

WHITE PAPER: ELEVATING EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES THROUGH PROJECT-FOCUSED INSTRUCTION

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the education landscape, Project-Based Learning (PBL) emerges as a potentially transformative teaching strategy, yet its adoption is often hindered by misconceptions about time constraints and curriculum alignment. This paper advocates for a paradigm shift towards "Project-focused instruction" (PFI), emphasizing its role as a strategic method for student-centered instruction that encourages various instructional practices, including direct instruction that enhances the teaching of standards-based curriculum. By aligning performance tasks and associated projects with standards and opportunities to attain cross-curricular learning targets, educators can address multiple learning objectives and transfer goals simultaneously, fostering a deeper, more enduring understanding in students. This white paper outlines the importance of reframing PBL to PFI in professional learning programs to secure teacher buy-in, thus paving the way for effective implementation of this pedagogical strategy.

INTRODUCTION

Project Based Learning (PBL) is “a teaching method in which students gain knowledge and skills by working for an extended period of time to investigate and respond to an authentic, engaging, and complex question, problem, or challenge” (*What is PBL?*, n.d.). When PBL is implemented appropriately, students learn *through* their work on the project by employing real-world skills, including communication skills, critical thinking, collaboration, and problem-solving (Kokotski et al., 2016; *What is PBL?* n.d.). PBL lessons are a type of inquiry-based learning, an “approach to learning that emphasizes the student’s role in the learning process” and where students are “encouraged to explore the material, ask questions, and share ideas” (Grade Power Learning, 2024).

The challenge of integrating PBL into the classroom primarily stems from a perceived lack of time (Habok & Nagy, 2016) to cover state-mandated standards. Teachers often view PBL as an additional layer to the curriculum rather than a delivery method. This perception overlooks the efficacy of PBL in covering extensive curricular content and future-ready skills in a cohesive, engaging manner. Transitioning the narrative in professional learning to Project-focused instruction (PFI) helps clarify that this approach is a proven instructional strategy designed to meet educational standards and promote retention through applied learning.

FROM ADD-ON TO INTEGRATED: THE EVOLUTION OF PROJECT-FOCUSED INSTRUCTION

For years, Project-Based Learning (PBL) has been considered a valuable supplement to traditional teaching methods (*What is PBL?*, n.d.). Teachers added projects to their existing curriculum to boost student

engagement and hands-on learning through enrichment or end-of-unit assessment. Unfortunately, misconceptions about PBL being time-consuming or incompatible with the teaching of rigorous standards often limit its impact on direct instruction (Larmer & Mergendoller, 2010).

The concept of Project-focused instruction (PFI) offers an alternative to this patchwork application of PBL. It repositions PBL not as something extra but as a primary mode of delivering instruction. This paradigm shift is supported by the framework of High-Quality Project-Based Learning (HQPBL). HQPBL outlines the essential elements that make projects intellectually stimulating, rigorous, and aligned with the development of vital skills (hqpbl.org). See the Framework for High-Quality PBL in Figure 1.



Figure 1: HQ-PBL Framework (<https://hqpbl.org>, 2024)

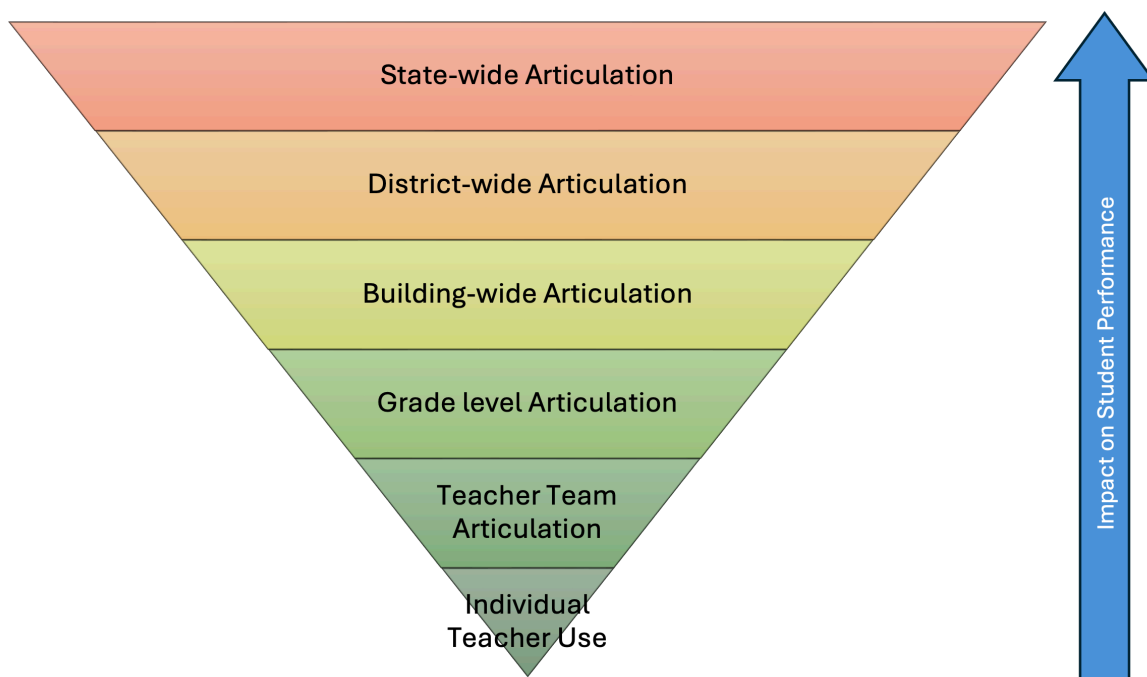
HERE'S WHY THIS FOCUS ON HQPBL MATTERS FOR PFI:

- **Student Experience:** HQPBL emphasizes how students learn through projects and project development, ensuring intellectual engagement, deep understanding, and the development of success skills like collaboration, critical thinking, and problem-solving. This focus underscores that PFI isn't replacing content but providing a more effective context for acquiring and applying it.
- **Addressing Standards:** Projects built based on the HQPBL framework explicitly target curriculum standards. Teachers can use PFI to cover content comprehensively while providing students with opportunities for authentic, applied learning to demonstrate their understanding.

- Beyond "Fun Activities": HQPBL's emphasis on intellectual challenge and accomplishment helps dispel the misconception that PBL is simply about "hands-on activities." PFI empowers teachers to create learning experiences that are both engaging and intellectually demanding.

Originally, PBLWorks created Gold Standard PBL which was designed to focus on project-focused instruction practices. This framework was designed around seven critical teaching practices with a focus on learning goals, key knowledge, and success skills (PBL Works, 2019). The HQPBL framework was created under the leadership of PBLWorks and integrated the ideas and reflections of many other learning organizations. The resulting framework is built with a focus on the student learning experience. As we consider Project-focused instruction, our lens will be on the student and how their learning experience unfolds through the strategies employed by the teacher.

INCREASING THE IMPACT OF PROJECT-BASED LEARNING ON STUDENT PERFORMANCE



Project-based learning (PBL) is recognized for its substantial benefits in enhancing student performance and key skills like collaboration and communication. However, the implementation of PBL can vary significantly, impacting its effectiveness across different educational levels. This model visually represents a hierarchical approach to PBL integration, ranging from individual teacher adoption to state-wide curricular initiatives.

At the pyramid's base is 'Individual Teacher Use', where educators independently incorporate project-based methods into their classrooms. This level relies heavily on personal initiative but may lack consistency and broader educational coherence. Moving up, 'Teacher Team Articulation' involves collaborative efforts within

teaching teams, promoting consistency and support among peers, though it's still limited to smaller, communal settings.

'Grade Level Articulation' extends the integration to entire grade levels within a school, ensuring that all students in the same grade experience a uniform approach to PBL, enhancing its scope and depth.

The next level, 'Building-wide Articulation', represents school-wide implementation. This unified approach ensures that all students within the building benefit from a cohesive educational strategy, fostering a supportive learning environment.

'District-wide Articulation' expands the initiative across all schools within a district, aligning PBL strategies with district-wide educational goals and curricula, thus maximizing impact and resource utilization.

At the pinnacle of the pyramid, 'State-wide Articulation', PBL is integrated through state-mandated educational standards and curricula, ensuring a uniform approach across all districts. This broad implementation supports statewide educational consistency and quality but requires significant coordination and support to foster buy-in and effective execution at all levels.

This model underscores the necessity of commitment at each level to ensure the effective implementation of PBL. While broader articulations provide consistency and scale, they also demand careful planning and buy-in to avoid top-down mandates that might be resisted at the classroom level. Each layer of the pyramid builds upon the previous one, illustrating that more expansive implementation can amplify the benefits of PBL, provided there is adequate support and alignment with overarching educational goals.

THE PFI PROMISE

By embracing Project-focused instruction and applying the principles of HQPBL, educators can shift away from viewing projects as a supplement to instruction. Instead, projects become the focus of the learning experience, fostering deep understanding, standards proficiency, and the essential skills students need to thrive in a complex world.

THE CASE FOR A PEDAGOGICAL SHIFT TO PROJECT-FOCUSED INSTRUCTION

ADDRESSING STANDARDS THROUGH APPLIED LEARNING

PFI can be used to address specific standards or learning targets or to align projects with cross-curricular learning targets, enabling teachers to capitalize on the diverse skills required to complete multidisciplinary performance tasks (Reid-Griffin et al., 2020). This approach not only ensures comprehensive coverage of learning targets in a specific subject area but also promotes the integration of knowledge as students apply what they learn in real-world contexts. Such applied learning makes the educational experience more relevant and memorable (Rhoades, 2020), enhancing the transfer between retention and understanding.

A common concern among teachers is that Project-Based Learning (PBL) necessitates extensive upfront teaching of concepts before students can engage in a project. For example, a teacher might insist they have to "teach" fractions in the traditional sense before launching a fractions-based project. For administrators, coaches, or lead teachers, it's essential to reframe this perception and help teachers see how PBL through project-focused instruction can be the primary vehicle for instruction, not something that comes after it.

It's important to acknowledge teachers' valid desires to ensure students have the foundational tools they need. It should be emphasized that PBL is actually a powerful form of active learning (Terada, 2021). Projects create a compelling context for learning concepts like fractions, making them more tangible and meaningful. This approach isn't about abandoning instruction but rather offering a "just-in-time" model for skill development.

It's important for teachers to be able to see how they can weave content and skill instruction into the project itself. This includes incorporating mini-lessons as needed, scaffolding activities based on student needs, and differentiating tasks to provide varying levels of complexity. Educational leaders need to underscore the value of contextual learning by highlighting research that suggests conceptual understanding and retention are enhanced when students apply concepts in real-world situations (George Lucas Educational Foundation, n.d.; Terada, 2021). Teachers need to be reminded that PBL focuses on the process of applying skills and content – often leading to deeper learning than isolated drills or worksheets. Additionally, PBL fosters the development of skills aligned with schools' "portrait of a graduate," which mirrors the qualities sought by most employers. These skills often include critical thinking, problem-solving, collaboration, communication, and adaptability (CASEL, 2024).

PBL activities can develop the core skills often included in a "portrait of a graduate" and sought after by employers. This occurs when teachers teach using instructional strategies designed to support the practice of these skills, hence Project-Focused Instruction. They include:

Critical Thinking:

- PBL presents students with open-ended, real-world problems. To find solutions, they must analyze information, evaluate different perspectives, synthesize knowledge creatively, and justify their decisions.

Problem-Solving:

- PBL is centered around resolving complex challenges. Students learn to identify core issues, brainstorm solutions, test and refine their approaches, and adapt their strategies based on feedback.

Collaboration:

- Most PBL projects involve teamwork. Students learn to distribute roles, negotiate and manage group dynamics, build on each other's ideas, and resolve conflicts constructively.

Communication:

- PBL requires effective communication throughout the process. Students need to share their ideas, articulate their reasoning, listen actively to their peers, and present their findings in a compelling manner.

Adaptability:

- Real-world problems rarely have straightforward answers. PBL teaches students to be flexible, learn from setbacks, modify their plans, and find creative ways to overcome obstacles.

AN EXEMPLAR OF HOW THIS MIGHT HAPPEN:

Let's say students are doing a PBL project to design a sustainable community garden. This project could foster:

- **Critical Thinking:** Researching best gardening practices, evaluating different site locations, and analyzing the needs of the community.
- **Problem-Solving:** Designing the layout, addressing issues like limited water access, and resolving budget constraints.
- **Collaboration:** Working as a team to plan, plant, and maintain the garden.
- **Communication:** Persuade stakeholders to support the project and present the garden's benefits to the community.
- **Adaptability:** Adjusting plans based on weather conditions, pest problems, or unexpected challenges.

The key message is that project-focused instruction doesn't mean students are left to figure things out alone. It is about strategic instructional moments embedded within a context that makes learning engaging and lasting.

ENHANCING 21ST CENTURY SKILLS

PFI inherently cultivates the 4 Cs: Critical thinking, Communication, Collaboration, and Creativity. These skills are essential for students to thrive in the 21st century. They are among the most sought-after skills by employers. Students develop these competencies in a natural, integrated manner by engaging in projects that demand analytical thinking, problem-solving, effective communication, and creative solutions. This holistic development prepares students for future challenges and opportunities in their personal and professional lives. As previously indicated, as skills that are highly sought after by employers, they are often part of a portrait of a graduate plan.

PROMOTING ENDURING UNDERSTANDING

The experiential nature of students in a PBL environment ensures that learning is active and engaging, leading to deeper understanding and retention. Students are not passive recipients of information but active participants in

their learning journey. This engagement fosters a connection between academic concepts and their practical application, leading to more meaningful and enduring understanding. The resulting projects require the application of content and skills learned in the classroom. This approach helps the student better comprehend how their learning can translate to the world beyond their classroom.

IMPLEMENTING PROJECT-FOCUSED INSTRUCTION

ADDRESSING THE TIME PARADOX: PBL AS CURRICULUM, NOT SUPPLEMENT

A significant barrier to PBL adoption in the classroom is the teacher's perception that it's time-consuming and requires figuring out ways to accommodate extra content on top of the existing curriculum (Larmer & Mergendoller, 2010). This section dismantles this paradox and demonstrates how well-designed PBL integrates seamlessly with curriculum objectives, making class time more efficient and effective.

SHIFTING THE MINDSET: PBL AS INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGY

Success lies in reframing PBL as project-focused instruction (PFI), a core instructional strategy for delivering curriculum, not an add-on activity (Schunk, 2020; Stollberg, 2017). Instead of separate lesson plans and projects, PFI integrates learning objectives and standards directly into project design. This focused approach eliminates redundancy and streamlines content delivery.

TIME MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES FOR PFI

Here are practical steps to manage time effectively within PFI:

- **Start Small:** Begin with shorter projects to build comfort and confidence before tackling larger ones.
- **Chunking and Scaffolding:** Break down complex projects into manageable chunks with clear learning goals and scaffolded activities. This provides focused instruction while promoting student autonomy.
- **Collaborative Planning:** Involve teachers across disciplines to design cross-curricular projects, maximizing efficiency and standards coverage.
- **Technology Integration:** Utilize technology for research, project management, and communication. Online resources and collaborative tools can streamline processes and save valuable classroom time.

DEFINED CAREERS (DC) AND DEFINED LEARNING (DL) PLATFORMS CAN SUPPORT THESE TIME MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES:

- **DL/DC Connection: Start Small** - Have students select a short initial project that aligns with a personal interest or potential career field. This initial exploration sparks motivation and lays a foundation for broader skill development.

- **DL/DC Connection: Chunking and Scaffolding** - As the project is broken down, explicitly connect each chunk to standards-aligned tasks from Defined Learning. Further, consider highlighting how these tasks develop skills and mindsets valued in various career pathways (DC).
- **DL/DC Connection: Collaborative Planning** - If possible, bring in industry partners or mentors (DC) during the planning phase. This provides real-world insights into project requirements and helps students understand how collaborative teams function across different fields.
- **DL/DC Connection: Technology Integration** – Beyond standard productivity tools, introduce students to specialized software or platforms used in specific industries (DC). Emphasize the ongoing technological skill development (DL) needed for success in most modern careers.

ALIGNING SKILLS AND LEARNING OBJECTIVES WITH HIGH-QUALITY PBL

EFFECTIVE PFI HINGES ON PROJECTS THAT ARE STANDARDS-ALIGNED AND DESIGNED TO CULTIVATE ESSENTIAL SKILLS. HERE'S HOW TO ACHIEVE THIS:

- **Standards Analysis:** Identify key learning objectives and standards within the curriculum. Authentic problems, challenges, and projects rarely address just one standard statement. As part of the alignment work, educators should balance the content, standard themes, and core ideas.
- **Project Design:** Create or identify projects that directly address these standards and learning objectives.
- **Skill Integration:** Embed opportunities for students to develop critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity within project tasks. These skills are often aligned with a school's Portrait of a Graduate and may be instrumental to the school's success.
- **Assessment Integration:** Develop formative and summative assessments that evaluate both content knowledge and skill development acquired through the project. Rubrics should be utilized throughout to drive reflection and the project development process.

BENEFITS OF HIGH-QUALITY PBL: TIME SAVED; SKILLS GAINED

By implementing high-quality PBL, teachers can potentially save time in the long run.

- **Reduced Redundancy:** Eliminate the need for separate lesson plans and activities when projects address curriculum objectives directly. That is, using PFI for direct instruction replaces — not adds to — traditional teaching strategies.
- **Increased Engagement:** PBL fosters high levels of student engagement. This engagement combats a common misconception that student-centered learning inherently leads to classroom management

problems. When students are actively invested in meaningful projects, they are less likely to become distracted or disruptive, leading to a more focused and productive learning environment.

- **Deeper Learning:** Applied learning in projects leads to better retention and understanding, potentially reducing the need for reteaching.

The perceived time burden associated with PBL often stems from a misunderstanding of its purpose. PBL becomes a powerful tool for standards-based instruction and skill development when implemented effectively as project- focused instruction. By strategically planning and integrating high-quality projects, teachers can not only achieve curriculum goals but also foster essential skills needed for student success in the 21st century, all while potentially saving valuable classroom time (Artama et al., 2023).

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING AS THE CATALYST

Effective implementation of PFI begins with comprehensive professional learning that repositions PBL from an additional teaching method to a core instructional strategy (Milner & Scholkmann, 2023). Training should highlight the alignment of projects with standards and the multifaceted benefits for students, including enhanced engagement, deeper understanding, and the development of critical 21st-century skills (Artama et al., 2023)..

A critical component in professional learning is operationalizing intended skills so teachers can distinguish between effective and cursory skill application. Examples include effective communication, meaningful teamwork, critical thinking, and creativity linked to goal-driven problem-solving.

COMMON ISSUES IN PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Traditional PD often cites the following problems:

- **One-Size-Fits-All:** Large workshops or professional development experiences may not address specific needs or grade-level challenges and are ill-equipped to change teaching practices (Scherff, 2018).
- **Theoretical Focus:** Emphasis on theory over practical, actionable steps for classroom use.
- **Lack of Follow-Up:** Teachers are left without ongoing support to apply new concepts.
- **Misalignment with Reality:**
 - It does not address time pressures on teachers.
 - It is often not related to specific curricular issues faced by teachers.
- **A lack of reflection and support:** Failing to incorporate peer conversations and coaching in an ongoing and supportive manner can lead to a return to common strategies (Blanchet, 2024).

VIDEOS CAN BE POWERFUL TOOLS IN PFI TRAINING

Videos offer distinct advantages for professional learning in PFI:

- **Observing Practice:** Seeing PFI in action addresses the "How does this look?" question for teachers.

- **Teacher Perspective:** Hearing teachers rationalize decisions and strategies utilized can help combat the "only for certain teachers" argument.
- **Student Engagement:** Purposeful student engagement in videos helps build teacher confidence.
- **Accessibility:** Videos can be revisited as needed, providing flexible learning.

EFFECTIVE PD MODELS FOR PROJECT-FOCUSED INSTRUCTION

Various professional learning models can help support teachers throughout their project-focused instruction journey. These models should consider content that helps to overcome the pitfalls discussed above and focus on the following:

- **A Variety of Learning Experiences:** A blended approach that maximizes the benefits of different modalities supports diverse teacher needs and fosters ongoing growth. Here's how to leverage this variety:
 - **Face-to-Face:** Build a strong foundation with initial training, concept introduction, active modeling through a student lens, and community building among teachers.
 - **Virtual:** Enable self-paced learning, ongoing reflection, knowledge sharing, and easy access to resources.
 - **In-House Coach:** Provide continuous, situated support, collaborative lesson planning, and feedback tailored to the school that's grounded in teacher and student engagement, learning, and achievement.
- **Multiple Perspectives:** Provide learning opportunities through different lenses, such as that of the student, teacher, and curriculum leader. This leads to powerful reflections (Blanchet, 2024), making PBL meaningful and beneficial for all involved.
- **Real-World Examples with Videos:** Incorporate the following:
 - **Project Examples:** Highlight videos of students engaged in different phases of well-designed projects.
 - **Teacher Commentary:** Include teachers explaining their design process, standards alignment, skill integration, and how they address potential challenges.
 - **Student Testimonials:** Feature students reflecting on their learning, skill development, and project experiences.
- **Additional Strategies for Ongoing, Effective PFI - PL**
 - **Needs Assessment:** Survey teachers beforehand to tailor PD to their concerns and experience levels.
 - **Hands-On Planning:** Engage teachers in collaborative project design or modification during PD sessions.
 - **Reflection Sessions:** Facilitate discussions where teachers share experiences, successes, and challenges as a cohort.

- Co-Teaching and Peer Coaching: Provide opportunities for teachers to observe each other, offer feedback, and refine their PBL practice in a supportive environment.
- Student Artifact Discussion and Assessment Review: Incorporate time for analyzing student work to gauge understanding, identify areas for improvement, and inform future PBL design.
- PLC Support: Embed PBL-focused Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) to foster collaboration, ongoing reflection, and a sense of shared ownership in driving change.
- Administrative Buy-In
 - Leadership support is crucial for aligning PBL efforts with school-wide goals and ensuring sustained success.

Professional learning focused on Project-Based Learning often involves teachers completing a sample project to experience the process firsthand. While this is valuable, a crucial follow-up step should be considered. Instead of focusing solely on the teamwork, communication, and other "soft skills" developed during the project, for teachers to make the mindset shift to PFI, it is important to guide participants through an intentional reflection on the academic standards addressed.

By explicitly mapping the completed project to specific curricular goals and standards, teachers gain a clearer understanding of how PBL isn't just about fostering general skills but is an effective tool for achieving rigorous academic targets. This connection is essential for teachers to buy into the concept of Project-focused instruction – seeing it as a core instructional strategy rather than an add-on activity.

WHY PROFESSIONAL LEARNING ALONE ISN'T ENOUGH

Even the best Professional Learning (PL) can falter if the school culture isn't conducive to innovative teaching practices like PFI. Key elements of a supportive school culture include:

- Shared Vision for Student Learning: Administration and teachers need a common understanding of what kind of learning experiences they want for students. Is the emphasis on standardized test scores alone, or is it on deeper understanding, skills development, and student agency?
- Leadership Support: Principals must champion PFI, providing resources, time, and protection from pressure to strictly adhere to traditional methods.
- Collegial Collaboration: A culture of sharing ideas, co-planning, and peer observation is essential for teachers to adopt new practices comfortably.
- Risk-Taking Encouraged: PFI inherently involves trying new things. Teachers need space to experiment without fear of failure or being penalized for initial challenges.

SPECIFIC SUGGESTIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL PFI

Here's how traditional school structures may need to adapt for PFI implementation to thrive:

GRADING PRACTICES

- **Shifting the Focus:** PFI requires prioritizing process-oriented assessments rather than solely focusing on final product scores. This can include evaluating practical, real-world skills like collaboration, critical thinking, research, and revision processes.
- **Formative Assessment:** Frequent formative assessment with meaningful feedback cycles ensures students stay on track.
- **Student Self-Assessment and Reflection:** Build mechanisms for students to track their learning and demonstrate growth. Include this in grading calculations.
- **Holistic Assessment:** Utilize a balanced approach that combines various assessment methods, including traditional assessments (quizzes, tests, projects) alongside process-oriented assessments and student self-reflection. This provides a well-rounded view of student progress and mastery.

TIMETABLES

- **Flexible Scheduling:** Project work may need longer blocks of time than traditional classes allow. Consider options like block scheduling, interdisciplinary periods, or flexible use of 'specials' time.
- **Teacher Planning Time:** Teachers need dedicated time to collaborate on project design, cross-curricular alignment, and assessment strategies.
- **"Release Time":** Consider ways to provide teachers with time to design new projects or observe colleagues who are successful using PFI.

ACCEPT EXPERIMENTATION

- **Set Realistic Expectations:** Acknowledge that the first try with PFI won't be perfect. Focus on growth and iteration rather than aiming for seamless execution immediately.
- **Utilize Data-Driven Reflection:** Emphasize analyzing student work and project outcomes to inform improvements, not to penalize teachers.
- **Celebrate Early Successes:** Highlight small wins and progress within and outside the school community to build enthusiasm and break down resistance.
- **Leverage Supportive Evaluation with a Growth Focus:** Link teacher evaluation systems to fostering a culture of risk-taking and experimentation with PBL. Encourage ongoing reflection and opportunities to showcase growth through portfolios documenting process and progress in PFI implementation. This ensures that teachers feel empowered to experiment with PBL without fear of negative consequences. It frames teacher evaluation as a supportive tool for professional growth rather than a source of anxiety.

CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

- **Pushback from Some:** Expect some colleagues, parents, and stakeholders to be skeptical. Address concerns transparently, highlighting the benefits of PFI for student outcomes.
- **Resource Constraints:** Be creative with limited resources. Supplement with grant writing, community partnerships, and free online resources.
- **District Mandates:** Open dialogue with district leadership about aligning PFI with broader curriculum goals is essential.
- **Implementation Dip:** Often, when a new initiative is begun, it may take time for everyone to feel comfortable and to observe success with students. During this time, naysayers may focus on shortcomings. It is important to know that this perception is part of the growth process, **and some setbacks will inevitably happen on the way to short- and long-term success.**

A NOTE ON IMPLEMENTATION:

Starting out school-wide with a PFI overhaul is ambitious and can be overwhelming. It is important to consider beginning with focused grade levels and subject areas while also considering what the intended outcomes are. These might include academic performance, development of durable skills like communication and collaboration, or interpersonal skills like self-monitoring and self-control. Use your initial focus to draw examples of classrooms that model success, build a positive culture, and lay the groundwork for wider adoption.

REFLECTIVE PRACTICE AND TEACHER BUY-IN

For PFI to be successfully integrated into the curriculum, teachers may need to experience its benefits firsthand. Professional learning programs should incorporate model projects that allow teachers to engage in PFI, followed by reflective sessions where educators can discuss the content knowledge and standards addressed. This experiential learning and reflection foster teacher buy-in, as educators directly witness the efficacy and impact of PFI on teaching and learning.

CONCLUSION

Project-focused instruction represents a paradigm shift in education, one that leverages the strengths of PBL within a framework that emphasizes direct instruction and standards alignment. By adopting PFI, educators can transform their classrooms into dynamic environments where a standards-based curriculum is the foundation for engaging, relevant projects. This white paper advocates for a strategic approach to professional learning that centers on PFI, ensuring that teachers are not only prepared but also motivated to implement this innovative teaching strategy. The ultimate goal is to enhance educational outcomes, preparing students for the complexities of the modern world through a curriculum that is rigorous, relevant, and supports 21st-century skills.

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