their selection, such as this participant who selected "fully implemented" for all items but described the current situation thus: "We had standards-based assessment fully implemented at the high school level for the first half of the year but were told to stop reporting standards and go back to our previous way of assessing because the administration was not confident in the State's commitment to standards-based reporting as far as the Diploma is concerned."

Most practices were reported as being partially implemented. Comments also noted that "partially implemented" could reflect variation at the level of the school, grade span, content area or teacher: "Some disciplines have fully developed assessments for all indicators, some have developed assessments for the classes that this year's freshmen are in, and some are still creating assessments as the year goes on." Overall, this evidence suggests that educators across the state believed implementation of proficiency-based education practices was in progress with some areas of full implementation and some areas of minimal to no implementation.

When broken down by teacher grade levels some minor differences emerged. Intermediate elementary teachers (grades 3-5) were significantly more likely than other grades to report that "specific learning standards that students are expected to meet have been identified," that "systems are in place for tracking student proficiency in each learning standard," "student progress (or course-taking pathway) is guided by demonstration of proficiency," and that "data on student proficiency in each learning standard is used to guide curriculum development." Differences among other grade levels were not statistically significant on these items. Middle and high school teachers were slightly more likely to report that "assessments have been developed and aligned to the learning standards" (significance at the  $p < .10$  level). There were no significant differences across grade levels on the item "student proficiency levels are being reported to students and parents/guardians." Table 2 depicts these differences by reporting the percent of teachers in each grade level that reported each practice as "fully implemented."

**Table 2. Percent of Teachers Reporting "Full Implementation" of Selected Practices, by Grade Level\***

Grade Level (N= 391)	Grades K-2	Grades 3-5	Grades 6-8	Grades 9-12
Specific learning standards that students are expected to meet have been identified.	61%	<b>84%</b>	69%	65%
Assessments have been developed and aligned to the learning standards.	30%	33%	<b>44%</b>	<b>44%</b>
Systems are in place for tracking student proficiency in each learning standard.	32%	<b>52%</b>	32%	42%
Student progress (or course-taking pathway) is guided by demonstration of proficiency.	23%	<b>38%</b>	24%	29%
Student proficiency levels are being reported to students and parents/guardians.	52%	57%	51%	48%
Data on student proficiency in each learning standard is used to guide curriculum development.	32%	<b>40%</b>	22%	23%

*\*Percentages in bold are significantly higher than other grade levels*

## Proficiency-based Education Policy

Participants in this survey research were asked to indicate their level of agreement to statements related to the impact of proficiency-based education policies in Maine. Table 3 identifies the percentage of responses in each level of agreement for the three survey items.

**Table 3. Educator Response to Impacts of Proficiency-based Graduation Policy (n = 403)**

Impact of Policy	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
High school graduation requirements should be consistent from district to district in Maine.	3%	9%	11%	43%	34%
Proficiency-based graduation requirements increase academic rigor.	28%	27%	21%	17%	6%
Maine school districts are likely to reduce course offerings in content areas that are not specifically included in high school graduation requirements.	3%	7%	18%	43%	30%

Again, responses were varied but reflected significant levels of agreement regarding belief that there should be **statewide consistency of high school graduation requirements** and the likelihood that **course offerings would be reduced within content areas that were not explicitly included in proficiency-based graduation requirements**. The majority of responses reflected that **teachers do not believe that proficiency-based high school graduation requirements increase academic rigor**.

Table 4 provides a depiction of how teacher perspectives varied by grade level by showing the percentage of teachers in strong agreement with each of the above three statements, by grade level.

**Table 4. Percent of Teachers Reporting they “Agree” or “Strongly Agree” with Certain Statements of Beliefs about Proficiency-Based Diplomas, by Grade Level**

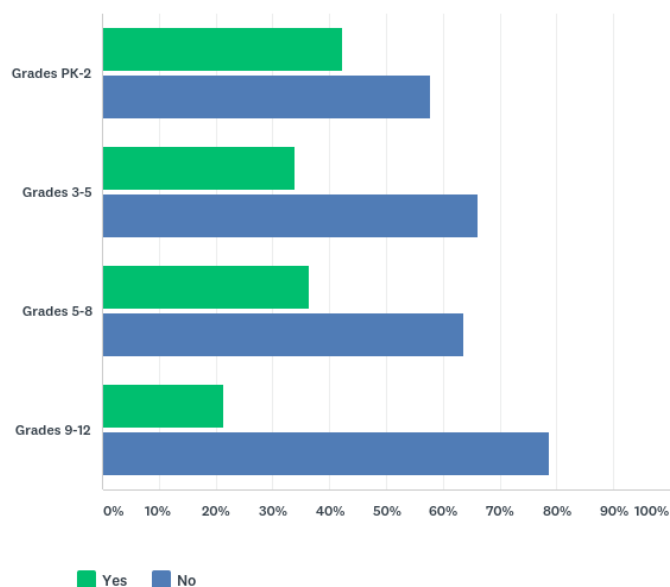
Grade Level (N=387)	Grades K-2	Grades 3-5	Grades 6-8	Grades 9-12
High school graduation requirements should be consistent from district to district in Maine.	<b>87%</b>	<b>86%</b>	79%	68%
Proficiency-based graduation requirements increase academic rigor.	33%	19%	31%	18%
Maine school districts are likely to reduce course offerings in content areas that are not specifically included in high school graduation requirements.	67%	64%	<b>71%</b>	<b>78%</b>

*\*Percentages in bold are significantly higher than other grade levels*

With consideration of these beliefs as well as the self-reported levels of implementation, successes, and challenges, participants were asked if they believed their district should continue to implement proficiency-based high school graduation requirements even if the state law changed and no longer mandated this policy. Of the 363 respondents, 108 (29.8%) indicated that their district should continue to implement proficiency-based diploma requirements while 255 (70.2%) indicated that their **district should not continue proficiency-based diploma requirements if state law did not mandate it**. As with several prior items, response patterns varied based on teacher grade level (see Figure 5), with high school teachers more likely than elementary teachers to forego district-mandated diploma policies.

**Figure 5. Educator Perceptions of High School Graduation Policy, by Grade Level**

Q9 In your opinion, should your district continue to implement proficiency-based requirements for earning a high school diploma even if state legislation did not mandate it?



It is critically important to note that there are multiple possible interpretations of this response pattern. Teachers responding with a “no” are not necessarily in favor of a change in state policy; they may support the concept of proficiency-based diplomas, but only if implemented statewide. However, while interpretation of underlying reasons may be difficult, the responses are an important indication of the internal pressure that districts may face to eliminate district-level proficiency requirements if the state policy is amended to make proficiency-based diplomas optional.

## Perceptions of Challenges and Successes

Variation persisted across responses to survey items asking participants to list the most significant challenges and successes their schools have experienced in the work to implement Maine's proficiency-based high school diploma mandate. Only a couple of themes were universal. For most other responses there was some level of contradiction. For example, some respondents cited inconsistency in defining proficiency as a challenge while other respondents indicated that common language to define proficiency was a success in their schools. This may reflect the realities of various schools, different experiences of individual educators, contexts of specific content areas or grade levels as well as other factors contributing to teachers' perceptions of success and challenge. This report identifies common themes that emerged as most prevalent among the data, but many of these themes also had a smaller number of contrasting perceptions.

### *Challenges of Implementation*

One of the most common challenges identified by educators was the **need for more time to learn, develop and implement proficiency-based education approaches**. There were no responses indicating an abundance of time or suggesting that additional time would not be useful.

While teachers identified multiple challenges and successes experienced in their schools' work to implement Maine's state-level proficiency-based diploma mandate, some common themes emerged in this research data. A frequently cited challenge by educators was the **need for increased opportunities embedded within their professionally compensated time to understand and create a local proficiency-based high school diploma system**. Responses identified a need for more common "time to build the system" with grade-level and content-area colleagues. Time was needed to develop shared "understandings and buy-in" of definitions and standards, align curriculum to standards, create curriculum materials and assessments and examine related theories and research literature as well as their own classroom/school/district data. Educators noted that this work must be "purposeful collaboration" with shared goals and clear communication engaging numerous stakeholders. Responses indicated that resistance to change-- including "significant push back from community members who don't understand proficiency-based learning and/or standards-based reporting" as well as negative reactions from colleges, community members and educators--could only be overcome with an authentic, dedicated integration of professional time for clarifying local approaches, practices and



philosophies as well as meaningful reflection on "perceptions and misconceptions" as well as effectiveness of these elements.

**Reporting student performance in a proficiency-based system was another common challenge** cited by educators in this research. Many participants described uncertainty, inconsistency and dislike for the grading scale adopted by their school. In many cases, this referred to a change from A-F scale to a 1-4 scale, in which "inconsistency between teacher interpretation" and "lack of motivation from students who don't like the 1-4 scale" were noted and the scale was described as "too vague," "takes away from high achievers," and "parents...need lots more communication to buy in." However, some respondents believed schools should utilize a "more rigor[ous] and accurate means of evaluating through Standard-Based Grading." Multiple respondents indicated that their school used "hybrid" reporting or grading systems that combined both types of grading scales or assessment methods. In some cases, this was cited as a challenge while in other cases it was perceived as a success. Some respondents mentioned concern for interpretation of grades in post-secondary contexts: "Information received by students attending college visits that a proficiency-based grading system (only) reported on their transcripts will be a detriment to their acceptance and scholarship opportunities" was identified as a challenge.

Reporting student performance and maintaining student achievement data was revealed as a challenge by many participants often in relation to **the need for software or digital learning management systems that were efficient and fit a standards-based grading** approach. Although a few existing software programs were specifically noted, none of these programs was reported as a success. For example, one respondent commented that "the trending algorithm is terrible" in the system used in the school. Another response identified a challenge as the "reporting platform/software that is counter intuitive, cumbersome and fails to communicate growth, strengths and trends in student learning."

Some participants identified that the lack of understanding regarding grading or proficiency-based education practices decreased motivation to perform well. Multiple responses noted that a proficiency-based practice of allowing students multiple opportunities to demonstrate proficiency in each standard could result in procrastination, lack of motivation or delayed progress: "Students are not studying well the first time because they know they can just retake it later." This practice was also reported to consume a lot of teacher time: "A lot of time

needs to be allotted for teachers to meet and choose the standards to test on and then create those assessments and the numerous retakes that are needed."

While some respondents identified proficiency-based education approaches as more rigorous than traditional education approaches, a common challenge in the transition to proficiency-based diploma systems was the maintenance of rigor or feeling that **"rigor is lessened to make sure students meet the standard."** Respondents indicated that there was significant pressure to keep students progressing through the grades and to graduate with their class even if they were not performing proficiently at grade level. One teacher commented:

Students that do not demonstrate proficiency are moved on to the next course. There is no solid plan in place to address all of the students who are falling behind, since they are not proficient. Students will continue to graduate without demonstrating proficiency. Teachers felt they were being held responsible for students' performance: "If graduates don't graduate on time, it appears as though we are not doing our jobs." Participants noted that the pressure to report students as proficient even when they were not could result in a "decrease in rigor (to make graduation rates look better)."

A complication in maintaining a level of rigor and authentic expectations for demonstrating proficiency was the overwhelming sense of **inconsistency in definitions of proficiency and implementation practices**. Respondents referenced inconsistency in expectations or standards between Career Technical Education programs and local high schools as well as for various populations of students. Educators said that "targets should be the same throughout the state," yet, "teachers perceive learning targets to mean different things." There was also contradiction evident in these beliefs. Respondents wanted "more local voice in learning targets we feel are important for our students to master" while also indicating that there was "disagreement among grades levels with regards to targets" and "inconsistent expectations from school to school and no solid guidelines, too much local control." Some teachers also believed that "building autonomy that connects with state/local mandates" was critical to success because "a moving target is hard to hit."

Insufficient resources and funding was another common theme in the findings of this research related to challenges to implementing proficiency-based diploma systems, which will be discussed further in the following sections regarding needed resources and recommendations for professional learning.

Various other challenges were cited at a lower level of prevalence among these survey items. Some educators lamented decreased electives and pathway alternatives (such as vocational education, alternative education, online learning and experiential learning) with the greater focus on requiring students to meet baseline standards in eight content areas. Multiple respondents identified resistance from various stakeholders as a challenge to dedicating needed time to implementing proficiency-based education practices or making changes to improve student opportunities.

### *Successes of Implementation*

Participants in this survey indicated that Maine's proficiency-based diploma mandate had resulted in various successes. Respondents uniformly acknowledged the **benefit of increased professional collaboration and collective work** as it related to standards-based education implementation. While finding time to dedicate to this collaboration was noted as a challenge, the opportunity to engage in this shared process was noted only as a success. Responses also suggested that educators believed this state policy had improved the available data on students' academic performance, thereby creating increased transparency and clarity with regard to academic goals as well as better understanding among students of their own content area achievement and targets. There was also a perspective common among multiple respondents to this survey that implementation of proficiency-based diploma policy increased rigor. This perception is contradictory to the finding discussed above that multiple respondents cited decreased rigor as a challenge of implementation. However, both findings were apparent and could be further evidence of the variation of beliefs and attitudes among Maine's educators regarding proficiency-based diploma policy.

**Increased professional collaboration and continuity** was a shared success of implementing Maine's proficiency-based diploma policy. Survey respondents noted that development of a proficiency-based system required greater and better communication among educators in all roles. Participants indicated that there was more "dialogue about student achievement" and "discussions about teaching practice." A response noted, "Teachers are talking about what interventions to implement when students don't get it." Creating teaching materials and assessments for a K-12 standards-based curricula necessitated connections between "core" academic content areas (English, Mathematics, Science) and "non-core" areas as well as between educational programs (CTE, alternative education, special education, English Learner programs,

etc.). It was clearly noted that time to engage in this collaborative work was limited by staffing levels, schedules, funding and resources. However, when it occurred, it was unanimously defined as a success of implementation.

The most prevalent theme within the identification of successes was the perception that **students better understood their own achievement and goals** in the content areas. While educators noted that there was still room for improvement in students' awareness and attention to habits of work standards, survey respondents indicated that increased student voice and choice was a success. "We are making students aware of what goals are being addressed," wrote one participant. Another educator identified "increased understanding and self-awareness" from students as a success.

This perceived benefit appeared to be related to the shared belief that the state's **proficiency-based diploma mandate had improved the data on students' academic performance**. Teachers indicated that there was greater communication with students and their families about achievement on content area standards. "Specific feedback for students" from standards-based grading, formative assessments and explicit rubrics was cited as a success of implementation. In addition, many respondents described enhanced systems of interventions for struggling students in their schools or districts. One respondent wrote, "There is a commitment to student learning first...time for remediation, re-teaching, re-assessing [because] we have an intervention block every day."

A successful proficiency-based education system was described as having a **curriculum aligned with common standards** which were articulated in assessments and reporting. A respondent suggested that with such a system, "grading is less ambiguous." In turn, "improvement in engagement due to differentiation" implemented in a manner that articulated student needs and performance was a cited success. Such a system was seen as allowing students to be more involved and aware of the learning objectives. Professionals said this process reinforced students' understanding through "common language on standards" and "consistency in expectations." Some respondents noted that there were increased resources in their schools/districts for students needing remediation or struggling to demonstrate proficiency in standards. The state policy's requirement that students be offered "multiple opportunities" to demonstrate proficiency was identified as an impetus to dedicating staff, time, and learning materials to offering students "second chances" and "increasing graduation rates."

Multiple survey respondents believed that this process of implementing such practices and approaches related to proficiency-based systems had **"increased [student] engagement due to differentiation,"** especially for chronically lower-performing students. Instruction was described as more "individualized" and having "greater objectivity." One educator wrote, "Students at the lower end of the academic spectrum are meeting higher levels of achievement." Another respondent noted, "Kids who have struggled in the past feel like they can engage more now." Educators identified that "students strive for higher proficiency" as a significant success of Maine's proficiency-based diploma policy because there had been a "change of mindset from 'what we teach' to 'what students learn.'"

### Resources Needed for Successful Implementation

Survey respondents were asked to identify "resources, supports or strategies essential to supporting the implementation and development of proficiency-based diploma systems." Some participants commented that it was difficult to respond to this item due to the previously noted challenge of inconsistent "objectives of what we are supposed to be doing." However, many responses elaborated on the prior challenges by suggesting specific approaches, areas of need or resources. The **most common request was for strategies and methods to provide improved and increased remediation for students struggling to demonstrate proficiency.** A related common theme in these responses was reiteration for **software or digital programs** that accommodated standards-based grading and proficiency-based systems efficiently and effectively. Educators also wished to be exposed to explicit **"successful models" of schools, classrooms and teachers** implementing proficiency-based education.

Although there were multiple recommendations for various resources and methods of supporting the implementation of proficiency-based diploma systems in PK-12 educational settings, the most prevalent theme was the need for more time. Echoing this theme in the challenges to implementation discussed in earlier sections of this report as well as previous years' reports on similar research, teachers adamantly indicated that **the transition to proficiency-based education requires dedicated, embedded, compensated professional time.** Time was required for defining consistent standards and proficiency levels as well as developing curricula and assessments. Time was required for piloting learning materials, creating valid assessments, developing reliable scoring processes. Time was required for implementing, reflecting, and evaluating in a cycle of continuous improvement. Time was required for communicating

philosophies, changes, and practices to students, families and invested stakeholders. Time was required for open discussions of practice, critical analysis of data, and application of learning. Time was required to employ improved instructional strategies, support students, develop methods of differentiation, assess and re-assess student work, input student data, and report student progress. "If it is a priority for the state, that should be emphasized in the district."

Another common theme in responses was the perception that **increased staffing was essential to implementing proficiency-based systems**. Multiple respondents indicated that more teachers were needed in their schools to provide individual support to students or remediation to the growing numbers of children not meeting proficiency in required standards. One respondent wrote, "There is not time, place or staff to remediate." In order to implement the successes noted in the previous section, educators believed "additional professional staff in content area(s)" was necessary. Some recommendations included staffing schools or districts with curriculum leaders who had the expertise and opportunity to provide relevant, useful training as well as related learning materials and insightful, sustained feedback. Other recommendations called for improved leadership (at the state and local level) with a shared vision aware of teacher and student realities.

Survey respondents requested the opportunity to engage with professionals in their grade level and content area who worked at **"model schools or districts" implementing proficiency-based systems "successfully."**

Viable, established models that illustrate improved student success rates, improved school culture, and or a hybrid system that blends time-tested pedagogy with strategically incorporated new approaches that honor existing mastery and allow for intentional and responsive changes.

Some participants noted that they wanted "models in action" instead of literature and rhetoric about theories or philosophies. Responses reflected interest in engaging in "research-based information provided for staff to understand the value of shifting to a proficiency-based system," such as effective pilot programs, data and evidence-based practices. Respondents also noted, however, that discussion of implementation had to be open to all outcomes even those results that did not show that proficiency-based education was successful and opportunity to "meeting with others to discuss what is working or not working." Another participant described the

necessity of a "safe environment for teachers to express disagreements about the system and its implementation."

In response to this item requesting essential resources, many survey respondents identified the need for an **efficient digital learning management system**. Specifically, educators expressed that software with an appropriate standards-based capacity to track K-12 student information and produce clear grade reports for all content areas was requisite to developing a proficiency-based system. In addition, respondents noted that ample training to use the software for all applicable staff must be embedded in professional time. Some comments raised concerns with existing digital systems, which they reported as too expensive, including grade reports that are not understood or "harmful to the philosophy of proficiency[-based education]."

Certain recommendations for essential resources, support or strategies to implement proficiency-based diploma systems were less predominant among the sample of responses but still relevant. Educators also suggested that they needed more tools for communication, materials and textbooks aligned with standards, reliable internet access for their students and small classes or student caseloads. Finding common definitions and grade reporting practices that aligned with post-secondary expectations for scholarships, awards and college admissions was also identified as critical to the success of this transition. Some respondents also believed that it was critical for stakeholders and policymakers to have greater "trust in teachers' judgment."

### **Educators' Recommendations for Professional Development**

A consistent theme throughout the responses to several items in this survey examining teachers' perceptions of Maine's proficiency-based high school diploma policy was the necessity of providing **embedded professional development opportunities**. Professional development was described as time for collective work, individual and shared learning, enhancing content area expertise as well as collaboration with colleagues. Teachers specified that funding for these opportunities must not be the responsibility of the individual and must occur within the bounds of professional expectations or compensated equally. Several respondents noted that they felt their district had "exhausted" in-state experiences and needed better learning opportunities. As mentioned in previous sections of this report, essential professional time was perceived as critical to developing effective **remediation strategies** for struggling students, **collective work** to create curricula and assessments aligned with standards, building relationships with **model schools** or



mentors with "successful" practices and training for integration of any new supportive **digital systems** and technology.

Specific professional learning recommendations included consistent feedback on teaching practice from "experts in proficiency-based learning," training to enhance strategies in public relations and communication with post-secondary institutions, students, families and stakeholders, as well as active learning sessions to share how to integrate proficiency-based education with other education approaches (such as experiential learning, project-based learning, portfolios, place-based learning and others).

## Conclusions

Findings of this survey research study reiterated conclusions from prior related research that perceptions of implementation progress, necessary resources and attitudes regarding proficiency-based education practices and policy reveal considerable variation. This variation may reflect the diverse conditions of individual schools/districts/communities, the various attitudes of professionals in this field as well as specific situations of certain grade levels, content areas or programs. Further research or analysis may be prudent to examine some of these contexts distinctly or as they relate to each other.

However, two critical and uncontested themes were consistent through the data in this research study involving PK-12 public school educators in Maine:

- 1) Professional collaboration and collective work were essential and effective components of developing and implementing a proficiency-based high school diploma system.
- 2) Teachers believe they need more embedded professional time, staffing and resources dedicated to the substantial work required to implement a proficiency-based high school diploma system.

In addition, other themes were prevalent although not universally shared by all research participants. The challenges of reporting clear, standards-based student achievement and inconsistency in definitions and implementation approaches across the state were evident. Significant successes shared by many educators included improved transparency and understanding with regard to achievement, student data, and learning targets.

Despite the considerable work completed so far and many success stories cited by teachers, they also report that several key elements to a valid proficiency-based diploma system



are not yet fully implemented. In particular, less than half of high school teachers reported full implementation of “assessments have been developed and aligned to the learning standards,” and “systems are in place for tracking student proficiency in each learning standard.” These practices are critical for authentically standards-based learning systems.

## Considerations for Policy and Practice

*An Act to Implement Certain Recommendations of the Maine Proficiency Education Council* (S.P. 660 - L.D. 1627) was passed into law as Chapter 489 in 2016. This legislation revised and added to amendments to *Maine's Revised Statute Title 20-A: Education* passed in 2012 within *An Act to Prepare Maine People for the Future Economy* (S.P.439 - L.D.1422), requiring Maine's public school districts to implement proficiency-based diplomas and standards-based education systems. Evidence from this research reflected implications of this state policy as perceived by PK-12 educators in Maine.

The following considerations for policy and practice reflect this and previous year's research with regard to Maine's proficiency-based education state requirements within statute at the time of writing this report. It is noted that the most recent session of the Maine Legislature adjourned without full consideration of numerous bills, including one bill recommended "ought to pass" by the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs that would substantially change current statute by removing the mandate that school administrative units award high school diplomas exclusively to students demonstrating proficiency in content area standards.

- The State, researchers in the field, policymakers and education leaders should continue to provide support and guidance to increase consistency and clarity among all stakeholders with regard to practices and policies *required* by state law and practices or approaches *recommended* as possible implementation models. This will be particularly important if existing policy is amended.
- Many teachers reported only partial implementation of key practices such as using assessments that align to state standards and having systems for tracking student proficiency. These strategies are necessary components of standards-based learning systems, regardless of whether or not students are required to achieve full proficiency to earn a diploma. School districts and the Maine Department of Education should

continue to monitor implementation of these practices and to provide supports where necessary, even if state policies are amended. Schools should continue to provide, and where necessary increase, compensated professional time to develop common definitions and greater consistency in standards and proficiency levels. Regional collaboratives could serve as a resource in this ongoing work. This may require additional and sustained resources in some settings. More specifically, the State and/or regional collaboratives could provide technical resources to help school districts develop and implement learning management systems to support standards-based reporting and proficiency-based systems. This role could include technical and financial assistance where needed in implementing technology-based local learning management systems that align with state-level reporting requirements and offer effective technical options for districts' data systems.

- Only one in five high school teachers agreed or strongly agreed that the proficiency-based diploma policy was increasing academic rigor in their schools. This will likely raise questions for those proponents of the proficiency-based diploma policy who see it as a means for improving Maine students' readiness for college and careers. Policymakers may wish to consider whether the existing implementation path is accomplishing its intended goal(s).
- Given the frequently-cited desire for additional professional learning to support students who are identified as not meeting proficiency, researchers suggest additional study to explore the extent to which Maine schools are implementing state requirements for multi-tiered systems of support such as Response to Intervention. Simply improving ways to identify students who are not proficient will not guarantee improved outcomes; schools must also build adequate supports to help students catch up after having been identified.

It is important to support public schools, school districts and their communities with guidance and resources to develop key components their education system, achieve greater alignment between practice and policy in the local context, and improve communication among stakeholders to facilitate successful policy implementation. In turn, these steps and dedication actions should increase performance and efficiency as well as improve learning opportunities for Maine's children.

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## Appendix A: Required and Optional State Policies

Key elements of *Maine's Revised Statute Title 20-A: Education* related to proficiency-based high school graduation requirements and standards-based education are summarized below, usually maintaining the statute language with some edits for clarity. Statutory language of "shall" or "must" indicate mandated requirements while "may" indicates an allowance but not a mandate for public schools (usually specified as secondary schools in this section), school administrative units or the Commissioner of Education. The following is based on state statute in effect at the time of reporting in June 2018.

### **A (secondary) school shall/must:**

- Ensure sufficient opportunity and capacity through multiple pathways for all students to study and achieve proficiency in career and education development, English language arts, health education and physical education, mathematics, science and technology, social studies, visual and performing arts and world languages as well as the guiding principles.
- Provide a comprehensive program of instruction of at least two years in length, which must meet the requirements of the chapter and the parameters for essential instruction and graduation requirements. The program must include instruction for all students in career and education development, English language arts, health education and physical education, mathematics, science and technology, social studies, visual and performing arts and world languages.
- American history, government, citizenship and Maine studies must be taught, and instruction must be aligned with the parameters for essential instruction and graduation requirements.
- Certify that the student (earning a diploma) has demonstrated proficiency in meeting state standards in all content areas of the system of learning results and each of the guiding principles.
  - Exceptions are included for student populations relating to CTE, special education, veterans, waivers, and others.

- Certify that the student (earning a diploma) has engaged in educational experiences relating to English language arts, mathematics and science and technology in each year of the student's secondary schooling.
- Students must be allowed to gain proficiency through multiple pathways and demonstrate proficiency by presenting multiple types of evidence.

**A school administrative unit shall/must:**

- In addition to maintaining a high school transcript for each student, a school administrative unit shall certify each student's content area proficiency, which must be included with the student's permanent academic transcript.
- Award a high school diploma based on student demonstration of proficiency.

**The Commissioner of Education shall/must:**

- Develop rules to accomplish the purposes of this section [which] must...
  - Allow local flexibility and innovation in developing consistent graduation standards.
  - Enable school administrative units to continue current progress aligned with the phase-in of the standards and proficiency requirements.
  - Describe standard criteria for ensuring equal educational opportunities for students.
  - Address the appropriate placement of students in career and technical education programs while ensuring that all students be exposed to all the content areas of the system of learning results through the 10th year of their studies.
  - Identify the manner in which the opportunities for learning in multiple pathways of career and technical education programs may be used to satisfy certain components of the system of learning results.
- Prescribe by rule basic courses of study that are in alignment with the system of learning results.
- [The department shall] establish parameters for essential instruction in English language arts; mathematics; science and technology; social studies; career and education development; visual and performing arts; health, physical education and wellness; and world languages.

**The Commissioner of Education may:**

- In order to facilitate the transformation of the public education system to one in which standards are used to guide curriculum and instruction and in which student advancement and graduation are based on student demonstration of proficiency in meeting educational standards, the commissioner may waive or alter any provision of this Title [20-A] (exceptions noted).

Prescribe by rule basic courses of study that include minimum time requirements and performance standards.



## Proficiency-based Education - Maine Public School Teachers

## Educator Role

1. Choose the option that BEST describes the grade level(s) of students you teach this year.

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="radio"/> Early Elementary (grades PK-2)       | <input type="radio"/> High School (grades 9-12) |
| <input type="radio"/> Intermediate Elementary (grades 3-5) | <input type="radio"/> Multiple levels (K-12)    |
| <input type="radio"/> Middle (grades 5-8)                  |   |

2. Which content area(s) do you teach? Check all that apply.

- ☐ Elementary - Multiple Content Areas
- ☐ English Language Arts or Literacy
- ☐ World Languages
- ☐ Mathematics
- ☐ Science
- ☐ Technology and/or Computer Science
- ☐ Social Studies or History
- ☐ Visual and/or Performing Arts
- ☐ Career Education (including any subjects in Career Technical Education)
- ☐ Health and/or Physical Education
- ☐ Special education
- ☐ Other (please specify)

## Standards-Based Policy Implementation

3. To what extent have the following practices been implemented in your school for the content areas and grades that you are currently teaching?

	Not implemented	Partially implemented	Fully implemented	N/A or Other
Specific learning standards that students are expected to meet have been identified.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Assessments have been developed and aligned to the learning standards.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Systems are in place for tracking student proficiency in each learning standard.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Student progress (or course-taking pathway) is guided by demonstration of proficiency.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Student proficiency levels are being reported to students and parents/guardians.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Data on student proficiency in each learning standard is used to guide curriculum development.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Other (please describe)

## Insights on Policy Implementation

4. Indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements related to the impact of proficiency-based education policies in Maine.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
High school graduation requirements should be consistent from district to district in Maine.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Proficiency-based graduation requirements increase academic rigor.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Maine school districts are likely to reduce course offerings in content areas that are not specifically included in high school graduation requirements.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Perceptions of Implementation

5. List 1-3 of the most significant challenges your school has experienced in implementing Maine's proficiency-based diploma mandate.

1

2

3

6. List 1-3 of the most significant successes your school has seen as a result of implementing Maine's proficiency-based diploma mandate.

1

2

3

7. What resources, supports, or strategies are essential to support the development and implementation of proficiency-based diploma systems. List up to three.

Resource 1

Resource 2

Resource 3

8. What type of professional learning, resources or support would be helpful in your work to help students attain proficiency?

Topic 1

Topic 2

Topic 3

Overall Perceptions

9. In your opinion, should your district continue to implement proficiency-based requirements for earning a high school diploma even if state legislation did not mandate it?

☐ Yes

☐ No

## Background

10. Which grade level description BEST describes your school?

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="radio"/> Elementary (pK-5, K-4, pK-2, etc.)   | <input type="radio"/> Elementary and middle (K-8) |
| <input type="radio"/> Middle (5-8, 6-8, etc.)              | <input type="radio"/> All grades (K-12)           |
| <input type="radio"/> High school (9-12, 7-12, 8-12, etc.) | <input type="radio"/> Other                       |

Other (please describe)

11. How many students are enrolled at your school?

- ☐ 99 or fewer
- ☐ 100 to 249
- ☐ 250 to 499
- ☐ 500 or more

12. Please identify the approximate level of eligibility for free or reduced-price lunch among your school's student population.

- ☐ Less than 10%
- ☐ 10% to 25%
- ☐ 26% to 50%
- ☐ More than 50%

13. How many years you have been working **in Maine** as a public school educator?

14. How many years you have been working **in this district** as an educator?