

Testimony

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-Thank you for the opportunity to speak. Intro myself.

-The Johnson Education faculty, as a group, believe in Act 77 and support the move to proficiency based assessment.

-I myself, and the rest of the faculty, believe that accurate and meaningful assessment is critical in education. It makes progress more meaningful and visible to the student, and allows the teacher to critically analyze their own practice to adjust pedagogy to fit students, rather than the other way around.

-At the higher education level, we are supporting the transition to proficiency-based assessment by training preservice teachers in the theory and use of standards-based assessment.

-Students are reading theories of standards-based assessment (Thomas Guskey, Robert Marzano, research from UVM) and practicing using them in their unit design. Meaning, when they design their units, they are built with learning scales and proficiency measures from the beginning. This is a shift for them, as like most people they were not exposed to this type of assessment in their k-12 education, but it is worthwhile and it will prepare them to work with assessment when they begin their careers in the field.

-In addition, the Education department at JSC is moving towards proficiency-based evaluation in our own higher education courses. We believe that students of all ages learn more from what teachers do than what they say; if we talk about proficiencies while only grading ourselves on a hundred point scale, then the hidden curriculum says that proficiencies are something you give lip service to.

-While in education we have always been a bit more progressive in our use of detailed rubrics and concrete learning objectives than other disciplines, this has still been a transition and one we have made gradually. Currently, our elementary and secondary methods courses are graded using proficiencies; others moving towards the model. As in K-12 education, the task is to do this meaningfully and to rethink our tasks to fit standards, so it is a gradual process. We currently have 5 classes using this form of assessment. My own summer homework is to adjust an undergrad and graduate class to move to this model. However, we are doing it and it is working.

-This has had positive benefits. It has made hard conversations about accountability and progression with students much easier and more productive. Instead of quibbling with a student about a letter grade, or a few percentage points that are

objectively meaningless, we can speak about what concrete aspects of education they need to improve upon.

-As an example, instead of saying you have a D on a lesson plan – and what on earth does that really mean – we can talk with a struggling student and say that you are proficient in your use of Common Core standards and in your learning objectives, but you show no evidence of essential questions at all and your assessment plan is only approaching proficiency. It makes these conversations much more concrete for both the faculty and student, and if we have someone who turns out not to be cut out for teaching we can show exactly why.

-This way students can see how proficiencies work for them, and how they might apply them to their own work with students in their future classrooms.

-This process is not complete; we still have to translate our course assessments into a final grade for transcript purposes, which is an issue that higher education will have to deal with in the future. However, it is a step.

-In summary, I believe that implementing proficiency-based assessment is a necessary task, and worth the growing pains. As districts continue to do professional development and teacher prep programs turn out new teachers who are current in this practice, more expertise will be built until it is no longer a change but just accepted practice.

-Thanks/are there any questions.