

## Credit Flexibility: Mastery-Based Assessment Models Audio Transcription

Thursday, April 22, 2010  
1:00 – 2:00 p.m. EST

Jennifer: Good afternoon everyone. My name is Jennifer Reed with the Great Lakes East Comprehensive Center at Learning Point Associates. I'd like to welcome you to today's event, Mastery-Based Assessment Models, part of the Credit Flexibility Web Conference series, hosted by the Ohio Department of Education, and Great Lakes East. This web conference is the fourth in a series designed to provide information related to the local implementation of the Ohio Credit Flexibility policy. The series will discuss the recently released guidance and will connect participants with Ohio schools, districts, and organizations that are currently working through the policy implementation. An archive is currently available on the Ohio Department of Education's website for the previous events from the series, including the March 17<sup>th</sup> Credit Flexibility and the Highly Qualified Teacher Requirements, the March 24<sup>th</sup> Ohio Credit Flexibility Gifted and Special Education, and the April 9<sup>th</sup> School Finance and Credit Flexibility. During today's web conference on Mastery-Based Assessment Models, featured speakers include Marcy Raymond, principal, Metro Early College High School, Columbus, Ohio; Jeff McClellan, principal, Metropolitan Cleveland Consortium for STEM High School out of Cleveland, Ohio; and with the Ohio Department of Education, Sarah Luchs, Associate Director for Student Success. With that I'd like to turn this over to Sarah.

Sarah: Thanks Jennifer. Good afternoon everyone. Today's topic, Mastery-Based Learning and Assessment, focusing especially on assessment, really goes in tandem with the recently released guidance on assessment related to Credit Flexibility and there's a second partnering web conference that's already scheduled for May 7, from 10:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m., which will feature Stan Heffner and Mark Hartman. That's the one that will focus on what's in the guidance document. Today's topic is going to focus a little bit more on school models and what it looks like in a whole school model and what are the dimensions of demonstration, or mastery based demonstration of proficiency that could apply in any number of settings. To do that, we're illustrating two sites that you may have seen already, Metro and MC<sup>2</sup>. I want to mention that Metro was the site that originally peaked the interest of the credit flex design team, the group that put together the proposal that was eventually adopted by the State Board of Education, in terms of unpacking what does demonstration really look like. So if you're going to flex time and focus on performance and outcomes, who could they turn to in Ohio that was already doing that, that might be able to help illustrate the understanding of how it works. Metro was one of those sites. The second site, MC<sup>2</sup>, is a site that's featured as one of our case studies. So if you haven't already looked at the case study site, I encourage you to check it out following the web conference. There are links embedded in that case study that

## April 22, 2010 Mastery-Based Assessment

show the sample capstone, which is the alignment to the benchmarks and the rubric dimensions for how teachers evaluate performance and how far along students are doing with their mastery. There's a sample rubric as well, and also a sample grade card. So if you haven't had a chance to look at those, please do reference those for a broad based understanding of what's being talked about today. In our short time today, we're going to unpack Mastery-Based Assessment, especially starting with the definition of what we mean by that, how it's working in these two sites, and where would you start in your school to go about putting these kinds of things in place. We'll spend quite a bit of time on your questions that you submit either in the text box or that you ask via the telephone line. As Jennifer already mentioned, our speakers are Marcy Raymond, she's the principal of Metro, and a teacher and a student. Do you want to introduce who they are?

Marcy: Sure, I have Kaitlin O'Brien, a student here at Metro, and I have Greg Barkamer, a math teacher here at Metro.

Sarah: Great, thank you. Also, we have Jeff McClellan who is the principal or head of school at MC<sup>2</sup>. Jeff, I understand you have with you two teachers, Joe and Sarah, is that correct?

Jeff: Hi. Yes, that's correct, Joe Helper, a 10<sup>th</sup>-grade biology teacher here at MC<sup>2</sup> STEM, and Sarah Lassinger, a 10<sup>th</sup>-grade English teacher, are both joining me on the call.

Sarah: Fantastic. Thank you all for joining us. In our pre-discussion about what do we mean by Mastery-Based Learning and Assessment, it has some embedded assumptions. Marcy and Jeff, I know you're going to do an integrated thing today and then also highlight from your unique sites. Marcy, if you would kick us off and then I'll just rely on you both to go back and forth.

Marcy: Sure. When we're talking about mastery-based learning and mastery-based assessment, we're looking at the criteria and the quality of what it's going to take for a student to go from one content specialty to another, sometimes within the same content, sometimes across content. So what we look at in this particular case is - what does it take to earn a credit and be successful in the next system, which, in our case, is the college system. For a student, like Kaitlin, who's studying mathematics, what is it going to take for Kaitlin to be able to go into calculus in college, based on the mastery that she has in mathematics at our site? The series of skills, performances, and benchmarks that she has accomplished that will enable her to be able to be successful in the next endeavor.

Sarah: Marcy, you had indicated that it's looking at the system that students are advancing into and also considering where they come from. You also indicated that this is a situation where the embedded assumption is that all students can learn, they just need maybe varying levels of time and certain conditions to do

that, and that was one of the prerequisites. Jeff, did you want to add anything to that?

Jeff: No, I think that's basically the primary assumption here. We changed the dynamic from time being the constant and what kids know being the variable, to identifying what is important for them to be able to know and show us that they know, and then we use time as the variable by which kids get there.

Marcy: So it means that we won't stop until the student has mastered or accomplished any of those characteristics or benchmarks that are required for them to be successful in the next system. That also means that we have to look at where they are, so there are some times where gaps would have to be covered, so that a student might need more things than what's on this list of what's going to be in this criteria. It might be more than that based on where the student is at that time. But the outcome is the same for every student. It's not different from student to student. The outcome is common. The time that it takes the student to get there is the variable, the outcome is common.

Jeff: For example, in our situation every 9<sup>th</sup>-grader enters into mathematics at the Algebra 2 level. Now some students are more prepared to demonstrate mastery on the Algebra 2 level benchmarks quicker than others. So they can progress through the benchmarks at a quicker pace. If they're demonstrating mastery to us on the benchmarks, we're awarding them credit for those benchmarks. Once they've demonstrated mastery to us for all the benchmarks that are tied to Algebra 2, then they're awarded the Algebra 2 credit.

Marcy: I have an example here of a student who came in with a set of skills that caused her to go faster in the coursework. This is Kaitlin. Kaitlin, can you describe what happened in mathematics?

Kaitlin: Sure. I went to a different school. It was Calumet Christian School, where you could take advanced math courses. So I went ahead and did that. When I came to Metro, a lot of people were taking the same classes that I had already taken. So we were trying something new, like putting kids into a Trigonometry class, while most of the people were still in an Algebra 2 class. I went on through the Trig and it was a lot harder than I had expected, but now I've finished it. I'm still trying to get my credit for it. Because it was a step up, it was actually challenging.

Marcy: The example here for Kaitlin is that she tested through Algebra 2, so she did the mastery requirements for Algebra 2 and went into Trig, without having taken the Algebra 2 course that the other students took. It's taking her a little bit longer to get through the Trig because of the exposure needs that she had with the content. So she's working on Trig, which is challenging her. It's not too easy, it's not too hard, but it's challenging her at her level and then at her pace.

Sarah: Jeff, are there similar circumstances that you have in your site?

- Jeff: Yes, we have similar circumstances with our students as well. Probably the most extreme example in our school is a student who is currently full time at Cleveland State University (CSU). He just turned sixteen maybe a couple weeks ago, but at the semester he transitioned from some of our work here, to a full time student at CSU. Now he still participates in some of the project work that we're doing and he's still somewhat integrated into the other activities in the school. But because of where he was academically and because of the system that we had him placed, we were able to allow him to transition to that point when he was ready. I think Sarah Lassinger has an example she'd like to provide you from her English classroom as well.
- Sarah: Hello. One of the things that we did, especially with our CSU student, is that I looked at the 11 through 12 English benchmarks that he had not mastered yet. He's able to do that through a program that we use with Accelerated Reader, and showing mastery in that regard, as opposed to sitting in a classroom and having to go through the things that we're doing, which gives him the ability to work on his Cleveland State material and master the benchmarks. That way his college classes can count toward his 11<sup>th</sup>-grade high school credit and he can still receive his 10<sup>th</sup>-grade credit. Another thing I do in the English classroom here at the 10<sup>th</sup> grade is I use a workshop model, which allows students who are ready to move onto master other benchmarks. It gives them that ability to do that while they're in class. So I can also give time to those students who are still working on mastering previous benchmarks. That workshop model allows us to not only differentiate our instruction, but gives more individual time to those who need it at different levels.
- Sarah: Thank you Sarah and Jeff. Some of what you're describing sounds a lot like differentiated instruction and a lot of individualized attention. Knowing where students are and what they need, how close they are to making the benchmark, additional supports, additional time. How do you manage that on a day-to-day basis? What kinds of things are necessary to have in place? That sounds, in some respects, very labor intensive.
- Marcy: You have to be very strategic about what your benchmarks are going to be, and how you're going to assess those benchmarks. Then once you have that strategy, the other pieces and parts fall into place. It's not necessarily that you need more time, it's that you have to use your time differently. It takes a collaborative effort. In most cases, for our teachers, it takes the ability to see the assessment at the same time as the instruction, not as two separate things. It has to be all culminating into one thing. That training takes a little bit at the beginning, but it becomes part of the way that teachers teach over time. So, for most of us, it's about being more efficient with the way that we're doing our work and making sure that we're assisting teachers as they go along. The job from the administrative standpoint changes a little bit. It's my job to work on the

instructional design, more than it is my job to look at the details of the pages that are going to be used within any certain context.

Sarah: Marcy, it sounds like you're starting to tap into how your mastery-based program model came into being and how you manage them. I want you to say a little bit more about that. I know in previous discussions, even with the design team, you sort of mentioned things about establishing the floor, the minimum and that not necessarily being enough. Also being able to establish what's more aspirational, what is that next level learning expectation really about and how do you build that in? And Jeff, this would be open to you as well. Can you talk a little bit about how your programs got started and what were some of the foundational elements?

Jeff: Some of our foundational elements essentially were in the work that was going on at Metro. We worked with Marcy as we were formulating the vision and the approach for our school. So we were able to learn from some of the things that Metro had already started to do. Then as far as the alignment of benchmarks, what we looked at were the different content area benchmarks. What makes sense from grades eight to ten, plus 11<sup>th</sup>- and 12<sup>th</sup>- grade Ohio benchmarks to make up an Algebra 2 class? Then we did the same thing for basically all the other courses. One of the features of our school is this trans-disciplinary project-based nature in which we try to look at these benchmarks in a way that connects science, math, English, social studies, engineering, art and/or foreign language together in these culminating projects. So we really focus on building the projects from the benchmarks and then assessing student progress towards the benchmarks and ultimately mastery of the benchmarks throughout that process. Joe Helburn is going to describe for you that process.

Joe: This is Joe Helburn. I want to talk about the planning process we do at MC<sup>2</sup> STEM. We sit down for a week and we plan through an entire project. We go through course phases of planning. It really helps to use it as an understanding by design, doing backwards planning. With that way of planning, we can see the bigger ideas and then feed into the bigger ideas, all of our disciplines. So if someone has a smaller sort of formative assignment, which will support understanding of this bigger idea or essential question, we're able to see that. Not only that, but by the end of the week, the last phases are really operationalizing the activities, making sure that they get on a calendar. So we use Google calendar and Google documents to have all of our documents in open, clear, transparent venue for all the teachers, and they're able to be adjusted when we need to adjust them. That's helped out a lot as far as making sure that if students are in one particular project and they need to move faster because their deadline is here. I know that Sarah needs to get her projects done, so I can help her out by co-teaching in that way. Just as a small example, we did a project where we were doing bio-mimicry. We each had similar projects around the major idea and we ended up at the end allowing the students to move faster through certain projects. They then moved on to another class and walked into that class and continued

working on that particular project. So in a way, we were allowing them to move faster and then work on areas where they really needed some help in their benchmarks and their projects, by allowing them to float to a new class.

Obviously, it was with the teachers' knowledge of the floating. It was really great to have all the kids really working on a specific project and benchmarks that they really needed in the individual classes.

- Marcy:
- Sarah, if we go back to your question about, what does it take to be able to get this kind of thing up and running. A school needs to think about a couple things. One is what is it that the state is requiring as a minimum and those benchmarks must be incorporated into anything you're doing. For us, this is our fourth year of implementation. We've done this for a while. So we also want to make sure that we're including the 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills that are going to be required. We happen to be a STEM school, so we want to make sure the 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills like communication, collaboration, decision making, problem solving are also incorporated additionally. Jeff talked about that in the picture of what the kids were going to know and be able to do, what are the common characteristics for that. We also have to look at, what is it going to take for a kid to be successful in the next system. For example, Greg Barkamer is a math teacher here at Metro. In Greg's case, we have a constant interplay between our partner university, which happens to be the Ohio State University, and Metro. We're looking at the colleges of the arts and sciences in the mathematics department, not just the education department. We want to know what it's going to take for a student to be proficient and ready to major in something that's going to be related to mathematics or English or any of the subject areas that we instruct. Mastery can't be determined only by the floor. You also have to have your next system as an input and that next system could be work and that next system could be college. We don't want kids to not be able to go to college, so college has to be included for all students. What we don't want to do is to provide an opportunity for some kids to be able to go on and other kids not be able to go on because they didn't get mastery in the things that they needed to be successful. Not everybody would choose mathematics or English or a specific area. We need to make sure that we're doing it in a way that is general enough and integrated in a trans-disciplinary way, enough for it to be common among all of the students so that they're prepared to make a choice without being held back because their experience and exposure wasn't sufficient for them to be successful. So when we have a kid like Kaitlin in the math program as a freshman, who is taking Trig, which is an unusual occurrence, similar to what Jeff described as the student at the community college, we want to make sure that we're providing avenues for all of these things to occur simultaneously. But the minimum is that they have access to a collegiate environment when they may not have had that at any other way. Greg has to constantly work with the university and I'm going to let him tell you a little bit about how the math department works and tries to make sure they're consistently working on the curriculum and the mastery items so that we are demonstrating regularly what the kids need to know and be able to do. This is Greg Barkamer.

- Greg: A big component to our development of the things that we were going to do in our math program is the minimum requirements for students to be ready for the next system, which is the college level. We are able to have a lot of feedback from our university partner at Ohio State. We have a specific benefit that some of our students enter into that college environment while they're still with us. So we get direct feedback and that informs our system as well. We can see how we might be able to revise curriculum. We've had a number of meetings with representatives from the math department at Ohio State, different professors. Any college professor that you talk to, if they teach calculus, will tell you what high school students need to be able to do to be successful in calculus. I've heard professors talk about that when I was in college. So having those conversations with the representatives from the next system, they'll tell you what you need to do to better prepare your students and you can make sure you're doing that as part of your curriculum.
- Marcy: We also want to make sure that we're not making the demonstration in one single way. So it's not just a paper/pencil test, it's not just a standardized test, it's not just a project. We want to have multiple methodologies so that students can demonstrate in multiple ways that they understand the concept and can demonstrate the benchmark. We want to make sure that there are lots of different opportunities for that to occur. The benchmarks alone might not be enough to be able to say that this kid actually understands Trig functions or understands the relationship between the performance and the perception of the audience. We want to make sure that no matter what the content area is, that we're looking at multiple assessments of that particular skill or item, so that the kids are ready to do anything that they're asked, versus a single lens kind of assessment system where there is a paper/pencil test, a quiz, maybe a piece of writing every once in a while. We want to make sure that we're using multiple lenses to assess mastery versus a single benchmark alone through a paper/pencil test.
- Sarah: Thank you Marcy. We've got a couple of good questions coming in to the chat box. So I want to take time to field a range of questions. I think we've shared enough to give people some food for thought. The first question is - Did you develop your own benchmark assessments and did you use the same format as the statewide assessments?
- Jeff: I'll go ahead and start. We use a combination of different assessments, most of them we've developed in house and most of them have been developed specifically to project outcomes that are part of the larger capstones that our students are participating in. Now, as Marcy mentioned, it's never really enough to have one specific measurement determining whether a student has achieved mastery or not. So we're constantly evaluating a student's progress towards mastery on a specific benchmark within the ten-week capstone window, throughout the course of the year, and sometimes even over the course of a number of years. One of the things that we can't stress enough to address the

question of what do you need to get started, you really need to have a different view of the use of time. Granted, a lot of kids may not need more time, but I think you have to be very flexible about the way you think about the way time is used. Joe was describing it , and I don't know if everyone really picked up on it. Kids were moving from room to room, not on a bell, or not on a regimented time dismissal, they were moving based on the demonstration of the required skills and mastery of benchmarks in the different subject areas. For example, if I was struggling with my math in that particular area, I may have spent more time in math that day than I did in English. If I'm doing better in English, I'm going to move faster through there onto something else.

Sarah: Thank you. Actually to build on that, because we do get this question. Jeff, I want to give you a full chance to emphasize it. Since time is variable, how do you handle scheduling issues? And that could be not just the bell, but what would typically had been the nine-week period.

Marcy: I think one of the things you have to think about is changing your paradigm for what is standard. In this case, performance is the standard and time is the variable, which means that every part of your system has to be able to flex to accommodate that. For instance, in a regular school environment, I might schedule in February students for next year's classes. Then that's the schedule for the year. Maybe there are a couple changes here and there, but that's the schedule. If time is the thing that's going to be standard, then that works. But if time is the variable and performance is the standard, then we have to give the kids either a shorter or longer time frame in order to get done what they have to get done in order to move forward. So that means that the system has to schedule and reschedule frequently for students to be in groups that are appropriate for both their learning and for their outcomes in their projects. It means the system has to flex for the kid, versus the kid flexing for the system in the time frame that's available. So as an administrator, that means that we have to schedule almost constantly. We have to schedule and reschedule based on what the students have accomplished and when they need to accomplish the next thing. We take care of a little bit of that by allowing the teachers the flexibility to move kids around within their team. So Greg's on a team with freshmen, and Kaitlin was one of the students who was able to move from one place to another in order to get the best instructional capacity for her in her mastery system. That individualization can occur at the teacher's discretion as well as a school-based discretion. So if we have large groups of kids who need a certain thing, then those large groups of kids can be together. But like Jeff described, sometimes that's not true. Sometimes small groups of kids need to do things together and we need to be able to flex to allow that to occur. So things like bell schedules go away. We have agreements among teachers about when things will happen, but it might change from day to day or week to week, depending upon what project is coming up and what the kids need to be able to demonstrate. On a big demonstration day, it might be that everybody is exhibiting all day. In those cases, the regular instructional practice that you would think of in a regular classroom, nobody would see that going on that day.

## April 22, 2010 Mastery-Based Assessment

But it's okay because it's part of what the kids have to know and be able to do in order to prove mastery. So the flexibility and agility becomes a component of the system versus something that's added onto the system.

Sarah: Jeff and Joe and Sarah as well, because you're all there at that same site, I heard Joe mention the Google documents. I'm wondering, are you using technology then to help teachers to reshuffle the deck week to week to meet individual student needs or groups of students needs?

Joe: Yes, we are. We have morning meetings on Tuesday and Wednesday and a Thursday evening meeting. Every meeting that we have, we talk about the calendar and talk about updating the documents. I mentioned that there were four phases to our planning. The four phases start with determining the big idea. We found that when we have a capstone and we pick a big idea, something for the kids to really wrestle with, that we can find a lot of rich material to connect trans-disciplinary with. Then phase two, after we figure out the big idea, we operationalize the big idea. What that means is we have to make sure there are essential questions that students are going to have to answer throughout the capstone project, as well as learning goals in each of our different disciplines and the benchmarks that we're going to be assessing all of our classes. Once we figure out which benchmarks and which learning goals and which sets of questions, we then take the time to chunk out our content into units, so we can start to really move into our third phase which assesses the development of the student and of the project. This is where we really make sure that we have not only summative assessments and the big projects at the end, but also that we have projects and assessments throughout the capstone. For example, if we have a research poster that's due at the end, we make sure that they're developing a good project plan. Additionally, that they're designing it correctly, that they're understanding the materials and methods, so we assess them not only on are they following the protocols correctly, but are they applying their math skills and doing box and whisker plots when they're analyzing their data? Then finally after we look at that, there's a summative assessment at the end. Phase four is the choreography of the learning. This is for the teacher, what kind of equipment are we going to need, what kind of materials, what are the deadlines that we're going to be setting, what are the specific event dates that we're going to need to set up so we can plan out the project accordingly. I hope that answers the question.

Sarah: Joe and Jeff, we're able to show your capstone rubric and your sample grade card, This is right off the case study that we mentioned earlier, and it is on our ODE website. You can go in and click just like Jen is right now, and take a look at those. If there's anything here, Jeff and Joe and Sarah that you specifically want to point out, she's just going to quickly put them up there.

Jennifer: I will click on the rubrics now. The rubrics document is open.

Sara: Okay. Perfect. So that's the rubric that you all developed locally. Why don't you go ahead Jen and show the grade card, because Joe did mention how that gets ticked off as students master each level and then that's the basis for how they flex time. While Jen is pulling that up, I want to go ahead and ask both sites this question, because a series of questions are around this theme. How much time is built into the teacher's day for collaboration and professional development and planning and what kind of professional development do teachers need to go to this kind of a model?

Marcy: Both of our schools started out with and formulated professional development on the fly, quickly. Our teachers for Metro were hired about four weeks before school started, so we had about eight or nine days that we worked with teachers to try to get things up and running. We now have moved to a more systemic way of doing it and we have days where teachers come in right before school starts. It was eight days last year, where the teachers came in for professional development, for planning the projects that we would be implementing. During the school year, the teachers have an instructional coach who works with them individually. We call a sub in, who goes from room to room to room, while the instructional coach pulls the teacher out for an hour. Our classes are two hours, so the kids aren't without their teacher for a long period of time. But they work on individual goals for themselves as professional learners. We redistributed all of the meeting time away from a staff meeting and a department meeting. We don't have those. We have one professional meeting per week on Mondays, right after school for an hour and a half. After school starts, we have no professional days. The only thing that we have after school starts is 1.5 hours every Monday after school. Jeff, on the other hand, knowing how hard it is to get this done, planned his school, with assistance of others, differently to incorporate the professional learning among the terms that they have at school. So his description is a little bit different than mine. The last part of your question was about how much planning time; our teachers have one hour of common planning every day and that common planning is from 7:00 a.m. to 8:00 a.m. That is the same as personal planning. So their personal planning is in common with everybody else's from 7:00 to 8:00 in the morning and then they teach three two-hour blocks with a half hour lunch for their school day. So our teachers here have one hour of planning time, personal and common. It is in common with all other teachers and that's the entirety of the planning time. Jeff's school is set up differently.

Sarah: Jeff, do you want to hit some of the highlights of how your site is different?

Jeff: Sure. We're on a full, year round calendar. So the way our school year breaks up, basically there are ten weeks of instruction, followed by a three-week break for the students. During that three-week break for the students, the first week is actually what we call professional development institute and it's an intense week of professional development for all the staff in the school. During that week we're assessing how the capstone that we just finished up went, looking at what worked, what didn't work, preparing for the next capstone in terms of processes

and then we build the next capstone during that week. During that week of professional development, one of the questions was - what kind of training do teachers need? I think it's really important to establish a culture of collaboration, a learning community type culture amongst the adults that are working. But then obviously people need to be able to know their benchmarks well, understand their content and then build rubrics and collaboratively plan for projects. We take a project-based approach to the professional development sessions. There's a rubric that's provided at the beginning of the week that outlines what needs to get done during the week and then basically every day the progress that's made by the adult group is evaluated back against the rubric with the idea being that by the end of the professional development week, the following things are done and it's evidenced right on the rubric. We try to model what we're implementing in the classroom in the actual learning time for the adults between ten-week periods. Now, during the ten-week period, we have 50 minutes in the morning on both Tuesday and Wednesday and then we have two hours of collaborative time built into the end of the day on Thursday. All of these professional development examples that I've given you are part of a negotiated memorandum of understanding with the teachers union that defines the different work conditions that our teachers are under, compared to the normal schools.

Sarah: Great, thank you. Another related question that we've gotten is earlier you both gave examples of students that your system is able to move along and they were both an accelerated situation. What about students who aren't able to demonstrate mastery on the benchmark or who continue to need time and support, so an underperforming student. How do you all help that student?

Marcy: What's interesting is, either at MC<sup>2</sup> or at Metro or any of the others who are working on this, your attitude about what you're seeing. It's kind of odd, I get people that come in and say, oh my gosh, this is a great credit recovery system. The students can accelerate or decelerate based on where they need to work in order to close gaps and show proficiency in the mastery item. So it works really well for getting kids to be able to do the work that they need to do in order to be able to move forward. Then I have, like four seconds later somebody else might come in and say, this is a great model for gifted kids because they can accelerate through coursework and not have to use seat time as the only way that they can achieve credits. For your question about how you work with students who have gaps, we're a lottery-based school, so we take anybody who wants to come. It's a straight lottery and Greg has both types of students in class. We try to start out with heterogeneous classrooms, and I'll let him talk a little bit about what it's like in math class, to have students who struggle and what kinds of things have to be in place for the kids who struggle.

Greg: One of the good things about having the mastery system is that performance is the standard and time is the variable. For those students who can't learn in a typical Algebra 2 class the way it would traditionally be offered at a standard school, you're able to offer that student a different way to learn Algebra 2. In a

traditional class, what sometimes happens is you teach to the middle portion of the class and the top part gets bored and the bottom part is lost. In our school, you can slow down your material for those students who need a lot of time to digest and go through and rehash material before they understand it. In my experience here, I haven't really run into a student where it's a case that they just can't learn the material. It might take them two or three times longer than it takes the average student, but eventually they all do perform to the level that's required.

Sarah: We got a question about common number of students or typical student load in the classroom teaching in both of your schools, could you speak quickly to that?

Marcy: Our target is 20 to 1 at Metro.

Jeff: We have 100 students for 6 teachers, so we're a little below 20 to 1.

Sarah: Great, thank you. We also got a question - Do your students have a choice about how they get to demonstrate mastery on the benchmarks? Marcy, I have heard you speak to this notion of the assessments themselves tend to be rigid, but the instruction, delivery and methods tend to be flexible. So, I'd like you both to speak to that question and, Marcy, you might want to expand a bit on that notion.

Marcy: Sure, thank you, Sarah. One of the things that you conceptualize when you're starting this process is that we want to give students choice so that they have the ownership and engagement on what's going to be required to be able to perform well. But the choices need to be about the methodology to achieve mastery, not necessarily on what the mastery standards are. So for some students, the mastery project might be an interdisciplinary project where they're working on putting a bill forward in the state legislature, which is something that they're working on right now with English, math and social studies. In that particular process, they're looking at the UN development goals. The students in that case can pick from the development goals, but they all still are going to do a white paper. They all still are going to look at the statistics and the statistical analysis. They're all going to give a speech. They're all going to produce an iMovie. They're all going to do the criteria for mastery that's necessary according to the benchmarks that have been established. However, the way they do that, or put that together, is by choice. So one student might choose environment sustainability whereas another student might take women's rights, and yet a third student could pick world hunger as a topic. So students are allowed to work, to do what is engaging to them by the topic in that case. But the criteria for performance is consistent among all the students because that's what is required in order to prove the benchmark or the mastery standard that we've established for those content areas. It doesn't mean that's the only way that we do it, but that's one example of a way that would occur.

Jeff: A lot of times the questions that we ask kids at the beginning of the capstone are open ended enough that they're able to address questions that relate, that are

important to them and meaningful to them. While at the same time, the mechanism by which we're evaluating what they know, allows us to get at the different benchmarks. The benchmarks don't say you have to study this specific question, they just say you need to address this specific area of content. In most cases, there are multiple ways in which kids can get at that content area that still allows them the flexibility and freedom to interpret the bigger question in ways that are important to them.

Sarah: Great, thank you. This is a little bit more on the operational side. Do both of your sites have students that are participating in sports and has eligibility been an issue at all? I know the Ohio Athletic Association has some pretty stringent rules, since their system is built on seat time. So the question is, how does it work in your site?

Marcy: We worked with OASSA specifically about that. We have several athletes here and it's a little bit harder because mastery, either you've mastered it or you haven't mastered it. And the time frame is going to be a little bit variable. However, what we worked out with them, the student is consistently taking courses. So they finish one course, they take another course, they finish that course, they take another course. They're consistently engaged in a full time course load. Because they're consistently engaged in a full time course load, as long as that full time course load includes six credit attainments across the year, we have no trouble. At five, we have to look at it a little bit more specifically, but our students are generally looking at nine credit attainments during the course of one year. Sixty percent of our kids get nine every year. So with that in mind, the OASSA has allowed eligibility, as long as the student is consistently enrolled in courses across the year, and those courses are five or more. However, if a student drops below the five credit attainment, we try to get our kids to get that before they start the sport. Let's say it's a fall sport, if they fall below the credit attainment at the end of the year prior, then they will not be eligible. So it's a little harder for our kids to get eligibility if they take longer than a year to attain a credit. When you're thinking about credit flexibility, you need to have the ability for acceleration where they can, in case they need time for something else.

Sarah: Great, thank you. I do want to reference that in earlier web conferences that have covered things like HQT costs, IEP, gifted students, athletic eligibility comes up. However, we haven't done one specifically on that. So I would ask those of our listeners who want to go in depth in specific areas, to reference those earlier conferences. Either of you, if you would just comment on - Do you have students with IEPs or are you accepting students that have cognitive disabilities into your programs and how are they fairing?

Jeff: We have 8% of our population is currently on IEPs. We don't have any self contained services, so the services that we're able to provide kids all happen within the classrooms.

April 22, 2010 Mastery-Based Assessment

Marcy: We're about 12% with IEPs. We do have eight autistic children, a blind student from the Ohio School For The Blind, and two deaf students. All these students have different needs. Our strategy for implementation is inclusion. We do not have any pull-out here at Metro. We follow the IEP, we work on the IEP with mastery in mind and the students are given more time. Sometimes they're given different demonstration capacities, so you can demonstrate this way or that way, but it doesn't mean that the standard changes, it means that the demonstration may change.

Sarah: Thank you. We have a new series of questions about each of your roles. So Kaitlin, I guess you're our representative student. The question is - Have you participated in different school models and how does it compare to your experience in Metro? Would you describe your experience there?

Marcy: Can I restate that for her?

Sarah: Sure, absolutely.

Marcy: She's asking your middle school environment versus this environment. You were in a small, religious-based school and you're now at Metro, which is a public school option for you. What are the similarities and differences between them?

Kaitlin: One of the big similarities is that the teachers are really willing to work with you. At most big public high schools, there are thousands of students, so there isn't really the one-on-one time. At my old school, there were so few students, that you could really work with the teachers, and they would help you. It's the same at Metro, it's a really nice thing. One of the big differences - my previous school was religious based, so we had a lot of different integration type things, we would integrate it with our specific religion. Here we're integrating it with other subjects. So in a way it's similar, but at the same time different.

Sarah: Thank you Kaitlin. Then the same question is being asked to the teachers that are on the line, to the extent that you've taught in different models, what really is different about this one, are there pros and cons that you would want to comment about?

Joe: I taught in South Bronx with a teaching fellows program for two years and I had an experience in traditional schools in New York City. They were, at that time, closing down schools and giving the principals a lot of autonomy to show progress. The environment was pretty much focused on getting the test scores up, and that was a very big push. I know that's true in Ohio. One of the things that I realized when I came into MC2 and was looking at the data and the results from the tests, that even though the assessments are a very important factor, we don't actually focus directly on the test. We look at our benchmarks and we have to know them extremely well. We definitely do analyze the state test to make sure that the level of question and the types of questions, the visual are all in our minds

and definitely play a role in how we look at our content. But what we found is that when you put students through rigorous project-based problems, real world problems, where they have something in their hands and they really have to solve that. They really improve their critical thinking. One of the outcomes is that we've improved our test scores every time we've taken them across the school. I think that's one of the big things that was a big difference between traditional and nontraditional schools. The fear is that if you don't focus on the test a lot, that your test scores might go down. But I found the exact opposite.

Greg: My previous teaching experience before I came to this school was at a juvenile correction facility. You'd think they would be a world apart, but something that is similar is having students at all different ability levels and having to meet them at their level. I've been at a traditional high school, but something that I've noticed that I have here, that I wouldn't have at another school, is the teachers have a lot of autonomy here. If we have a good idea, we can try things, as long as it's reasoned out and there's a good purpose behind what we're doing. The administration allows us to follow our good ideas to make the school better.

Marcy: I think that's symptomatic of mastery. What happens is that you agree on what it is that's going to be measured. The benchmarks are consistently agreed upon. The outcomes are agreed upon. Once that's done, the teacher has discretion to get to delivery. So it could be in a way that's different from year to year. It could be in a way that's different from week to week. But the teacher's job is to get the kids to do it; however it takes for the kids to get that done. What we want to make sure happens is that there is autonomy and ownership in the way that things are delivered and that there is a way that Greg can flex, which is different than the way that Andrea might flex or different than the way that Corey might flex, for the benefit of the students, because every student group might look a little different. We want to make sure if they have a good idea about how to deliver something, that that's something that's honored and promoted, because it will help the kids get to this mastery standard that we've all agreed upon before we started.

Sarah: Thank you. We're nearing the end of our time. I've been scrolling through the questions and the slides Jeff and Marcy provided for us. The PowerPoint will be posted for anybody who wants to download those. They include key considerations in so many of your questions, so we just chose not to cover them during this web conference. That's also true for these big ideas, these summative ideas, about looking at feeder systems, being flexible, getting agreement, certainly putting in place the structures of planning time, and the documents around common understanding of the benchmarks and those mastery-based protocols. Again, those are available in the case study, if you want to look at how Jeff's site is using them. So, the same question goes to Jeff and Marcy, and we are short on time, so if you could keep it sort of short and sweet. What's the role of the leader here? You both are principals. What's the number one or two things that leaders

have to have in mind to make this successful? You both have school-wide models. They're both focusing on performance-based mastery.

Jeff: Role one in my job is to clear the path. There's a lot of things that get in the way. I think every teacher would love to spend 100% of their time focusing on mastery and focusing on making sure that kids are understanding what it is that they need to understand. But so many times other things kind of get in the way. And sometimes that even means that I need to get involved in the actual teaching so that we can create opportunities for teachers to have more time to collaborate. I think the biggest thing that I do is just try to keep away as many of those barriers to doing what all of our teachers are here to do, can actually happen.

Marcy: I agree with everything Jeff said, but I think the other thing that comes to mind that is really different about being a principal here, versus being a principal in an environment that's more traditional, my role isn't just to make sure that we get from point A to point B. It's that we get from point A to point B with quality. So my job is to make sure that we're monitoring and measuring the performance against quality all the time. The performance standard no longer is that everybody gets 21 credits to graduate. The performance standard now is, that every student STEM-ready in our case. So that means that I have to work on partnerships with other people, with entities where kids get experience and exposure so they get to see STEM environments, so they get to do the kinds of things that will cause them to be able to be accepted by colleges. It's making sure that the kids are applying for as many things as they can with their college career as an outcome. So it just redefines what your target is. The target here is about quality, not quantity of credits.

Sarah: Thank you, Marcy and Jeff. I just want to point out that our next web conference is on the quality elements of a student credit flex plan. The compendium to today's web conference again is May 7 on assessment. If you have not already visited the Ohio Department of Education's website, where all the guidance documents, case studies, and web conference archives are, please feel free to do so. We always make the PowerPoint and a transcript available to you. I want to thank our participants for participating today, giving us your time and your wonderful experience, so we don't have to make all the same mistakes in building our own programs. Thank you to all our folks who logged in and asked us questions. I hope you have a great afternoon. Take care.