

# FEATURE







# Portrait of a Graduate

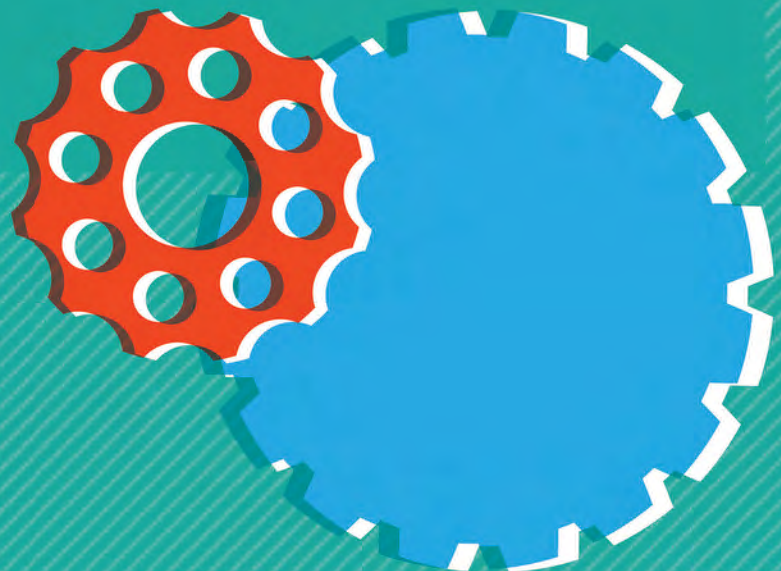
and the *National School  
Library Standards*

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Fair Haven Union High School (FHUHS) is a small school of approximately 375 students in rural Vermont. The district is called the Slate Valley Unified School District (SVUSD) and consists of about 1,320 students who come from five sending towns. We are currently undergoing several educationally innovative changes as directed by the Vermont Agency of Education. Fortunately, the *National School Library Standards for Learners, School Librarians, and School Libraries* were released just in the nick of time!

### Vermont: An “Advanced” State

As seen in the iNACOL image in figure 1, Vermont is one of the “Advanced States, ...with comprehensive policy alignment and/or an

active state role to build capacity in local school systems for competency education” (2016). The State of Vermont Agency of Education, however, is calling our new system of learning and grading proficiency-based versus competency-based (2019b).

### Impact of Vermont Legislative Act 77

“Proficiency-Based Learning is a key component of flexible and personalized pathways set forth in Act 77 and the State Board of Education’s *Education Quality Standards*. Vermont public schools must provide students with flexible and personalized pathways for progressing through grade levels and to graduation” (Vermont Agency of Ed. 2019b).

This requirement means that learning is to be student-centered, individualized, and personalized for each student in our school district. Student schedules will be flexible; learning is no longer based on seat time; and learning may occur not only in the classroom, but also online, and outside of school.

### AASL Standards Support Our School District’s Vision Statement

The timely release of the *National School Library Standards* in the fall of 2017 assisted the school librarians of SVUSD as they developed proficiency-based learning and grading standards. Although the AASL Standards have not yet been officially recognized by the State of Vermont, Casey O’Meara, one

## A Snapshot of K-12 Competency Education State Policy Across the United States

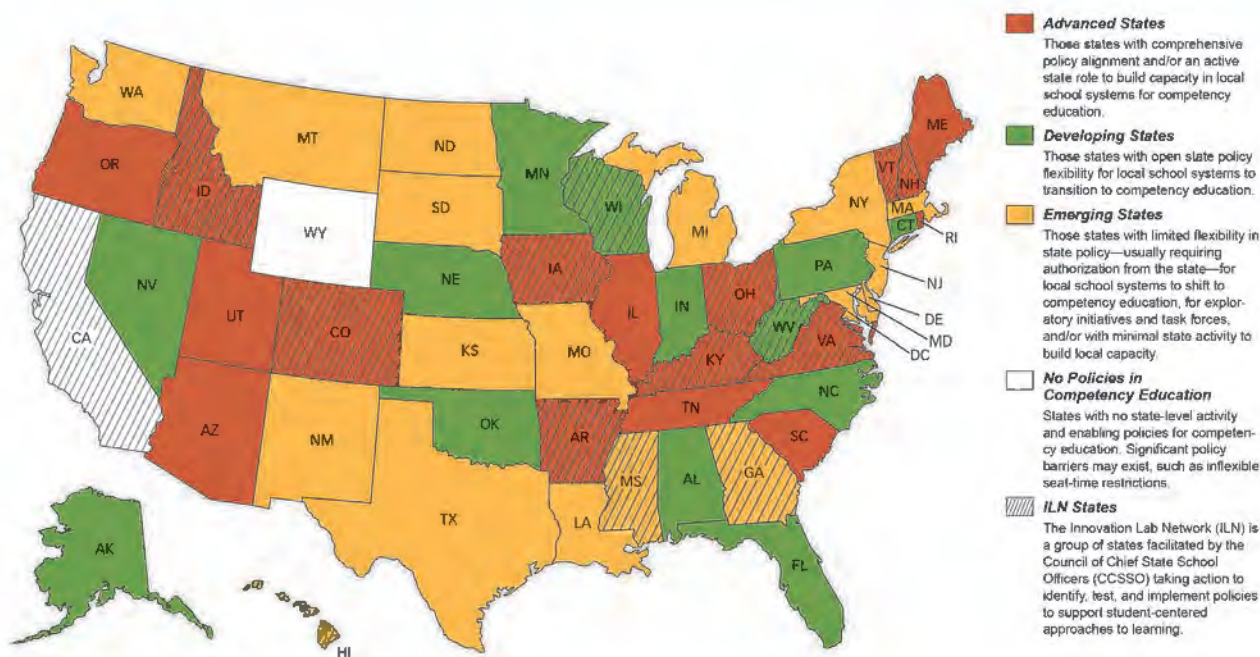


Figure 1. Map showing Vermont’s status as “Advanced” (iNACOL 2018; reprinted with permission).

of the authors of this feature and director of curriculum at SVUSD, fully supported the case to use the recently released standards for the school libraries within our district. Casey supports the AASL Standards because our district's vision statement, specifically in regard to our students, is implicitly aligned with all six Shared Foundations, as we've noted here in the added parentheses:

Slate Valley Unified School District's Vision [excerpt]— Our students are curious and creative learners (Explore) who succeed through personal initiative and sustained effort to reach high academic goals. They are critical thinkers and learners who seek knowledge (Inquire) and possess technological competence and collaborative skills (Collaborate). Our students embrace diversity and culture (Include), act responsibly (Engage) and contribute to our community (Curate). (Slate Valley 2018)

## AASL Standards Support Vermont's Transferable Skills

The Vermont *Education Quality Standards* (EQS) require students to reach proficiency in transferable skills that reach across all content areas. The transferable skills are communication, collaboration, creativity, innovation, inquiry, problem solving, and the use of technology (Vermont Agency of Ed. 2019a).

Thus, the AASL Standards not only support the district's vision and portrait of a graduate, they also support transferable skills and proficiency-based grading and learning for all students "...in Vermont beginning with the graduating class of 2020" (Vermont Agency of Ed. 2019a).

### Proficiency #1 - Information Literacy: Students will demonstrate critical thinking as they plan and conduct an inquiry-based research process using digital media, technology, and information literacy skills, to create products that express new understandings.

#### Performance Indicators

- a) Build new knowledge by inquiring, thinking critically, identifying problems, and developing strategies for solving problems (American Association of School Librarians (AASL Standard I. Inquire).
- b) Demonstrate an understanding of and commitment to inclusiveness and respect for diversity in the learning community (AASL Standard II. Include).
- c) Work effectively with others to broaden perspectives and work toward common goals (AASL Standard III. Collaborate).
- d) Make meaning for oneself and others by collecting, organizing, and sharing resources of personal relevance (AASL Standard IV. Curate).
- e) Discover and innovate in a growth mindset developed through experience and reflection (AASL Standard V. Explore).
- f) Demonstrate safe, legal, and ethical creating and sharing of knowledge products independently while engaging in a community of practice and an interconnected world (AASL Standard VI. Engage).

Figure 2. Excerpt from SVUSD K-12 Library Proficiency Scoring Guide based on the AASL Standards' Commitments for each Shared Foundation.

## Implementation of the AASL Standards

### District-Wide Information Literacy Proficiency

So how do school librarians in our district use the *National School Library Standards*, the roadmap for our students? First of all, our school district had, prior to the November 2017 release of the standards, decided on an Information Literacy Proficiency (written by Deborah) that states:

Students will demonstrate critical thinking as they plan and conduct an inquiry-based research process using digital media, technology, and information literacy skills, to create products that express new understandings.

However, after the new AASL Standards were released we decided to use the Key Commitment for each Shared Foundation in the AASL Standards as performance indicators (PI) for our K-12 students to support the district-defined Information Literacy Proficiency, as shown in figure 2.

### Learning Targets

In proficiency-based learning and grading we need to take the standards (PI) we are using and break them down into the competencies (learning targets) that we will build our lessons and assessments upon. We used the Competencies outlined for each Shared Foundation found in the *AASL Standards Framework for Learners* (AASL 2018, 34-39). Please see the website Deborah created to view the associated district learning targets

Table 1. SVUSD grades 9–12 assessment criteria for information learning proficiency performance indicators (based on Key Commitments for the Shared Foundations in the AASL Standards).

Slate Valley Unified School District's (SVUSD) Scoring Criteria: High School 9-12 Complexity Band				
Performance Indicator	Getting Started	Making Progress	Proficient	Going Beyond
I can build new knowledge by inquiring, thinking critically, identifying problems, and developing strategies for solving problems. (AASL Standard I. Inquire)	I can build new knowledge with support.	I can build new knowledge by inquiring, thinking critically, identifying problems, and developing strategies for solving problems with support.	I can build new knowledge by inquiring, thinking critically, identifying problems, and developing strategies for solving problems.	I can demonstrate proficiency and can provide evidence that I can transfer and apply the skills and knowledge I have acquired for the Inquiry Process, as I design and actively engage in personalized, project, and proficiency-based learning opportunities within my local learning community and beyond.
I can demonstrate an understanding of and commitment to inclusiveness and respect for diversity in the learning community. (AASL Standard II. Include)	I can demonstrate an understanding of inclusiveness and diversity in the learning community with support.	I can demonstrate an understanding of and commitment to inclusiveness and respect for diversity in the learning community with support.	I can demonstrate an understanding of and commitment to inclusiveness and respect for diversity in the learning community.	I can demonstrate proficiency and can provide evidence that I can model inclusive behaviors for diversity in leadership positions, as I actively engage in personalized, project, and proficiency-based learning opportunities within my local learning community and beyond.
I can work effectively with others to broaden perspectives and work toward common goals. (AASL Standard III. Collaborate)	I can work effectively with others with support.	I can work effectively with others to broaden perspectives and work toward common goals with support.	I can work effectively with others to broaden perspectives and work toward common goals.	I can demonstrate proficiency and can provide evidence that I actively engage in collaboration throughout my personalized, project, and proficiency-based learning activities within my local learning community and beyond.
I can make meaning for myself and others by collecting, organizing, and sharing resources of personal relevance. (AASL Standard IV. Curate)	I can collect and organize resources of personal relevance with support.	I make meaning for myself and others by collecting, organizing, and sharing resources of personal relevance with support.	I make meaning for myself and others by collecting, organizing, and sharing resources of personal relevance.	I can demonstrate proficiency and can apply and provide evidence of my informational curation skills and knowledge, as I engage in my personalized, project, and proficiency-based learning activities within my local learning community and beyond.
I can discover and innovate in a growth mindset developed through experience and reflection. (AASL Standard V. Explore)	I can innovate with support.	I can discover and innovate in a growth mindset developed through experience and reflection with support.	I can discover and innovate in a growth mindset developed through experience and reflection.	I can demonstrate proficiency and can apply and provide evidence of my innovative growth mindset to my personalized, project, and proficiency-based learning activities within my local learning community and beyond.
I can demonstrate safe, legal, and ethical creating and sharing of knowledge products independently while engaging in a community of practice and an interconnected world. (AASL Standard VI. Engage)	I can create and share knowledge products with support.	I can demonstrate safe, legal, and ethical creating and sharing of knowledge products independently, while engaging in a community of practice and an interconnected world with support.	I can demonstrate safe, legal, and ethical creating and sharing of knowledge products independently while engaging in a community of practice and an interconnected world.	I can demonstrate proficiency and can provide evidence that I can apply the skills and knowledge of Engage, as I persevere in my personalized, project, and proficiency-based learning activities within my local learning community and beyond.





for all AASL Standards <<https://bit.ly/2NquAQD>>. For example, the learning targets for Inquire are listed below. (Please note that each learning target has its own scoring criteria.)

1. I can formulate questions about a personal interest or a curricular topic that I will be inquiring about/researching.
2. I can use basic and advanced search techniques to find information.
3. I can find information from multiple resources, both digital and/or print, to answer my questions and use as evidence for my inquiry/research.
4. I can evaluate the information I found, using information literacy criteria, to determine if I should use it to answer my questions, and use as evidence in my inquiry/research.
5. I can connect my prior and background knowledge with the new information I have found, as a context for new meaning, to

answer my questions and use as evidence in my inquiry/research.

6. I can synthesize all relevant information I have found to construct new understandings for myself.
7. I can devise and implement a plan to fill knowledge gaps in my inquiry/research.
8. I can create a learning product that expresses my new understandings, as a result of my inquiry/research.
9. I can share my learning products with an authentic audience.
10. I can provide constructive feedback on learning products that others have created.
11. I can act on any feedback to improve my learning product that expresses my new understandings.
12. I can continue to pursue knowledge on the topic of my inquiry/research.

13. I can connect my learning to real-world experiences in regard to the topic of my inquiry/research.

14. I can reflect upon my learning to help me make informed decisions about my personal interest, or curricular topic that I was inquiring/researching about.

In proficiency-based learning and grading the learning targets are sequentially aligned. Students should become proficient in each learning target before they advance to the next. According to Barry J. Zimmerman and Dale H. Schunk, "Within Bloom's framework, a semester or year long course consisted of a series or sequence of learning tasks. When the relationship among the learning tasks is sequential, the cognitive and affective outcomes of earlier tasks become the cognitive entry behaviors and affective entry characteristics for later tasks" (2003, 379).

# An Administrator's Perspective

When Dr. Casey O'Meara, Director of Curriculum, Slate Valley Unified School District, was asked about the *National School Library Standards Shared Foundations*: These will be instrumental in "...creating ethical and effective citizens at the grassroots level."

He went on to say, "If permanent habits are to be formed for students, educators must prepare them for participation in local, national, and global communities. The added aspect of realism included in a course including...further evaluation of students' perspectives through performance, form deep impressions for many participants. The competencies of the six Shared Foundations of the *National School Library Standards* led to the development of K-12 school library proficiencies. High schools, colleges, and universities need more of this; our nation needs more of this.

"Learning experiences to create lasting meaning, while engaging in the principles of Inquire, Include, Collaborate, Curate, Explore, and Engage do not always exist in school. In fact, secondary schools can isolate and exacerbate a sense of disconnectedness from skills necessary for life. If the United States continues for generations, lacking use of information literacy, then we better begin creating ethical and effective citizens at the grassroots level."

The beauty of the *National School Library Standards* is that we can adapt the learning targets as we please for each grade level, keeping in mind that our school libraries (K-12) must align their teaching and learning so that all students acquire and meet proficiency in all skills by the time they graduate, thus ensuring they meet our district's portrait of a graduate.

## Scoring Criteria

In SVUSD the assessment criteria are defined for four levels of proficiency, from "Getting Started" (the lowest) to "Making Progress" to "Proficient" and "Going Beyond." Deborah had to define what it meant to be "Proficient" and what it means to "Go Beyond" within our school district, indicating that students had met a level of mastery.

According to Tom Schimmer, an expert in standards-based learning and grading, "Students at the advanced level (Going Beyond level) have reached a level of mastery over the grade-level standards. They are able to apply and adapt to authentic, atypical, or unpredictable situations or circumstances. These students can draw upon their conceptual understanding to solve real problems that show a level of creativity and sophistication. These students are able to accurately self-assess and have a depth of understanding that seamlessly connects related or previously explored concepts" (2016, 110).

Schimmer's definition of reaching the level of mastery aligns with that of the transferable skills, as outlined in the Vermont *Education Quality Standards* (2016). The State of Vermont and our local school district would like to see students be able to transfer the knowledge and skills they have gained, not only across all content areas, but to other authentic learning experiences





they will encounter as they actively engage in personalized, project, and proficiency-based learning opportunities within their local learning community and beyond.

### Looking Ahead

Our school district and state are in the process of significant educational change. This was the first year we have had to work with proficiency-based grading and learning. As a school librarian, Deborah is grateful for the timely release of the *National School Library Standards* and knows that, as with any inquiry process, she and her colleagues will be doing a lot of reflecting and amending as we progress through the process of personalizing learning for our students. Thankfully, the administrators of the school district fully support the AASL Standards (see sidebar) and those standards support the learning and grading priorities of our state. The next thing we need to do is get our state to recognize AASL's *National School Library Standards*, just as our school district has done. This adoption at the state level will ensure all students in the state meet Vermont's portrait of a graduate.



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and president-elect of the Vermont School Library Association (VSLA) 2019–2020; board member of the New England School Library Association; VSLA delegate to the AASL Affiliate Assembly; and AASL Regional Representative for Affiliate Assembly Region 1.



**Casey O'Meara** directs and coordinates the selection, development, and evaluation of curriculum, assessment,

instructional programs, and professional development opportunities in the Slate Valley Unified School District in Fair Haven, Vermont. He holds a Bachelor's degree in political science from the University of Vermont, a Master's degree in curriculum and instruction, and a certificate of advanced graduate study in educational leadership from the University of Vermont. He also holds a Doctorate in curriculum leadership from Northeastern University.

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