



## **MASTERY-BASED LEARNING WORK GROUP MEETING**

**November 14, 2019 Meeting Agenda**

**1:00-4:00 p.m.**

*Avanti High School*

*1113 Legion Way SE, Olympia, WA 98501*

**Meeting Purpose:** This meeting will be focused on the school and student perspective. Additionally, work group members will have a discussion around the draft interim report.

### **Agenda:**

**1:00-1:10**                      **Welcome**

**1:10-2:15**                      **Mastery-Based Learning: Perspective from Three Schools**

*Michael Velasquez, Principal, Avanti High School*

At Avanti, the curriculum and pedagogy is derived by what students learn about themselves. Classroom self-assessments and other tools help students figure out who they are and how they learn. The more students learn about themselves, the more they can advocate for themselves as learners. "This is how I learn and this is what I need..." When a student is advocating for themselves, it helps teachers do their job better.

We have Avanti Habits, which are our form of core competencies or 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, and these include creativity, critical thinking, innovation, social justice, demonstrations of mastery in each subject area, resiliency, and responsibility. Our mission is to be student-centered and focus on depth over breadth in learning, compassion and mindfulness, metacognition, and reflection. Our professional learning community this year has discussed the book *Grading for Equity* by Joe Feldman.

Our model deemphasizes grades—no C, D, or Fs are given because of mastery model. A mastery/competency level of a "B" is the minimum expectation on all assignments, in all classes, for all students. Mastery is defined ahead of time as part of the student's learning plan and is based on an 80% minimum expectation on all assignments and classes. Mastery is determined by the teacher's interpretation of if the student has met by the state learning standards. (Half of a credit is determined to be the equivalent of 75 hours—however long or short it takes the student to complete these learning standards.)

The goal is to create an environment where risk-taking is encouraged (in traditional model, failure is not encouraged when you are focused on grades). The focus is on the learning that comes from making mistakes as part of the learning process, so assignment re-takes, revisions, experience, and timely feedback are all valued.

We have morning and afternoon students—students are only required to take three classes a day, then are doing the rest of their work at home. Based on their individual goals and circumstances, some students do take more than three classes a day. We have both teacher driven and student driven classes, based on student needs (left or right brain thinkers, etc. Students determine in each subject which type

they want to take.) Fridays are devoted to interventions and support all day long. We have a .5 FTE (Full-Time Equivalent) special education teacher. Special education student needs are met in the general classroom here because the learning is so individualized.

At Avanti, we have a focus on meaningful assessments of mastery, including through project-based learning. Every year we have exhibitions where each student presents their learning to their families and it is open to the community. We also have a community engagement group that meets monthly. We do a lot of field experiences and bringing parents in as expert guest speakers, etc.

The environment and culture of our school is one where everyone knows each other and wants each other to benefit. An educator shared her teaching has changed since beginning at Avanti, because she feels the freedom to focus on relationships with her students. This has always been part of her desired pedagogy, but now she feels the freedom to take that approach in her classroom. Several students shared that Avanti is a place they feel like they belong as students. In the principal's opinion, 200-300 is a good size for this type of choice school—to ensure the feeling of belonging and community is realized.

*Julia Bamba, Principal, Gibson Ek High School*

After our district closed an alternative school, they opened Gibson Ek four years ago under the Big Picture Learning model (with a waiver from credit graduation requirements). This is the first year that seniors will have been there since their start of high school career—we have 48 seniors this year. Most students do not come to school on Tuesdays/Thursdays because they are at internships.

Under our model, students graduate based on competencies, not credits. The rubric ranges from “emerging” to “empowered” levels of competency. Students can meet a competency at either the foundational level or the advanced level (advanced level has additional requirements, including that the project must include: having an impact on the community beyond the school, design thinking, working with a mentor, and influencing peers to make changes). Design labs are interdisciplinary and are an opportunity for students to dive into deeper learning through a variety of interesting elective courses.

Students are collecting evidence of their learning throughout their high school career, they then sit down and discuss their learning with their advisor. Gibson Ek uses Google Drive as the student dashboard—each student has an evidence folder for their projects, to demonstrate their learning. Google sheets is their tracking method of competencies.

Gibson Ek is also a pilot school for the Mastery Transcript Consortium's new transcript model this year.

*Aaron J. Smith, Principal, Odyssey Middle School & Discovery High School*

In 2015, the district bond committee decided to create a new high school option. They involved students in the redesign of the school building; Discovery High School is a very open space with no traditional classrooms. There is a lottery system for Odyssey Middle School and they have some students with IEPs.

Students receive all of their instruction from a single teaching team that includes instructors for math, science, English Language Arts, and history. They have not experienced any certification problems because each team has an instructor for each subject area—and they are the teacher of record for that course and the one assessing those learning standards.

They have a focus on transferrable skills (known as EPIC: Entrepreneurs, Producers, Innovators, Contributors) and increasing student engagement by letting them work on real-world problems. They also employ standards-based learning, to marry traditional grades with standards-based learning. The day-to-day feedback students receive is standards-based; then, the Jumprope program is used to

transfer from a standards-based score to a letter grade, where the overall score (letter grade) is based on combining a number of scores on different standards. For students who can show mastery without doing all the homework/learning activities, they are able to do so, as a student's homework and learning opportunities do not factor into the final grade. However, students do get a score for their work ethic. Assessed events can be redone, and then the final score is based on which standards the student wants to improve.

For one period each day, students have personal learning time where they can prioritize what to focus on in their learning plan, meet in small groups, or with their teachers, etc.

Discovery would like to get to even more integration with team teaching and students going out to internships/well-designed integrated projects that earn credits.

## **2:15-2:45 Student Panel**

Why did you choose your school over a comprehensive high school?

- "I didn't do well in the traditional environment. I didn't enjoy home school, so I tried Gibson Ek. I was hesitant but was drawn to an education where I could control what I was doing and learning."
- "In middle school, I started on honor roll and ended by scrapping by. I was terrified I wouldn't graduate high school and felt stupid. School shouldn't make students feel stupid—it should make them feel confident and uplifted. Going to my school is one of the best decisions I ever made."
- "I have ADHD which led to a lot of rough times in middle school. As a person of color and having ADHD, I felt neglected during most of my education life. Avanti is both a safe place for LGBTQ students, for people of color, for all students. I'm pretty sure I wouldn't still be in this life without Avanti."
- "I chose Discovery after touring it—there was a difference in school structure and a difference in approach. I didn't struggle academically, but I struggled keeping a purpose to my work. This school has really helped me feel a purpose."
- "I felt like I had issues working with other students/needed to learn how to collaborate better—and needed to build those skills. So, I switched to Discovery and feel like I've grown in my previous areas of weaknesses."
- "I learned early on that not everyone is an extrovert like I am. And I wanted to figure out how to be able to work with other students more. Discovery lets me work in groups and have a growth mindset. I got to choose where I wanted to go along with teacher support. It gave me freedom, the yin and yang balance between freedom and just doing worksheets. I found my home here."

If you could share one message with the members of the mastery-based learning work group, to help us provide more learning opportunities like you have had to more students, what would it be?

- "Comprehensive high schools are built for one type of student and that's it. Almost all of the students left out of comprehensive high school can be served by a project-based learning, mastery model."
- "Teach with your heart and mind. The reason why I used to hate school is because I felt like the teachers didn't care about me. Students need someone who cares deeply about them as individuals and learners."
- "There's more to education than just learning and getting 24 credits. Taking your self-interests in learning and going further with those into deeper learning—to not be bound to only state requirements in what you learn."
- "The world is more than a classroom and teacher lectures. It's really easy to make a connection with your students. You don't have to change your entire curriculum to make students feel like they're doing good. Students need to feel like they can go further and explore."

- “We as students can do so much. We can make so many changes and we can create so many things. We can help ourselves, but we have to be given the tools to do so. We want to make things better for future students of course, but you’re also serving students now. We can’t wait for perfect programs. With the world changing, we have to change too—but students have to be given the freedom to do so.”
- “Give us the freedom to fail so we can have the ground work for success.”
- “We’re only human. We fall and make mistakes sometimes. But, we don’t have to be judged for them. Imperfections create something more beautiful than perfection ever could be. I feel like a lot of schools focus too much on grades and getting perfect test scores. Sometimes our worst mistakes can lead to the most joy. Every student is an individual and we’re not perfect—and that’s a good thing.”

Is mastery-based learning an opportunity to get rid of labels? (E.g. gifted, remediation, etc.) How do you see MBL serving those student groups who are having the greatest challenges accessing traditional schooling?

- “Actively embrace inclusivity, including events and activities during the school day for students to get to know each other and their teachers.”
- “In traditional schools, a lot of students don’t feel seen or accepted. With this system, it’s much easier to feel accepted and seen (e.g. through advisory, the test we take to get us into that advisory is based on similar likes/personalities, etc. – you get to grow with this same group of students throughout high school).”
- “Self-paced, individualized education is critical for students—and helps with the labels.”
- “Administrative behaviors can be devastating to students. You can’t say we need to be gentle with this student because they have a mental illness—that creates stigma. We have to be gentle with all our students. The individual mentality stigmatizes students... students are more perceptive than we’re given credit for.”
- “Celebration of a person’s identity.”

## **2:45-3:00                      Public Comment**

## **3:00-3:25                      Work Group Discussion: Draft Report**

At the time the draft report was written, OSPI’s competency-based assessment report was not yet available. Data will be incorporated from that report into the work group’s final report.

Other components that might be missing in this report:

- Why do we care about MBL? Why should we make this transformation? We need an introductory section of the report to address the why.
  - This could include a focus on equity, to prepare students for the workforce of the future, one size doesn’t fit all, etc.
- This has to be a public relations tool (in plain language) to educate the public and bring our audience along, as we are being educated.
- Perhaps a discussion of New Zealand’s approach to mastery-based learning (MBL), in addition to the other countries already referenced.
  - This is a great start based on the time we’ve had together.
- Perhaps not this report, but in further areas of exploration—who and which student communities are able to access MBL now, and who is being left out.
- There are some assumptions made in the report that I have issues with:
  - The most important examples of MBL I’ve seen come from little kids who understand what they’re learning and where they’re going (MBL in Washington section of the report)

currently says that we don't have much info on MBL in elementary and middle school—make clear that even if we don't have data on this, it's still happening).

- We need to further unpack students advance on demonstration of mastery.
  - We do not need to focus on a country. In Idaho, in at least some schools, they have moved past the same age grade cohort.
  - Please be cautious with assertions that could lead to mistaken conclusions for our audience.
- How MBL is going to affect opportunity gaps for students of color. We have to convince people it is not a continuation of a system that is explicitly racist. There is also not enough of a mention of parents, families, and communities.
- The student voices today give us the why. But, the how—we need more time to wrestle with the 24 credit requirement as a work group and we need more staff to give students what they were asking for today about relationships. We need time to work this through.
- Choice freedom encouragement voice creativity size matters diversity equity—words we heard today from our students. I like the preliminary vision of the work group—can we expand it with some of the words we heard today?
- I wonder about the equity of a rural district trying to do this without funding. If we could capture some of the previous comments that encourages school leaders to do this—I want our school leaders to have the ability to fail, feel the freedom to innovate, etc. Start with an aspirational conversation in the report—and say we as adults also feel the ability to fail.
- This report helped me better understand what we are trying to do. How can we provide a place for marginalized students that meet student needs? How can we develop a system that provides what these students need? Importance of relationships in schools, especially with transitioning from semester to trimester for 24 credit requirement. That's what I'd like to add to either this report or the subsequent report—the how.
- We need something that explains that terms are not interchangeable, even if they are used that way. For instance: MBL, CBE, personalized learning, PBL, etc. Please add a paragraph about this and then link to a glossary.

**3:25-3:55**                      **Discussion: Debrief the Day**

**3:55-4:00**                      **Next Steps**

We will send an updated report out for review the week of November 25 and plan to submit the final report to the Legislature the week of December 9.

**4:00**                              **Adjourn**