

The Learners Speak: Our Feedback

March 1, 2011

I surveyed approximately 30% of our learners in variety of subgroups in the hopes of gaining insights into their perspectives on the new system, focusing on their understanding of the purpose and organization of the system, their views on why they are or are not on pace, the use and effectiveness of school-wide tools for empowering learners with voice and choice as well as independence in a learner-centered learning environment, the instructional practices that cause or inhibit learning, and the use of Educate. There were several areas where a general consensus could be reached by all participants. In some cases I felt that it would best if I used their words, not mine so the following is a synopsis of those findings based on the survey questions:

1. What do you think it means when we say you are in a learner-centered performance-based learning system?

- That we work/learn differently and at our own pace.
- We choose what we want to do and when we want to do it.
- That we have to be responsible for our learning.
- Going back and learning i.e. relearning until you really get it.
- That we all learn.
- It means we move ahead based on our academic performance.
- I have to prove my knowledge in order to keep moving on to other topics.
- It's all about your progress instead of the whole class.
- This means that they base our grades on our work and how much we understand things rather than just the fact that we finished our work.

2. How is learning this school year different from last year?

- Honestly I like the new system. Yes it is more confusing at first but I am learning more than I did last year.
- I think this year is better because last year you just kept falling behind if you didn't pass.
- It's different because we can go at our own pace. Last year even if we didn't understand the subject we still moved on.
- You have to be more responsible or else you won't move on, there's really not time to mess around.
- We have to show that we actually learned something before we move on.
- With this system, I actually move at my own pace without having to wait for the rest of the class, and there's usually not a teacher speaking all the time.
- It's more independent and we have to work harder.
- There's more pressure.

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3. Why do you think you are on-pace, behind pace, or ahead of pace? Please be specific.

- Too much evidence
- It's hard
- I don't pay attention but I'm kinda getting it now.
- Because I am not very good at reading.
- I'm behind because the system decided to do the hard things first.
- Some kids are falling behind because teachers no longer teach and work packets have become what they mostly learn from.
- I don't really get good instruction in math and I feel sad because soon I'll be behind and it won't be my fault because I've tried to tell the teacher before.
- Because we haven't had a long term teacher and they don't help us.
- I'm on pace in all my classes except for science because my LF does not follow the PBS.
- I think I'm behind pace because I gave up cuz it's too hard.
- Because I didn't know how things worked at first and also because nobody pressures me to be on track.

4. Give at least one example of something a learning facilitator has done that has helped you learn.

- After school tutoring
- Explained how it was important to my future
- Sentence frames help me get started on my summary
- When you tell a learning facilitator you don't understand something and they explain it to you
- Provides examples/exemplars
- Returns work with feedback the same day or the next day so I know if I need to revise my work or move ahead
- Tell me that I can do it and help me
- To connect what I am learning back to my life
- Make writing more interesting (i.e. Rethinking the Essay) (ELA)
- Teacher-made power points, notes, and study guides
- Mini-lessons in small groups on specific learning targets (Mentioned by majority)
- Updates my Capacity Matrix when I turn in my evidence
- Flashcards
- Let me work with a partner
- Labeling task sheets in a bin
- Do mini-lessons and **explain it in another way**

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5. Give at least one example of something a learning facilitator has done that has not helped you learn.

- Paying attention to the bad people instead of the people who need help
- Embarrassing me in front of the class
- Ignore me when I need help
- Give us referrals
- When the teacher is not ready when we are (i.e. we are ahead and they don't have the resources ready for the next learning target or measurement topic)
- Move on too fast and leave me behind
- Say they don't care and get my hopes down.
- Just giving me a paper and thinking I can do it
- Does not help me one on one and "she" tells me to do practice sheets without fully explaining them to me
- Having everyone focus on one measurement topic or learning target when everyone else is in a different place
- Working on the warm-ups for too long and not having time to complete evidence
- Gave me textbook pages I'm supposed to read and learn from. I can't learn straight from the textbook easily.
- Teaching me something I don't have to learn anymore (math)
- Not teaching me and expecting me to just do it

6. What advice would you give us to better meet your needs as a learner in this performance-based system?

- Put learners in classes that are at their level so the teacher can focus on one LT/MT with all students
- LF should help and not let us work independently too much; two days out of the week sit individually with 2-3 people and talk to us and help us
- Give us more time
- Breaks down the steps
- Make things a little simpler, and to be more understanding of how we (students) do things.
- More exemplars
- Focus on each student more, I know it's hard but it will help a lot.
- Also, have more one on one appointments or study sessions
- Give more options for evidence to complete and when we complete it
- Return work quicker (math)
- If a teacher sees that a learner is really behind have a meeting to help them and explain things to make it easier for the learner
- More lessons, specifically telling us what to do
- More one-on-one conversations
- More specific and helpful tasks

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- Be more organized with work
- Update info on Educate more often
- Add notes, power points, practice work, and tasks online (educate/website)
- Make capacity matrices more understandable and give mini-lessons on anything for each group once a week to answer any questions so the learners can get back on track and know what they need to work on if they are stuck and not waste time struggling when they can get it in the mini-lesson
- Have all of the resources ready when we move ahead
- We should take our tests and do evidence when we want to, not when you guys say
- When we move to a new MT (measurement topic) or LT (learning target) have a little group and explain what we need to do and teach a little on it

Additionally, I asked about the use of Educate, our online grade book system which is accessible by parents and learners. Most often learners noted that they feel their scores on tasks and learning target scores should be updated daily or weekly. Unfortunately, many of our learners do not have internet access at home or have forgotten their password which has resulted in minimal use of Educate by learners. I also asked about whether they would use Educate more often if they knew their scores were updated weekly and if they were able to access resources such as notes, power points, or tasks and they responded with an astounding "Yes!"