

Deeper Learning in the Time of COVID-19: Leveraging performance assessments & Graduate Profiles to best prepare for re-opening (Part 3 of 3)

Friday, October 2, 2020

In the final installment of AYPF's [Deeper Learning in the Time of COVID-19 webinar series](#), attendees heard from California's district-level leaders, teachers, and students. These panelists, representing [Envision Learning Partners](#), [Linked Learning Alliance](#), and [Pasadena Unified School District \(PUSD\)](#), discussed how they have leveraged performance assessments and Graduate Student Profiles to continue to cultivate deeper learning skills through the COVID-19 pandemic.

Roneeta Guha, Vice President of Strategy and Impact at [Linked Learning Alliance](#), began the conversation by providing context to the work that is happening in California. Linked Learning is an [approach](#) to transforming educational systems by integrating college and career preparation. Performance assessments are an essential component of this framework and serve as an authentic means for students to demonstrate an acquisition of knowledge through hands-on projects, which is critical for success beyond high school. The COVID-19 pandemic has presented Linked Learning Alliance and their partners with the unique opportunity to turn this type of assessment into a strategy that is pandemic proof, something that students in California demonstrate as they continue to present and defend their learning virtually. Guha defined performance assessments briefly as demonstrating and evaluating applied skills that can be taught and learned. Common performance assessments include open-ended responses, portfolio building and defending, capstone projects, or even a driver's test. Guha emphasized that by design, a high-quality performance assessment should elicit evidence of learning, have clear criteria for success; it should be equity-focused and should be a learning experience in itself. Many research studies highlighting the effectiveness of performance assessments in student learning prove the efficacy of performance assessments. Research shows that performance assessments can improve instructional quality, encourage teacher collaboration, increase student achievement, improve deeper learning, and lead to more equitable outcomes. Finally, Guha introduced the [California Performance Assessment Collaborative](#) as a statewide network of schools and districts working to implement innovative and equitable performance assessments to prepare students for graduation and beyond. The collaborative launched in 2015 and now encompasses over 60 schools across 16 districts, including those working with Envision Learning Partners and Linked Learning Alliance.

Kristina Turley-Payne, Coordinator for College and Career Pathways with the [Pasadena Unified School District \(PUSD\)](#), joined the conversation to speak about the Summer Bridge Program and how they have pivoted during the pandemic. PUSD is part of the California Performance Assessment Collaborative and has implemented performance assessments in their Summer Bridge Program. PUSD has worked with the Center for Powerful Public Schools to create this program. The driving forces of the Summer Bridge Program are performance assessments in the form of project-based learning. The program also includes upper-level students serving as

Summer Bridge Leaders, who act as co-teachers delivering social and emotional support to the participating underclassmen. Turley-Payne explained that when the COVID-19 pandemic began, they had to analyze the program and determine which aspects would be beneficial and digestible in the online environment. PUSD decided that the Summer Bridge Program would still happen virtually, that they wanted to emphasize relationship building, and that project-based learning should be maintained. Additionally, rather than taking place over five days a week for three weeks, the program was concentrated into a three-day event.

Summer Bridge Program teacher and academy lead at [John Muir Early College Magnet](#), **Beverly Rodriguez**, recognized that project-based learning takes time and that condensing three to five weeks into just three days was challenging. The first step of this process was identifying the goals and essential aspects of the Summer Bridge Program. The first key aspect identified was building confidence through incremental activities that lead up to project-based learning. The second aspect identified was the inclusion of Summer Bridge Leaders. Once the program's goals were identified, the Summer Bridge Program teachers then had to determine how the time spent over three days would be allocated. This experience proved advantageous for the Summer Bridge Program teachers who got advanced experience adapting curriculum to a virtual setting.

As the Summer Bridge Program teachers concentrated the curriculum into three days, an emphasis was placed on lower-level students building relationships with the upper-level students. Summer Bridge Leader and 12th-grader at [John Muir Early College Magnet](#), **Goyahkla Robles**, was most excited about this role because of the opportunity to help underclassmen make a connection to their school. Goyahkla never had this support system coming into high school and emphasized that this made the Summer Bridge Leader opportunity even more exciting. Robles shared that many Summer Bridge Leaders were concerned about their ability to keep students engaged online. However, Beverly Rodriguez taught them that the best way to keep students engaged is to appear engaged themselves.

As a Deeper Learning Coach with Envision Learning Partners, **Alcine Mumby** has direct experience working in schools where project-based learning and portfolio defenses are the foundation for assessment. Mumby shared that through the COVID-19 pandemic, it has become clear that students are resilient learners who, when cared for by their community, become natural inventors, thinkers, and scientists. However, the current restrictions caused by the pandemic also make it extremely difficult to deliver quality education. When striving for quality virtual education, Mumby encouraged policymakers and administrators to listen closely and learn from those who work directly with students every day. Achieving high levels of quality education requires that students be engaged in the virtual environment. Mumby emphasized that relationships are vital to developing effective and engaging learning partnerships. However, to create personalized, engaging learning, educators must seek to know and believe in the person they are teaching.

Sofia Valadez, Pathways Coach with [Pasadena Unified School District \(PUSD\)](#), worked to support teachers in the district by providing them with professional development opportunities. First, Valadez needed to determine what options teachers would be interested in. After sending out a needs assessment, it became clear that teachers wanted to know how to better engage their students online through connections and relationships. In coordination with Kristina Turley-Payne, Valadez has been successful in bringing teachers this type of professional development. For Valadez, this was a unique opportunity to introduce the [Graduate Profile](#) to teachers. The [Graduate Profile](#) is PUSD's framework for a curriculum that ensures each student graduates with an education encompassing critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, communication, college and career readiness, cultural competency, and wellness. Additionally, the [Graduate Profile](#) requires that students participate in service or work-based learning and a Graduate Portfolio defense before graduation. In the virtual environment, greater emphasis was placed on social and emotional learning as well.

Sara Scribner, Head Librarian at [Marshall Fundamental](#), supported students in their senior year very directly throughout the building and defense of their Graduate Portfolios. In this work, Scribner was able to identify gaps in the curriculum and created online resources for students to learn in a self-guided manner. Before the pandemic, Scribner created cohorts of students and gathered them during school hours to participate in a workday to supplement the self-guided online work and ensure that students had the resources to compile and present their portfolios. Through this process, Scribner also found that students struggle to identify and articulate their strengths.

After transitioning to a virtual school environment, the Graduate Portfolio defense went through two separate iterations of delivery. At the end of the spring semester, students presented and defended their portfolios in a live video chat format, which retained a Q&A portion. However, students who presented during the summer created pre-recorded videos to be graded without the Q&A portion. Scribner found that the live video format was much more substantial and rewarding for the students.

Simone Kuo, a 12th-grade student at [Marshall Fundamental](#), presented and defended a Graduate Portfolio in the summer semester. Kuo most enjoyed receiving feedback and hearing perspectives from other students about their high school experience. However, Kuo found that creating a portfolio as the school transitioned to a new online format made it difficult to access the resources available before the change. Regardless of the challenge, Kuo acquired and refined her communication, critical thinking, and researching skills.

As the webinar came to an end, panelists answered questions and provided final thoughts. **Alcine Mumby** encouraged everyone to think of learning outcomes and the Graduate Profile as education promised to the student, rather than just expectations of them. In response to an

inquiry about what skills teachers can use to accelerate learning, **Sofia Valadez** shared that Pasadena Unified School District has coaches embedded in each school. These coaches gather weekly to collaborate and share resources that they can use to provide professional development to teachers at their respective schools. Another participant asked the panelists to share examples of formative assessments that align with deeper learning outcomes rather than summative assessments. **Alcine Mumby** explained that the Graduate Portfolio defenses are only summative because they happen in the student's senior year. Portfolio defenses can be done throughout the student's education as a formative practice. In Mumby's experience, schools have had students demonstrate learning every six to eight weeks, with a portfolio defense at both the 10th and 12th-grade levels. Additionally, these schools have opted to do student-led conferences rather than a standard parent-teacher meeting. Finally, **Simone Kuo** encouraged teachers to be understanding of students. Especially during the pandemic, when a lot is going on behind the scenes for students, Kuo finds it impactful when teachers reach out and seek to understand students.

This event summary was written by Shawn Knecht, AYPF Intern (Fall 2020)