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## Education Interim Committee

67th Montana Legislature

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TO: Education Interim Committee  
FROM: Pad McCracken, Committee Staff  
RE: Proficiency-based and Learner-centered in the Chapter 55 proposed revisions  
DATE: September 1, 2022

I am happy to see that the Chapter 55 recommendations from the Superintendent of Public Instruction include a strong emphasis on proficiency-based and learner-centered education. These terms and approaches have been circulating in education circles, the nation, and in Montana in recent years, and it is past time for them to be defined in our state. At your June 6 joint meeting with other constitutional authorities, several voices mentioned the need to do a better job of communicating and messaging to school districts and the public at large state-level policy. If policymakers want to encourage proficiency-based and learner-centered approaches, having clear, consistent, and concise definitions of those terms at all levels of state policymaking is imperative.

Here is what I see related to proficiency-based and learner-centered in the Chapter 55 recommendations that are currently being reviewed and considered by the Board of Public Education:

- The revisions emphasize a learner-centered system in several places, but "learner-centered" is not defined.
- There are a number of new definitions in ARM 10.55.602. Here are several:
  - (22) "Graduate profile" means a learner centered model(s) based on a shared vision of learner attributes that students should have when they graduate.
  - (27) "Integrated action plan" means a district plan that ensures a learner centered system and continuous improvement that reflects local context and needs, is based on school level comprehensive needs assessment, incorporates stakeholder input and feedback, and aligns plans across required state and federal programs.
  - (43) "Personalized learning" means to:
    - (a) develop individualized pathways for career and postsecondary educational opportunities that honors individual interests, passions, strengths, needs, and culture;
    - (b) support through relationships among teachers, family, peers, the business community, postsecondary education officials, and other community stakeholders;
    - (c) embed community-based, experiential, online, and work-based learning opportunities; and
    - (d) foster a learning environment that incorporates both face-to-face and virtual connections.

- (47) "Proficiency-based learning" means systems of instruction, assessment, and academic reporting that are based on students demonstrating that they have learned the knowledge and skills as outlined in the state content standards.
  - (48) "Proficient" means that a student demonstrated a high level of knowledge and skills that are expected to be learned signaling that a student is well prepared to progress on the learning continuum aligned to the content standards, learning progressions, and necessary readiness skills.
- ARM 10.55.603 on "Curriculum and Assessment" is amended to mandate implementation of a proficiency-based model: (1) Local school districts shall develop and implement a proficiency-based learning model that includes curriculum aligned to all content standards and appropriate learning progressions.
  - ARM 10.55.701 which outlines duties of local boards of trustees, includes among the board's duties implementing policies that allow for personalized and proficiency-based learning models.
  - Throughout the revisions as part of an emphasis on proficiency-based models, the phrase grade-level learning progressions is replaced with grade-band learning progressions. It's unclear what constitutes a "grade band."

It appears that the definition of "proficiency-based learning" is modeled closely on a definition by the Great Schools Partnership:

*Proficiency-based learning means systems of instruction, assessment, grading, and academic reporting that are based on students demonstrating that they have learned the knowledge and skills they are expected to learn as they progress through their education.*

I'm concerned that this definition could be used to describe our current age-based cohort model which is based on the goal of students demonstrating proficiency and have recommended to this committee a variation on Idaho's statutory definition:

*Proficiency-based learning means a system of education in which student progress is based on a student's demonstration of knowledge and skills, not seat time or the age or grade level of the student.*

As far as a definition of what constitutes a learner-centered approach, I have previously pointed this committee to the work of Education Reimagined and their five elements of a learner-centered system:

- Learner agency (not a passive receiver)
- Socially embedded (relationships matter)
- Personalized, relevant, and contextualized (tailored to student interests and culture)
- Open-walled (learning is not confined to the school building)
- Proficiency-based (students progress only and as soon as they demonstrate proficiency)

I see most of these elements in the definition of "personalized learning" which is used along with "proficiency-based learning" in the proposed revisions. Perhaps adding a definition of learner-centered system as an education system incorporating personalized and proficiency-based learning would work.

Again, I am happy to see the emphasis on proficiency-based learning and other learner-centered approaches, but I think it would be worthwhile for the Board of Public Education and all of the constitutional authorities to take a close look at the definitions and application of some of the above terms in the Chapter 55 revisions.