



## How Do Colleges View Proficiency-Based Transcripts?

A goal of proficiency-based learning is to create more college-ready students. How are colleges getting ready for them?

Each year, students in the United States make millions of choices about colleges, deciding where to apply and enroll. Each of these choices benefits from clear communication about students' interests and accomplishments among students and their families, secondary schools, and postsecondary institutions. In states adopting proficiency-based systems, some parents are worried about the effects of resulting changes on their children's chances for admission. But they need not worry about this part of the college process. Proficiency-based transcripts have proven to be an asset when documented thoughtfully.

Proficiency-based education offers college admission staff members the opportunity to get to know students' interests, skills, work habits, and achievements more deeply, and this can support their admission and success following enrollment. Proficiency-based systems that incorporate personalized learning environments and multiple flexible pathways toward graduation help ensure more equitable preparation for and access to higher education, especially first generation college-goers, students of color, and others historically underrepresented at postsecondary educational institutions.

### What We've Learned

**All colleges evaluate data from many different sorts of students.** Admissions staff members already know how to understand and compare varied forms of transcripts. The primary task of secondary schools is to present what the student has learned and accomplished in the most clear and helpful way possible. The job of college admissions officers is to be able to compare students to one another and make judgments. While each college has slightly different criteria, almost all assess prospective students through their academic performance, the level of rigor of the course of study, test scores, communication skills as indicated by essays and interviews, and extracurricular activities.

**Schools that have or will adopt proficiency-based approaches should follow guidelines when constructing key documents.** Schools are responsible for providing transcripts of students' academic performance. Proficiency-based transcripts differ significantly from traditional transcripts that present snapshots of student achievement as measured by seat time and letter grades. By the very nature of a proficiency-based system, students' learning experiences are expressed through varying levels of attainment as measured against standards. College and university applications are also accompanied by a school profile that conveys important descriptive information about the school's academic program and student population. College admissions staff members consider school profiles essential to the admissions process because they provide the necessary context to interpret and understand the academic accomplishments of individual students. Each of these traditional elements of college applications must be adapted when a school shifts to a competency-based approach.

**Proficiency-based transcripts and school profiles ably demonstrate students' individualized pathways toward achievement.** They can, along with other admissions materials, offer a rich sense of how students are doing as responsible, involved citizens. In a powerful demonstration of support, 69 New England colleges and universities ranging from community colleges to the Ivies have offered **unequivocal statements** that make it clear that students with proficiency-based records of learning will not be disadvantaged in any way during the college admissions process.

### Want to Know More?

Visit the **Leadership in Action** website and download *I Want to Know More*, a selection of information and resources for those interested in reading more about the role of proficiency-based learning in college admissions.

### A high-quality education has never been more important than it is right now.

The New England Secondary School Consortium hopes that our Leadership in Action series will spark conversations across the region about how students could be learning in today's high schools.

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