

# Moving Forward Together:

Bullitt County Public Schools

Spring 2023



## Bullitt County Public Schools

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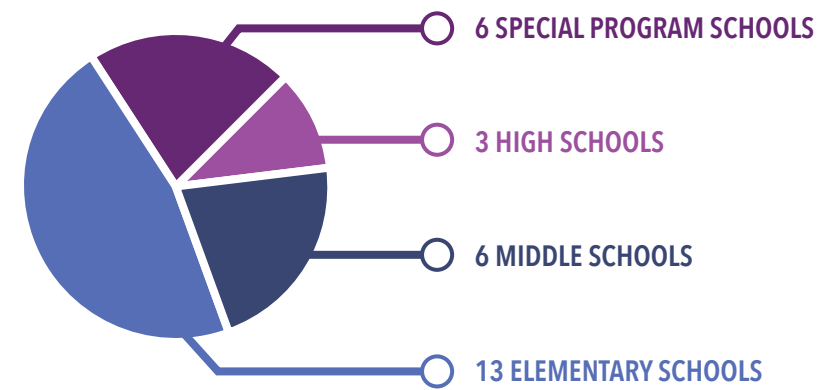
04 Lessons Learned on the Transformation Journey



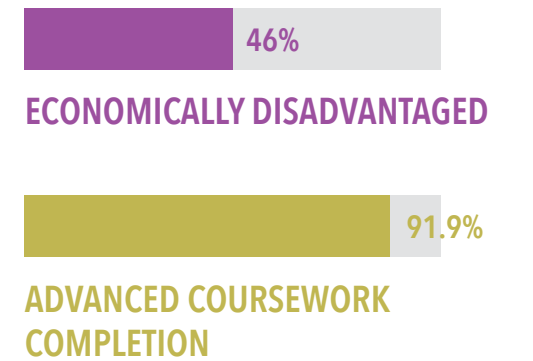




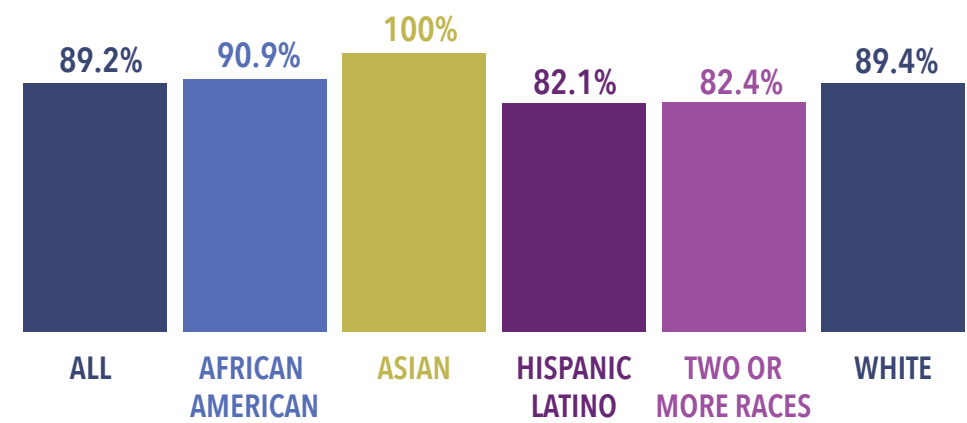
**BULLITT COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS**  
**SHEPHERDSVILLE, KENTUCKY**




**25 SCHOOLS**  
**12,497 TOTAL STUDENTS**



**4 YEAR GRADUATION RATE BY ETHNICITY**







“ We have to understand that kids are growing up in a world that’s **totally different from what we grew up in**. They’re not as eager to learn the way that we did, and if we continue to teach the way that we’ve always taught, we’re not gonna reach those kids. **School has to evolve and change because society is evolving and changing.**”

— Kim Ludwig, Math Educator, Bullitt Central High School, and President, Bullitt County Education Association

Bullitt County is located in the north central part of the Commonwealth of Kentucky, at the western edge of the Bluegrass region, in an area commonly known as Kentuckiana. The towns served by Bullitt County Public Schools (BCPS) are small, ranging from Lebanon Junction, with a population of 1,700, to the county seat, Shepherdsville, at just under 15,000. Interstate 65, which bisects the county, connects the district to the city of Louisville immediately to the north. According to Dr. Jesse Bacon, the district’s superintendent, blue collar jobs have historically dominated the local employment landscape. Over time, however, the county has become “a bit of a bedroom community for Louisville,” he says, “with more high-paying jobs and opportunities.”

Embracing change—whether it applies to the local workforce or the wider society—has long been a cornerstone of the district’s identity. A shared commitment to growth and progress, encapsulated in the BCPS motto, “Moving Forward,” has attracted visionary leaders and educators to BCPS and helped build an innovative culture. For Jesse and Adrienne Usher, the assistant superintendent, the district’s change-positive culture sets it apart and makes it a desirable place to work. “I had been working in districts where maintaining

the status quo was the way to be. And we were not going to do anything different than that,” Adrienne recalls. “I came to Bullitt County because even 10 years ago, it was a district that was always looking forward, always moving ahead, not just maintaining the status quo.”

When Jesse and Adrienne talk about the impetus for transforming education and the processes to effect meaningful change, they often invoke the language of [design thinking](#), a human-centered approach to innovative problem solving that is used in a wide array of fields. Jesse recalls how encountering design thinking while pursuing his doctorate at the University of Kentucky served as a watershed experience. “People were always saying, ‘Think outside the box,’ but nobody ever explains how you go about thinking outside the box.” For him, design thinking provided “a different way to think about school and a different way to approach problem solving,” one that was built on empathy, interacting with stakeholders, discovering their needs, and generating innovative solutions.

Early in Jesse’s career as an administrator, before he came to work at BCPS, empathy for learners prompted him to recognize that traditional education—what he calls “19th





century content acquisition”—was a complex problem that required innovative thinking to solve. “It started for me,” he recalls, “when I was evaluating teachers. I would go into the classrooms and sit, and I just kept thinking to myself, ‘I don’t even want to be here. I can’t imagine how these kids feel right now.’”

For Adrienne, empathy for learners was also a key factor for “rethinking how we teach, how we learn, and how schools should be.” In Adrienne’s case, her own experiences as a learner provided a student-centered lens

for redesigning schools. “I was a kid that traditional school did not work for,” she says. “It was so boring. My high school graduation was in jeopardy because I had missed so many days of my senior year. It’s kind of shocking that I became an educator, honestly.”

Echoing the principle of “[designing for the margins](#)” to support equitable and inclusive learning experiences, Adrienne describes how her mode of teaching has always involved “finding ways to engage the kids that don’t like school or it doesn’t work for them.”

#### DESIGN THINKING DEFINED

*“Design thinking is a human-centered approach to innovation that draws from the designer’s toolkit to integrate the needs of people, the possibilities of technology, and the requirements for business success.”*

—TIM BROWN, EXECUTIVE CHAIR OF IDEO



# Bullitt County Public Schools Graduate Profile



## 01 The BCPS Graduate Profile

With empathy and a user-centered mindset at the forefront of leaders' thinking, it is not surprising that, in 2017, when the district embarked on a journey to redefine success, they engaged with a wide array of co-designers and community partners. From the very beginning, Jesse says, stakeholder engagement was central to the strategic planning that led to the district's new mission statement and Graduate Profile. "We were very, very intentional that this wasn't going to be [Adrienne's and my] plan. This was going to be our community's plan for how we wanted to move forward together to make sure that our kids were best equipped to succeed when they graduated high school."

Working with partners from [CF Educational Solutions](#) and [Envision Learning Partners](#),

the district brought together members of the school and larger community to develop a shared vision of what BCPS schools should be aiming for. Each stakeholder brought a different perspective to the work, and each one was motivated by a personal "why" for redefining success and redesigning teaching, learning, and assessment to better support all learners to achieve it.

For example, Daniel Mullins, the principal of Lebanon Junction Elementary School, was part of the original Graduate Profile team. What excited him was "the idea that this was going to be K through 12. Because if we're talking about what we want our graduates to have, you can't get them to that level in just a couple of years. It's got to start at the very beginning."



### OPPOSITE PAGE

Created in collaboration with a wide range of stakeholders, the Bullitt County Public Schools Graduate Profile expresses a shared vision of what all learners need to be if they are to thrive in their futures and contribute to the wider community.

### THIS PAGE

Fifth grade learners from Lebanon Junction Elementary School work on collaborative problem solving as they assemble clues to identify "Mystery Locations" across the U.S.



Walter “Beau” Kaelin, a former high school science teacher and currently a high school instructional coach, recalls how meaningful it was to “get in on [the Graduate Profile] from the get-go.” According to Beau, “The world has changed faster than education can change,” especially in the area of assessment. “The way we assess success is very outdated. To take standardized test scores and then equate success to that is not applicable to this day and age.”

Although he had personal motivations to be part of the transformation, Beau was cognizant of the perspective he brought to the work as an instructional coach. “Adrienne wanted to have

representation of every different path or mode of thought,” he recalls, “so the committee had principal and teacher representatives from elementary, middle, and high [school], and from special ed.” Noting that sometimes [administrators] “lose sight of what it’s like in the classroom,” he saw himself as a teacher advocate, someone who could help ensure that a new Graduate Profile captured “the level of efficacy to really prepare students for the real world but is still accessible and applicable to teachers in the classroom.”

One of the teachers on the Graduate Profile team was Kim Ludwig, a veteran teacher of math at Bullitt Central High School, who is

also the leader of the local teachers’ union. Responding to a personal invitation from her principal, Kim joined the team, but she approached the work with skepticism—at least initially. With a chuckle, she describes her mindset at the time. “I’ll be honest, I kind of got drafted. When you’re standing there face to face with your principal, you’re not going to say no.” At her first Graduate Profile meeting, she remembers thinking, “This all sounds great, and it’s going to be the next new thing that comes along, and it’s going to be gone in a year or two.”

Today Kim is a champion of the Graduate Profile and a leader in the work of transforming the learning experience in Bullitt schools. Not only has she redesigned her own teaching and assessment practices, but she also collaborates with her colleagues and supports them to “live” the Graduate Profile through peer-to-peer learning. As Kim is quick to acknowledge, changing the way she thought about school, her teaching methods, and even her role and identity as a math teacher did not happen overnight. Still, she can point to a eureka moment from that first meeting, an event that broke through her skepticism.

“I’m checking my email, and I was probably playing Candy Crush on my phone,” she recalls. “I wasn’t paying a whole lot of attention to the guys presenting until one of them made this statement: ‘We are preparing

students to graduate for jobs that have not yet been created.’ I’d never thought about that. Suddenly I was like, ‘The world changes so fast that I’m preparing kids to go out into a world that doesn’t exist yet. They’re going to be doing things that aren’t there yet.’ I put down my phone, and I closed my computer, and from that point forward they had me. That was my hook.”

In addition to a cross section of educators, the work of the Graduate Profile committee included parents, students, and quite a few members of the business community. According to Adrienne, leaders also interviewed incarcerated individuals to learn about what they had needed from schools but did not receive. Across the board, learners’ futures were front and center in the process and discussions. Jesse explains, “We wanted to make sure that [our work] encompassed every single opportunity that students would have once they graduated from high school. We knew we needed to talk to postsecondary partners. We knew students would also have opportunities to go directly to the workforce once they left our schools, so we wanted to plug into business and industry leaders or Chamber of Commerce folks within our community.” The goal, he says, was to “help us define student success and what the success criteria really look like. We posed the question, ‘If you had two to three applicants for a particular job sitting in front of you, what are some attributes that would set one individual apart from another?’”



## NEW MISSION STATEMENT

Our mission is to inspire and equip our students to succeed in life.

## PREVIOUS MISSION STATEMENT

The Bullitt County Public Schools learning community will educate all students to high levels of academic performance as measured by state and national standards by creating and maintaining a positive learning environment with a comprehensive system of support.

### OPPOSITE PAGE

The BCPS community’s shift away from a focus on test scores and toward a more whole-person, lifelong definition of success is reflected in these mission statements from before and after the co-creation of the Graduate Profile.

“It was really eye opening how common their answers were,” Jesse notes. For example, he points out that the BCPS Graduate Profile element “Community Contributor” was inspired by a consistent theme the committee heard from people from business and industry, university admissions, and the military. “They told us across the board, ‘We want people that are not just going to punch a time clock and leave us. We want folks that are going to be involved in our culture and enrich the community here.’”

Similarly, including “Innovative Problem Solver” in the Graduate Profile reflects the expressed needs of stakeholders for “people who can look at a situation or a problem and come up with a solution themselves. They need to be able to take a look at a problem and figure out how to solve it effectively and efficiently.”

Mike Ekbundit, a BCPS parent, is also the director for engineering programs at GE Appliances. In that role, he manages his company’s college talent pipeline for engineering, working regularly with undergraduate and graduate students. For several years, he has also partnered with BCPS as a volunteer teacher and administrator for a STEM program that operates within district schools. Not surprisingly, he answered the call for community members to help refine the Graduate Profile.

“As a corporate partner and a hiring manager, someone who’s looking for talent and hires people every year, I have a different kind of stakeholder position,” says Mike, “one

that requires me to have a little bit different perspective.” A self-described “pot-stirrer” who constantly asks questions and doesn’t always agree with what he hears, Mike appreciated the opportunity to give input and also the authentic ways district leaders invited stakeholders into the process.

“I was thankful for the opportunity and the time and effort the district put forward to make sure we all understood. I thought the group did a great job at meetings making sure that all of the community members understood what was going on, what was being said. As we worked our way through the [Graduate Profile] pillars, I never felt like I was just being asked to give a stamp of approval.” Mike adds that, as a result of these conversations with community members all striving to do the right thing for students, “The logical answers came forward.”

Mike points out—and district educators agree—that most of the hard, complex transformation work comes after the adoption of a new success definition. At the same time, however, he acknowledges the significance of the Graduate Profile as a necessary, if not sufficient, step in the right direction. “I’m glad we put a mark in the sand, a big flag stuck out there that we can aim at as a target. We can’t do any work without us agreeing about where we’re going, which is why we had to start with the Profile. If students could successfully demonstrate all of the aspects of our Graduate Profile,” he says, “they would be well ahead of the curve and tracking towards pretty good success. That would be lovely because the number of adults that actually have all of those isn’t that high.”

# BC Bullitt County Public Schools

## Core Values

MOVING FORWARD *Our mission is to inspire and equip our students to succeed in life.*



### Students Matter Most

1. Will it improve student success?



### Shared Accountability

1. Will it improve organizational collaboration or student performance?
2. Is it ethical?
3. Is it cost-effective?



### Embrace Differences

1. Will it help create acceptance and understanding of people of different backgrounds?
2. Will it contribute to the development of positive relationships?



### Future Focused

1. Is it sustainable going forward?
2. Are there possible unintended impacts?



### Proactive Innovation

1. Will it make us exceptional in quality, opportunities, and results?



### Service Before Self

1. Will it improve stakeholder satisfaction (students, staff, parents, community)?

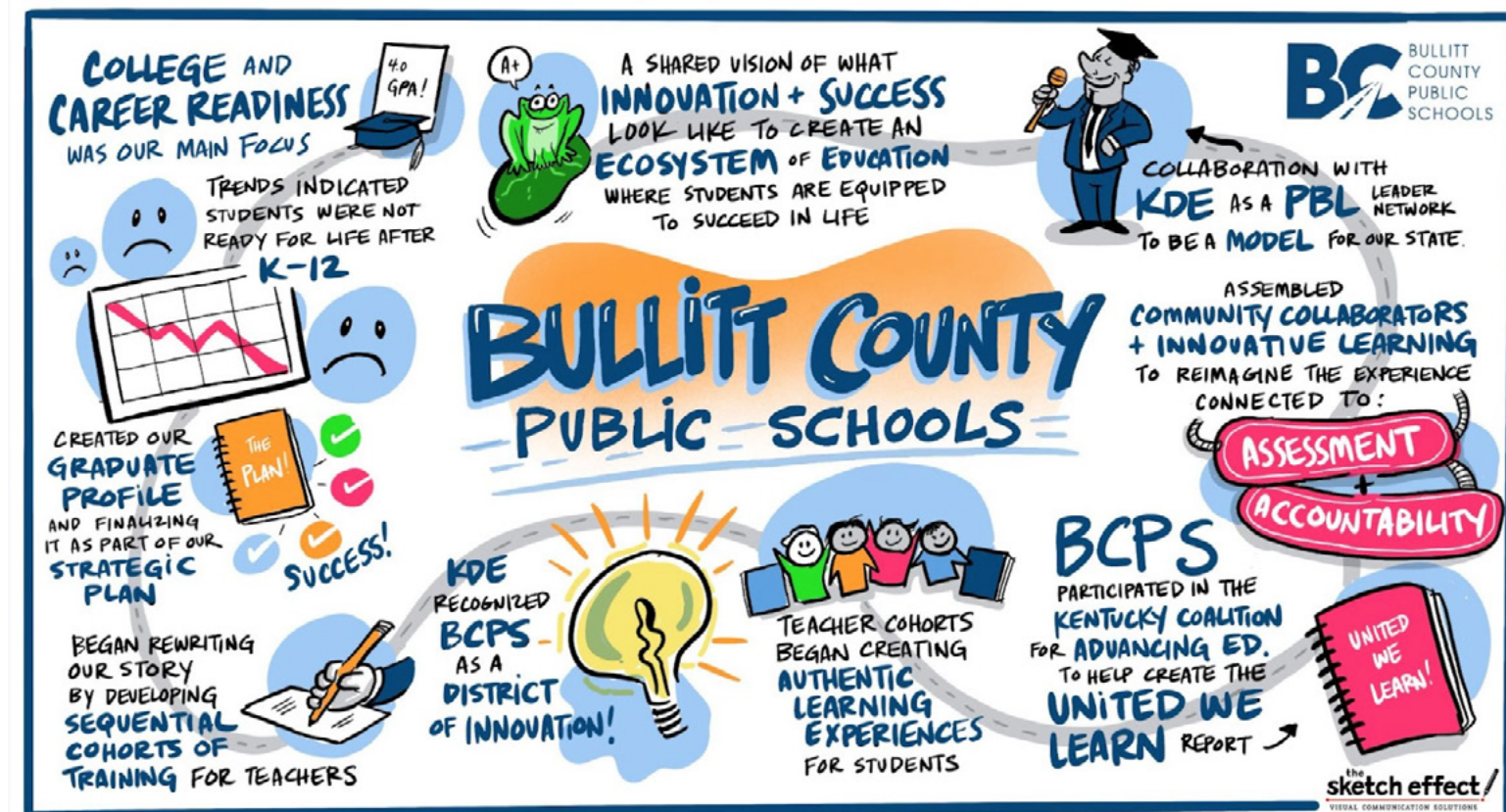




## 02 Change Processes, Bullitt-Style

BCPS educators have coined the verb “Bullitt-ize,” a word that reflects the district’s identity as innovators. Although district leaders and school-based change agents gather ideas from a broad range of approaches, exemplars, and partners, they rarely if ever adopt a product or process without “Bullitt-izing” it—recreating it to align with the strengths and values of their community. The district’s process for implementing the Graduate Profile is no exception. Simultaneously intentional and organic, the BCPS approach to change builds on strengths, empowers teachers to innovate, and models the kind of professional growth and learning that adults in district schools want their students to experience.

Early on in the work to bring the BCPS Graduate Profile to life, leaders highlighted existing strengths within the district—programs that were already supporting learners to develop competencies like self-direction, problem solving, or collaboration. According to Jesse, what they discovered was that there were “pockets happening across the district that a lot of our folks didn’t even know about,” often because they were only available to select high school students based on an application process or teacher recommendation.



This graphic recording captures the key elements of the BCPS Graduate Profile story.





Even when compared to the largest district in the state, Bullitt County Public Schools offered “more dual credit options, more apprenticeships, more work-based learning than anyone. We’ve got over 92 pathways, and that’s unheard of for a district our size. But it was more at a high school level. And what I really want to do with this Graduate Profile work is start it literally from the time you might enter preschool with us. It’s not just what we do in high school.”

— Adrienne Usher, Assistant Superintendent, Bullitt County Public Schools

“We wanted to be intentional about defining and owning where those things were taking place,” Jesse explains, “but also to provide opportunities for that [kind of learning] to spread organically throughout the district so that the overall experience for every single kid changes, not just the kids who are in identified programs that have already been established around this work.”

To reach that goal of universal and equitable access to powerful learning, Jesse visited every school and spoke to the members of every faculty. When he shared examples of long-standing programs like [Bullitt Advanced Math and Science](#) (BAMS), an accelerated STEM program that features real-world learning and community partnerships, he asked the school community, “How many of you would want this experience for your kid?” He recalls that every single person raised a hand. This response prompted new questions, which he hoped would spark curiosity and activate leaders for change across all schools, grades, and subjects. “Why are we not providing these same types of opportunities for all of our kids?” he challenged his audience. “How do we provide students with authentic ways to demonstrate this type of learning in a way that’s going to be truly meaningful to them?”

According to Adrienne, the only way to transform the student experience is to transform pedagogy. Her purpose, she says, is to support teachers to be innovators in

their own practice, “which in turn will innovate what the learning experience is for kids.” Recognizing the importance of teacher practice is not a novel idea, but what sets BCPS apart—what “Bullitt-izes” the transformation process—is the role of teachers as leaders, designers, and innovators, not just implementers of change. For example, Adrienne and Jesse do not talk about “getting teacher buy-in” for the Graduate Profile or “executing with fidelity” with new instructional methods, because such language suggests compliance to mandates and traditional structures of authority.

Instead, BCPS teachers elect to join professional cohorts to learn and to lead work that they are passionate about. Participation in a cohort is voluntary, and teachers are given time, space, and support from internal and external experts, as well as stipends for taking on these roles as learning designers and leaders.

The results from numerous initiatives provide evidence to district leaders that this kind of grassroots and organic spread of practices takes years to unfold, but it is the best way to build and sustain the kind of transformation that the Graduate Profile aspires to and all learners deserve. Adrienne observes that the district has used the professional cohort approach for eight years, predating the launch of the first Graduate Profile group in 2019. “It’s a professional learning system that gives



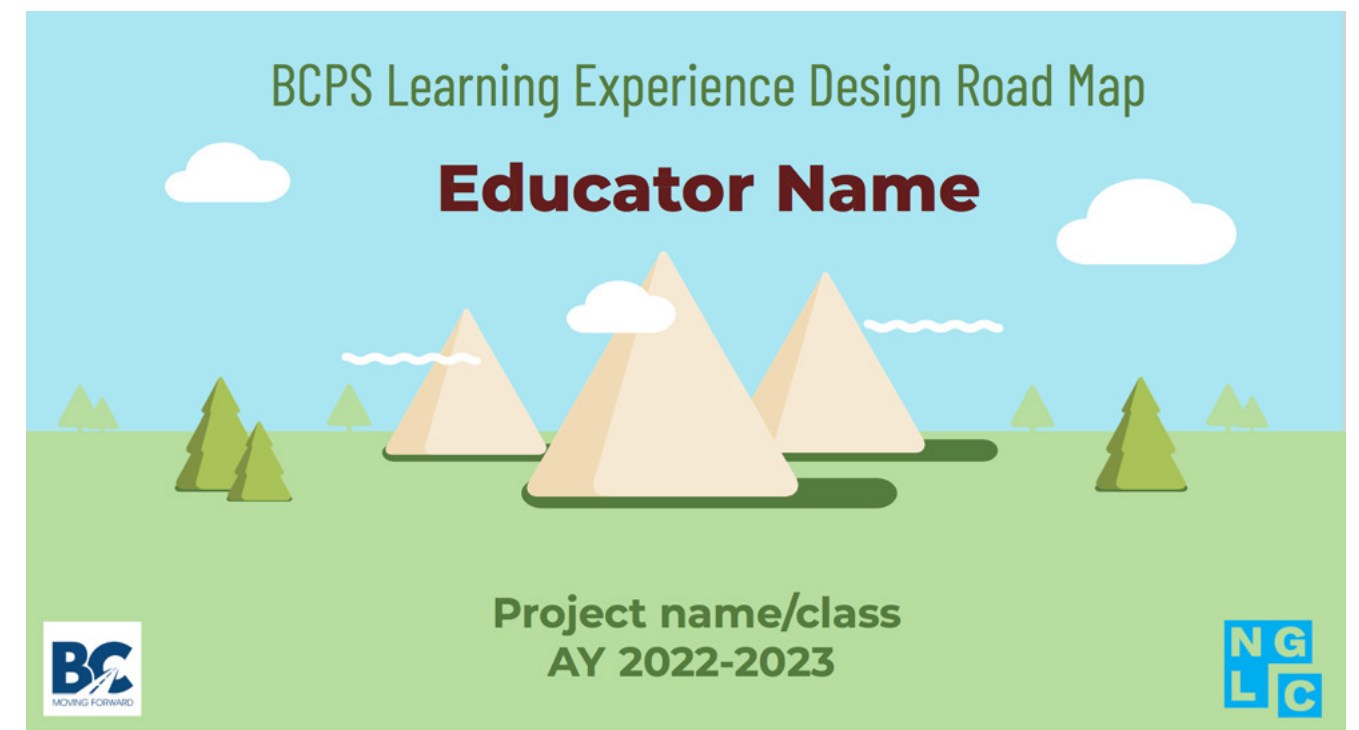


teachers voice and choice,” says Adrienne, “like we should give our kids. As a district leader, I don’t believe in getting up and saying, ‘By 2025 we’re going to have 45 percent of our classrooms doing a PBL [project] or a [portfolio] defense. That would be forced and about compliance. It wouldn’t be authentic.”

By the end of the 2022-2023 school year, more than 75 district teachers representing a range of schools, grades, and subjects will have devoted at least one year to participating in a Graduate Profile cohort. In the first year, in partnership with [Next Generation Learning Challenges](#), cohort members dig into the six Graduate Profile competencies, explore research and real-world exemplars, and apply their learning to their own contexts. In many cases, Adrienne notes, year one is

more about mindsets and understanding than radical changes to practice. Her messaging to teachers is, “You just have to think about the competencies a bit more intentionally. There’s a new definition of what being an effective communicator is. So how do you think more about planning that learning experience with your newer, updated understanding of what a communicator is?”

In addition to collective sense-making around the Graduate Profile, cohort members spend time designing new or adapting existing activities, assignments, and classroom practices to support development of the competencies in intentional ways. For those teachers who choose to dive more deeply into new designs for learning, the first year of the cohort experience culminates in a two-day



Educators in the Graduate Profile cohort, along with interested peers, often complete their year by designing a major project aligned to the Graduate Profile by attending a Design Learning Institute. Participants design this new learning experience using a design road map that reflects high quality PBL and Liberatory Design principles.



Design Learning Institute over the summer, where individual teachers or teams design a major project that focuses on a high-priority content topic—to support the “Mastery Learner” competency—and one or more other Graduate Profile elements. In some cases, cohort members repeat all or parts of the year one experience in subsequent years. Members of the cohort also invite educators from their schools who were not part of the cohort to join the Design Learning Institute in order to collaborate on a new project design.

As Adrienne explains, “The key to [implementing the Graduate Profile] is the professional learning cohorts. Now, you could view the cohorts as just a group of people that are getting trained and they’re the only ones doing it. But what I know from using this model for almost eight years now is what really happens. The cohort teachers are in the trenches, and the next day they’re calling their partner or teammate who’s not in it to plan with them. They’re planning things together. These other people may not be as knowledgeable as the people in the cohort, but it’s spreading because they’re all surrounded by the teachers who have been in a cohort, and that’s how they’ve learned to teach.”

At BCPS, participation in a cohort is not designed to be a “one-and-done” experience. For example, Adrienne reports that cohort groups continue to meet together in years

two and three on a regular basis, such as at monthly learning design days organized by the district. To continue to build capacity to refine their own practices aligned to the Graduate Profile and share their learning with others, teachers also set personalized goals and receive coaching from instructional experts on staff at the district or from organizations like [Advanced Learning Partnerships](#).

Moreover, Adrienne points out that just because the cohort approach to professional learning is teacher-centered, that does not mean leaders are hands-off. When it’s time to launch a new Graduate Profile cohort, she explains, “I call all these teachers on their cell phones and invite them. I talk to them about where they are at in their practice. ‘What are you thinking about this work? Where do you want to go?’ Does it take me hours? Yes. But as time consuming as it is, I try really hard to talk to every single teacher about the professional cohort.” In addition to boosting participation, she says, personal calls build positive relationships and a learning culture among adults. Her message to potential cohort members is, “The assistant superintendent is a real person. She doesn’t have everything figured out. We’re going to be figuring [the Graduate Profile] out together.”

For Jesse, building a culture of innovation and improvement requires explicit messaging from leaders that failure is a natural and expected



Educators from the Graduate Profile cohorts collaborate to unpack the competencies.





part of growth. “We’ve been really intentional with every single communication that comes from us to the teachers and principals who are engaging in transforming the learning experience. ‘Don’t be afraid to try new things. Don’t be afraid to fail. Let’s learn from what doesn’t go well. Let’s try it again in a different way next time, and let’s get a better result. And guess what? If you try it and it doesn’t work, great, tell us what you learned from it. Tell us how you’re going to do it differently the next time. That’s all we ask.’ We do not expect them to be perfect, but we do expect them to show growth, and also tell us where we can help them along the way.”

According to Jesse, to nurture a change-positive culture at schools and in classrooms, leaders must also model innovative mindsets in district operations. “In every single aspect, every department— transportation, facilities, what have you. We’ll come up with a new idea to try something. We’ll throw it out there, and

if it doesn’t work, we’ll say, ‘Whoops, we’re sorry. We’re gonna back up and punt, try it a different way. That didn’t work because of X, Y, Z so here’s the new plan.’ I think that’s built a lot of trust from our staff, seeing that we’re not afraid to step out and try new and different things.”

At times leadership support may also include providing educators with a sense of safety by, in Jesse’s words, “throwing up a shield” or “running interference” with respect to external factors and old criteria for success. Participating in the Graduate Profile cohorts, he says, “is liberating to the teachers because we’re giving them permission not to be a slave to the standardized testing system we’re all required to participate in. We try very hard not to overemphasize those assessments like a lot of districts and places do. Yes, assessment is important. It’s a data point in time that we will analyze, but it’s not what we’re going to hang our hat on at the end of the day.”







### 03 New Learning Designs for a New Definition of Success

The first Graduate Profile cohort launched in the fall of 2019, just before the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted learning at BCPS and throughout the world. Since that launch, district leaders have observed notable shifts in teachers' practice. One of these is a growing focus on experiential learning, such as project-based learning (PBL) and authentic, real-world tasks. According to Adrienne, the pandemic did not derail innovations in instruction. Instead, she observes, the challenge of trying to replicate a traditional, teacher-directed classroom in a virtual environment "pushed some of our teachers towards PBL. Because they weren't able to be right there in front of their kids, we had more teachers attempting to teach with projects."

For example, she relates the story of a biology teacher at Bullitt Central, who told Beau, his instructional coach, that teaching science as he had done in the past simply could not work in a remote setting. "I can't teach science like this," the teacher said. "I've got to do something completely different. I've got to turn it upside down." Encouraged to do just that, his answer was to replace teacher-centered lessons with a project-based approach. Soon, Adrienne reports, his students were learning biology by building turtle habitats in their homes.

Jesse points out that the pandemic also changed mindsets around the importance of learner agency and the competencies like the Graduate Profile's "Self-Directed Navigator." "Giving students the agency to own more of



Lebanon Junction third graders review patient charts as part of "OR Day," a career exploration experience featuring real-world skills and partnership with a healthcare professional from the community.

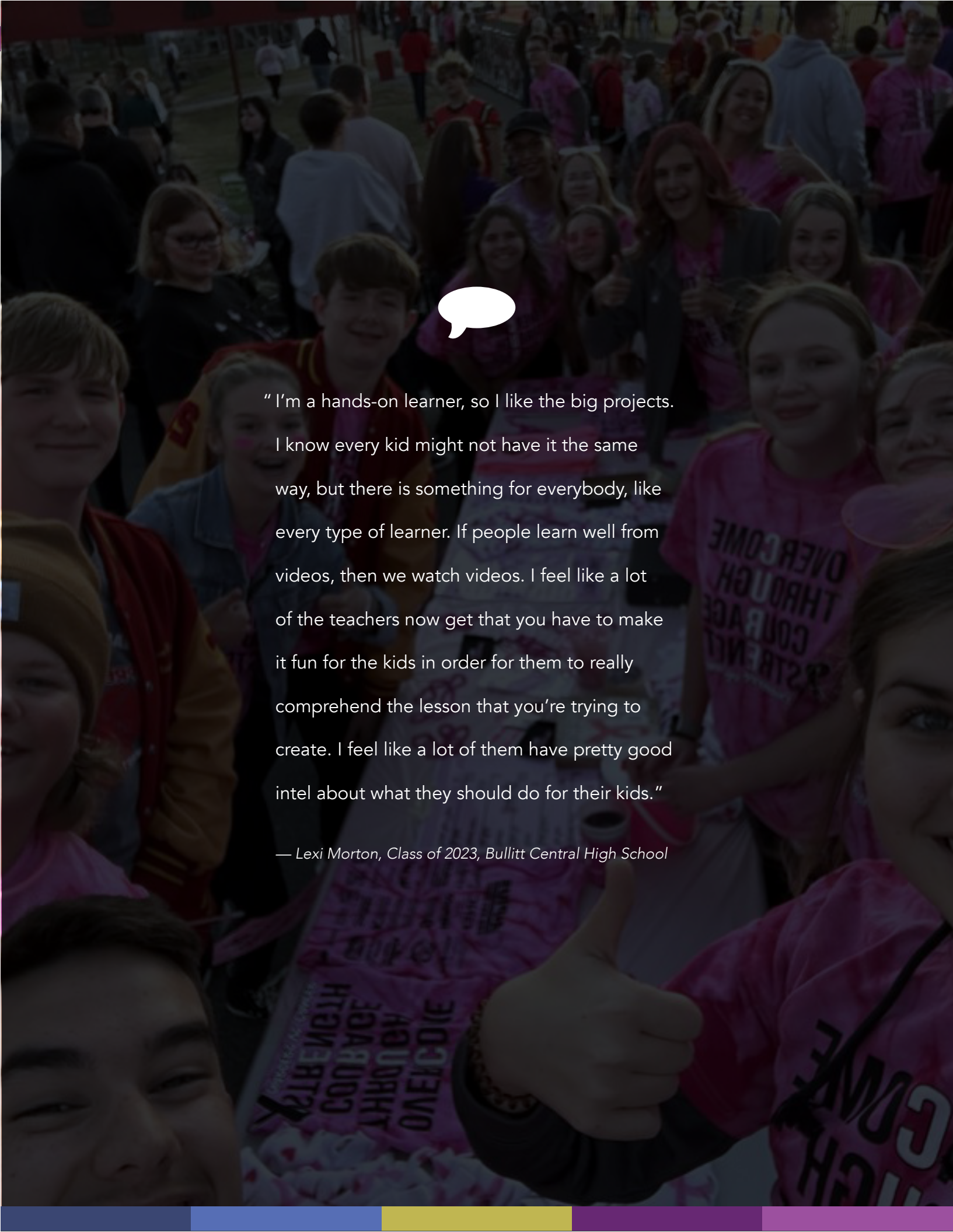


their learning journey and learning process has come about as a result of the pandemic. Since then, we've been able to grow towards giving students the opportunity to self-select what they want to work on and how they're going to approach and solve problems."

Daniel, the elementary school principal, notes with pride that two fifth grade teachers from last year's Graduate Profile cohort are doing a "fantastic" job developing learner self-direction at his school. To illustrate, he describes what he observed during a recent classroom visit: "Their focus right now is 'Self-Directed Navigator.' Kids have a Google survey every day that asks them what their goal for the day is. The kids set it. For some of them it's a behavior goal. For some of them it's an academic goal. They're doing that for the day, but they're also doing it by lesson. The fifth graders are really internalizing how to self-navigate to set the goals and then navigate to reach them."

Growing support for learner voice and choice, Adrienne observes, is also shaping teachers' assessment practices. During her frequent visits to classrooms, she sees more flexibility, with teachers providing multiple options for how students demonstrate their learning. More and more, the teacher's message, she says, is, "Okay, this may be what we're learning today, but everybody can show it in somewhat of a different way." Although she recognizes that assessing learners in multiple ways has long been part of differentiated instruction, she makes this distinction: "Before, you might have had some little bit of differentiation, but this is better than differentiation because kids are having agency. They are getting to decide how they show it."

The stories of two BCPS educators—Beau and Kim—who have engaged deeply with the Graduate Profile since the beginning illustrate the kinds of changes in mindset and practice that have taken root and are now spreading across the district.



"I'm a hands-on learner, so I like the big projects. I know every kid might not have it the same way, but there is something for everybody, like every type of learner. If people learn well from videos, then we watch videos. I feel like a lot of the teachers now get that you have to make it fun for the kids in order for them to really comprehend the lesson that you're trying to create. I feel like a lot of them have pretty good intel about what they should do for their kids."

— Lexi Morton, Class of 2023, Bullitt Central High School





“ For enrichment, students are told, ‘Well, take this elective,’ but if they don’t hit benchmarks in math or English, then they get one less elective because they have to take remedial math or remedial English. So if your extracurriculars as well as your electives are essentially rewards for doing well in class to begin with, a lot of students are going to feel like they’re in a system where they can never win. They don’t get access to those opportunities, and those students are the ones that need those opportunities the most.”

— Beau Kaelin, Instructional Coach, BCPS

## Beau Kaelin

From his perspective as an instructional coach, Beau appreciates the ways the Graduate Profile highlights collaboration, communication, and problem solving—capabilities scientists need. “You don’t really have any scientist in history operating by themselves, acting in a silo. So much of the Graduate Profile encourages individuals to collaborate with one another, to open up academic discourse with one another, as well as to reach out and discuss with individuals that don’t necessarily share your ideas.” He contrasts this broader definition of science with how it has been defined in the past. “A lot of the science that students are taught in high school has very specific content, but they never really see the application of it. Science becomes a series of facts to memorize and learn. They don’t see science as a practice.”

According to Beau, the Graduate Profile helps teachers and learners “step back and see that science is a process. It’s a way of thinking more than it is just fact based. Science is the way that our brains function.” Citing examples of problem solving from daily life, such as figuring out an alternate route to work to avoid road construction, Beau frames the study of science as a life skill that is relevant to everyone. “That is the scientific process. You’re forming a new hypothesis and you’re looking at the data and you’re altering where you go from there.”

For Beau, PBL is a good fit for this broader definition of science, and, like Jesse and Adrienne, he notes that it has been part of the BCPS experience in the past—for some learners. “We have done some project-based work with BAMS, where the students are working with GE Appliances or they’re out collecting in Bernheim [Arboretum and Research Forest].” Like many other district educators, he is committed to making this kind of authentic, whole-person learning part of every student’s experience.

“This year, my growth goal with teachers is focusing on incorporating that [Graduate Profile] stuff in all classrooms,” Beau says. “I feel like a lot of the time that higher-order, project-based work and thinking gets reserved to advanced classrooms,” he explains. “It’s assumed that only advanced students can do this sort of thing. But I would contend that it’s actually more important to do it with all your students, the students that aren’t in those classrooms. They’re the ones that get less opportunities because of teacher belief that they can’t do it.”

Although he primarily coaches high school educators, Beau draws inspiration from the Graduate Profile work he has observed among middle school teachers, who have been active in the cohorts since the first year. For example, he notes that, “Any time [middle school teachers] were doing a group activity,” he says, “they were very explicit about how



the students were working on being effective communicators and productive collaborators and what that means. Even though we tend to think of high school educators as the people most responsible for preparing students for graduation,” he adds, “these middle school teachers are rocking [the Graduate Profile] better than a lot of the high school world.”

As a result of time spent in middle school classrooms, Beau is supporting high school teachers to be more explicit about the language of the Graduate Profile. According to him, “It’s very easy to say, ‘Oh yeah, we’re doing all of these things on a regular basis,’ but unless you’re bringing it to light intentionally with the students, they aren’t necessarily making that connection and realizing that sometimes the activities you’re doing are designed to build a skill more than to build content knowledge.”

Leveraging the district’s culture of innovation, as well as the scientific process, Beau is also working with a team of science educators at Bullitt Central High School to pilot “passion-based” research projects in science classes. These projects, a quarter long, are based on learners’ interests, but they also intentionally embed both Next Generation Science Standards and Graduate Profile competencies.

The goal, he explains, is to make science classrooms more authentic and relevant to students, as well as to the world as it is today.

“We feel like the Graduate Profile is the way to authenticity because we are in an era when you can just look up anything that’s knowledge based.” Teaching, he argues, should be more about “how you tap into what would be authentic to students.”

Although scientific processes and problem solving underlie all the projects, Beau notes that students choose their own topics and set personal goals for their learning. For example, students have chosen “a vast array of topics,” including figuring out how to shave 15 seconds off a mile run, how to cook gluten-free food, or how to start a TikTok trend. According to Beau, providing opportunities to develop Graduate Profile competencies is also central to both the educators’ design of the project and the students’ own goals and reflections on their learning. Teachers, he says, intentionally build in opportunities for learners to “be community contributors, work on collaborative skills, reflect on self-selected goals, and then unpack them and assess” their progress. Educators also use language from the [Graduate Profile Learning Progression](#) to assist learners in setting personalized goals that align to the six competencies.

Learner voice and choice, Beau says, also applies to the overall project design. To make sure the learning experience is as relevant and authentic as possible, Beau interviewed a diverse group of students, including those “that don’t necessarily buy into school. My teacher

team and I then took that feedback, and we modified how this project looks in terms of parameters and grading and everything. Once we revised it, we sent it back to the student interviewees again, and they gave feedback again. It was a back and forth process. So now any slide or handout that a student is seeing has been vetted by students multiple times over.”

Beau describes how he and the pilot teachers “looked at [the design of the project] the same as we did the Graduate Profile: if we want to make something that is authentic to the community, ask the community. So in this case, for us to try to make something that’s authentic to student learning, we had to ask students what it should look like.”

For Beau and the science educators participating in the pilot, the projects also needed to have a home in a content area like science so that the experience could be as equitable as possible. As he explains, “We felt that it was important to dedicate that time within a content class because that ensures that all students get those opportunities.”

Learner response to the passion projects has been positive and, to some degree, unexpected for both educators and students. “We’ve found that [learners] are surprised—almost jarred—by having the freedom to basically pick topics that interest them and go from there. They couldn’t believe it, almost like we were tricking them. That [reaction] surprised us as well.”







“I’m one of those teachers who when you were coming to observe me, my lesson was going to be perfect. When I was a student, I wanted the ‘A,’ and I wanted that perfect observation when I was a teacher. What I really had to do—and it took a lot of coaxing from Adrienne—was to give up control and be okay with failing because that was what I wanted my students to do. I want them to make mistakes because that’s how we learn. I tell them that all the time, and we use whiteboards a lot in my classroom because they’re easy to erase. I think as teachers we forget that making mistakes is how we learn, too. I need to try things that are going to crash and burn. Administrators and principals have to create that culture ahead of time so that the teacher understands that it’s okay to fail, that this is new to all of us.”

— Kim Ludwig, Math Educator, Bullitt Central High School

## Kim Ludwig

When Adrienne tells stories of individual educators who have transformed their teaching in response to the Graduate Profile, she invariably mentions Kim. An experienced—and admittedly traditional—high school math educator, Kim participated in the first professional learning cohort and started designing her first major project—in which students applied algebra and trigonometry principles to designing a spectacular fountain for the entrance to an amusement park.

At the time she was invited to join the cohort, Kim recalls, she was “a very old-school teacher,” and her classes were “very structured.” She describes a typical lesson this way: “You would come in, get out your notebook, do the bell ringer [activity], and do notes together. You would do some sort of guided practice on your own, be it a worksheet or something similar. There would be some kind of exit slip at the end. Then there would be days that we’d take quizzes and days that we’d take tests. That’s essentially how my class ran every day.”

Moreover, for a long time, Kim saw no reason to change what she was doing. After all, her learners continued to meet traditional definitions of success, like getting good grades. “My kids learned,” she says, “but they were learning out of compliance and not learning out of truly wanting to learn. I typically teach the advanced kids, so they cared about their

grade. They were learning the material, but were they really learning it in the depth that they should have been learning it, or were they just learning it out of compliance because they had to, to get that grade in my class?”

“The Graduate Profile allows us to get to those kids who aren’t going to learn it out of compliance,” she argues. “You’ve got to have a hook for them. I found that when I started doing the projects, my kids were learning at a whole different level. It blew me away.”

As with so many of her innovative colleagues, one key change to her thinking about teaching originated with empathy for her learners. According to Kim, she taught the way she did because “that’s how my teachers ran class every day when I was in school. It didn’t bother me because I liked school. When the Graduate Profile came out, it really got me to think about what I could do differently. I had to think, ‘Okay, if I’m a kid who doesn’t like school, how much do I want to come to school if every single one of my classes is just come in, do the bell ringer, take out my notebook, take notes, do an assignment, do an exit slip, leave, go to the next class, and do it all over again? I am going to hate the six hours



Listen to Kim and high school student Lexi Morton describe the fountain design project.



I’m there during the day, and by the time you get me in fourth or fifth period, I’m probably ornery and not a nice person.”

Kim is very clear that transforming practice does not mean ignoring academic content. “Kentucky has not changed the standards. I’m still teaching the same content. I’m just approaching it in a totally different way.” In addition to incorporating projects in which learners apply math concepts and also develop Graduate Profile capabilities, Kim has made significant changes to her daily instruction. Chief among these is shifting from a teacher-centered approach to a learner-centered one.

In addition to working on collaborative projects like designing a fountain, Kim has explored ways to “take a step back and let [students] have some control on a daily basis. I’m giving students more voice, having activities that require them to talk more and me less. I’m taking time to incorporate conversations or have students come up and present or do the teaching of the lesson.”

According to Kim, one of her boldest moves to support learner agency was giving her students the opportunity to create the rubric for the fountain project. Kim admits that she was skeptical about how the lesson would go. “In the back of my mind,” she says, “I’m thinking this is going to be a completely wasted day. I’m going to have to redo the rubric anyway, but we’ll try it.”

As Kim recalls telling the class, “You need a rubric, and you are going to tell me what needs to be on there. You’re the teacher. What do you need to do to show that you’ve mastered all the quadratic concepts for unit three?”

The results stunned and delighted Kim. “The conversations that they had coming up with this rubric were far better than anything I would’ve gotten on any paper-pencil test,” she says proudly. “They all deserved an A on that unit. They were using the vocabulary correctly. They were using the content material correctly. They were harder on themselves than I would’ve been on them. They were arguing with each other, saying things like, ‘You have to have at least four sprays on your fountain if you want to get a [top score of] four.’ And they came up with the due date themselves. The entire rubric was created by them.”

Redefining teaching and learning does not happen overnight, Kim says. It takes persistence and practice, for both the teacher and the students. “The first couple of times you do class discussion,” she says, “they’re not really going to talk because they’re not really sure what you want them to talk about. Is it going to go perfect the first time? No. Is it going to go perfect the second time? Probably not. To form a habit, you have to do it consistently. Your kids will eventually get what you’re trying to do with the process and how you’re trying to get them to understand.”

Kim describes how teaching this way has changed her work flow as well. Designing learner-centered lessons and activities, she reports, requires more preparation, or “front-loading” on her part. However, the extra work in advance is worth it, she says. “I’m working far less hard in the 55 minutes that they’re in my room than I was before. With the old way

of doing it, it’s me for 55 minutes—standing up there delivering the instruction, doing the notes, going through the problems for the whole time. Now I’m stepping back to let them lead the show, and I’m not so exhausted because I’m not the one delivering the instruction five periods a day, 55 minutes each period.”

Teacher/Curriculum Centered	Learner Centered
Educator does most of the talking	Students do most of the talking, working & learning
Wisdom & knowledge reside in the educator	Learning is collaborative: learner, peers, educator, and other partners contribute & give feedback
Educator designs all aspects of the learning experience	Learners make choices about what they will learn, how, and with whom
Educator intervenes with constant & instantaneous correction	Learners find their own way & figure things out
Educator is the sole arbiter of quality	Learners & educator co-create what success looks like
The classroom is quiet and orderly, with static rows facing front	The learning environment is buzzing with activity, with flexible seating for collaboration
Culture of compliance & following	Culture of knowledge, joyful struggle, and leading

Creating a learner-centered classroom to support a broader definition of student success is a guiding principle for the Graduate Profile professional learning cohorts.





## 04 Lessons Learned on the Transformation Journey

Educators, leaders, and members of the Bullitt County community who have embraced the Graduate Profile know that much of the work to transform the learning experience for all students lies ahead. They do not claim to have everything figured out, yet they have learned enough from the process to offer some advice to others who are redesigning education with a focus on equity and lifelong success for their learners.

A common theme across stakeholders is that bringing about transformative change—and building the capacity to sustain those changes—cannot be hurried or forced. “Anything that is done right takes time,” observes Beau. “You can’t turn a school on a dime,” he says, even when a district has a clear direction of where it is headed, like a new Graduate Profile. For example, he notes, “It took us five years to make this new profile of a graduate and then get to the project pilot with my team of teachers. Nothing has to be rolled out en masse and rushed. It’s not a time crunch.” Comparing transforming learning to completely changing course on an old-time clipper ship, he says, “It’s more like a slow, wide-curving turn.”

Speaking to fellow educators and the leaders who support them, Kim points out that it is neither quick nor easy to change teaching practices from what is easiest for adults to what is best for kids. It is possible, however, and

persistence is key. “Don’t give up the first time something fails,” she advises. “Don’t give up the second time it fails. If it fails the third time, don’t give up. It’s going to take some time, especially if you’re like me and you’re stubborn and you’ve always taught one way. Through the whole first part of this work, the whole first cohort, I was ready to walk away.” She adds with a laugh, “I didn’t want to do it. I wanted to finish out my 27 years teaching my old-school way. If a teacher who’s been teaching 17 years can change their ways, anybody can do it. Now I’m in. Now I love it.”

Another recommendation to fellow districts concerns engaging with the wider community to create your new success definition. Although many districts enlist the support of stakeholders to some degree, members of the BCPS community share suggestions on how to collaborate with agency and authenticity. For example, Mike, as a community partner and parent, makes a distinction between simply getting buy-in and true engagement. “If you’re going to ask somebody for their opinion, ask for an opinion, not an approval. Because if you’re asking for approval, that’s just a ‘yes’ or ‘no.’ If you ask me for my opinion, it’s engagement. If I feel like you’re just asking for my approval, I’m probably not going to participate because you’re going to do whatever it is anyway. And if I feel like you’re cornering me, I’m probably going to resist just on reflex.”





Noting that many graduate profiles feature effective communication, he reminds educators doing this work that active listening is an essential skill for adults as well as learners. “If you’re going to put communication as a pillar in your chart,” he argues, “that means you also have to be willing to listen to me, even if my opinion is different because of my perspective as a non-educator.” In addition, he cautions against jargon, which he sees as a barrier to engagement.

“Use plain talk,” Mike says, “at least up front. If you can say it in two words, say it in two words.” He challenges organizers of community events to remember, “You are asking people to give time and effort and resources to come to your thing. Be willing to listen, and be willing to talk straight. Use the words that everybody can understand. If you’re going to whitewash everything with long discourse and big words that are only

understood in the educational space, chances are it’s not going to sink in with a group that represents the complete cross section of your community.”

Beau adds, “If you’re asking for feedback, your actions should reflect that you listened to that feedback.” If engaging stakeholders is carried out effectively, as an authentic collaboration, he says, the contributions will be evident. “Whatever the final product is, you should be able to point to it and say, ‘This is where your feedback is represented.’”

Adrienne sums up the district’s approach to stakeholder engagement and its results this way: “Our committees represented all different people in our district. They were really invested in [the Graduate Profile work] and really wanted it to mean something. Some of these people tell me that they still have a sense of pride, that they walk around the district knowing that they were a part of this.” ■







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