



## Where Tradition and Innovation Meet

Recently, I was one running with a friend on the rail trail heading toward Hanson Ridge and he asked me: “What will high school will be like for my children, with the changes coming from the state around a proficiency based diploma?”

Like many people in town and across Maine, he had concerns about the impact of the new diploma and how students will be affected by the changes. Huffing and puffing, I spent our hour together trying to “paint a picture” of what I envisioned the school day might become in Sanford. I’d like to share some of those thoughts with you.

Next year’s freshman class—the class of 2018—will be the first to be impacted by the new requirements set by the state of Maine. Over the next four years, students will still take most of the same classes as they do now. They will still receive numeric grade, have GPA’s, credits, honor rolls, and even graduation honor parts in 2018.

But in addition to earning a grade for each class, students will also be measured by how well they are mastering the many aspects of the curriculum—or how “proficient” they are. The curriculum itself is based on what’s known as the “Common Core,” a set of standards that has been adopted by the state of Maine, as well as 47 other states in the country. As has always been the case, students will learn math, science, English, history, health, foreign languages, music and other subjects that have always been taught in school.

What’s new is *how* students will learn this content. Over the last decade or so, business leaders have emphasized to educators the need for young people to learn important skills for thriving in the 21<sup>st</sup> century: problem-solving, collaboration, effective oral and written communication, the ability to access and analyze data. In all subject areas, students will learn—and have time to practice--these vital skills.

Students must also “show what they know.” In other words, they must demonstrate that they have reached their “learning targets”—all of the specific knowledge and skills that have been determined will make them ready for whatever future they embrace. Sometimes they will demonstrate their understanding through tests, sometimes through papers and reports, sometimes through individual and group projects and presentations.

In every instance, we will be tracking student progress both through the traditional report card and a report of the ‘learning results’—or student mastery of knowledge and skills. The “learning results” will be very transparent to families. Parents will be able to check on a student’s progress as often as they’d like through a web-based program. We will also continue to use Infinite Campus to record daily assignments and traditional letter grades. Everyone will know how a student is progressing on each standard, and can then more easily determine what support or what enrichment a student will need to reach his or her goals.

If a student does not achieve proficiency on a particular standard the first time around, they will have multiple opportunities to try again. No longer will a student just receive a zero or an “F” and move on. Instead, we will work with students to determine the best pathway for him or her to master the standards. Neuroscience tells us that students learn in different ways, thus our teachers are learning how to provide a variety of strategies for students to reach their targets, whether it be through a classroom-based project or even an internship in a local business or community organization. We know that when young people are

engaged in their learning, they are more motivated to learn. And when they are more motivated, they reach better outcomes.

In short, what we are doing is ensuring that every student who walks across the stage on graduation day is able to contribute their talents to the community—whether they head to college or technical school, seek employment, and eventually become tax-paying citizens and community leaders. If our community is to grow and prosper, we simply can't let any talent go to waste.