

Moving to Slate: Anticipated Frequently Asked Questions

We expect you might have some questions already. Here is an initial attempt at clarifying some things.

1. *What is Slate?*

According to the creators of Slate, [“Slate is an open-source platform built and controlled by schools to simplify the adoption and management of technology and enable more authentic student evaluation. Slate’s open-source approach ensures schools retain complete control over their software and data while sharing the systems and tools that support their innovative models.”](#)

In plain English? Slate is a proficiency-based assessment platform. It is where teachers will create assessments, enter assessment data, attach rubrics, and track student progress on a given standard. It is where students and parents will go to view progress.

2. *Why are we changing reporting platforms from Infinite Campus to Slate?*

Baxter has always been expressly committed to strong proficiency-based learning and assessment practices. The online reporting platform we choose *should* facilitate our implementation of best pedagogical practices, and support student-centered learning through clarity and transparency. Infinite Campus does not support best practice as established by the education literature, nor does it fulfill Baxter teachers’ needs in supporting student-centered learning and academic growth.

A sampling of Baxter teachers’ concerns with IC, according to faculty survey January 2017:

- “[IC does not] show progress kids are making from year to year”
- “I find it challenging that I cannot see students progress towards standards over time/ multiple years worth of data at the same time.”
- “[I wish I could] communicate more and better narratives to parents and kids in context.”
- “I can’t attach rubrics or docs in IC, so feedback can’t live there unless I take the time to type a separate comment”
- “[T]he most problematic issue with IC is its inability to track student data and progress on individual standards as a student moves through Baxter. At a standards-based school, the ability to track a student’s progress on individual standards is REQUIRED!”

3. *Why did we choose Slate?*

For the last 15 months a team of our colleagues has been meeting frequently to determine how best to address the concerns raised by IC and articulated in the faculty survey we completed in January 2017.

The team reviewed a number of possibilities and landed on Slate for the following reasons:

- ★ **Quality** aka the degree to which it addresses Baxter’s critical pedagogical and logistical needs. The platform will cause clear and transparent reporting to happen, by design. It will present student progress in a user-friendly interface to support teaching and learning.
- ★ **Flexibility**. In collaboration with the team at Slate, Hal will be able to adapt Slate’s various modules to meet Baxter’s specific needs (generating our unique college transcript, eg).
- ★ **Cost**. We can afford it! :-)

4. ***Are we still going to use Infinite Campus for some things?***

Yes. We will still be using IC for non-academic student information (e.g. demographic information, attendance, behavioral incident records). We may also record end-of-term grades for courses during the transition, though we hope to automate this process so that it doesn't create additional effort on the part of teachers. Hal and guidance will be working closely with both IC and Slate to generate college transcripts this year.

5. ***How will we all be supported during the transition from using IC as our primary platform to using Slate as our main reporting platform?***

In addition to two ½ days of professional development and workshop time during August, faculty and staff can expect additional support leading up to progress reports, as well as Slate team BLC office hours throughout the fall, during which all are invited to stop in with questions. Details to come this fall.

6. ***What will parents see?***

Parents will essentially see the same thing as a student. Proficiency information will be shown in terms of progress on STANDARDS and INDICATORS; for information on assignment completion, students and parents will consult Google Classroom, as they always have.*

Here is an example:

**When this document was finalized, the above statement was true. It is possible that by the time you read this, kids and parents will ALSO be able to view assignment completion information through Slate. This is our hope. Again, stay tuned!*

The screenshot shows the SLATE Dashboard interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with 'SLATE Dashboard', a search icon, and links for 'Courses', 'Manage Slate', 'Tools', and 'Halsted'. Below the navigation bar, there is a 'Design' dropdown menu and a 'Refresh' button. The main content area is divided into several sections:

- Recent Progress:** A table showing progress on standards and indicators.

| Scoring Domain | Rating |
|--|--------|
| PR: Knows how to define and call custom functions Programming, Mr. Larsson | 10 |
| PR: Demonstrates an understanding of how to change variable | 10 |
- Design Process:** A section showing progress on 'Y1' standards. The progress bar is at 0%. Below the progress bar, there are two indicators:
 - EN: Identify insights relevant to a given problem statement with guidance. Progress bar is at 0%.
 - PR: Identify relevant project deliverables and constraints (scope, schedule, resources, quality). Progress bar is at 0%.
- Aesthetics & Meaning:** A section showing progress on 'Y1' standards. The progress bar is at 0%. Below the progress bar, there are two indicators:
 - EN: Shares incidental facts about select eras in art history. Progress bar is at 0%.
 - EN: Exhibits comprehension of the Elements of medium. Progress bar is at 0%.

7. ***How will Slate support my role as an advisor?***

So glad you asked! You are going to love Slate come SLC time. You will be able to create a roster of your advisees and call up visually-appealing graphics to accompany conversations with advisees and their parents about progress in classes, on standards, and towards graduation. Additional PD will happen leading up to progress reports and SLCs.

8. ***Slate supports best practices for proficiency-based learning...but what exactly are the principles behind proficiency-based learning?****

The Slate team did our work with a few assumptions in mind about proficiency-based learning. They are listed below. [Note: We acknowledge that the following are, as stated, merely ASSUMPTIONS; therefore they are not carved in stone, nor are they edicts, but rather our starting point for engaging in this work. It is the intention of the forthcoming Curriculum Committee to begin to codify Baxter's own unique set of PBL principles which can inform universal practice by all teachers. See, for example, [Casco Bay High School's Family Grading Guide.](#)]

- All learning expectations are clearly and consistently communicated to students and families, including long-term expectations (eg graduation requirements) and short-term expectations (eg learning objectives for a course or learning experience).
- Student achievement is evaluated against common learning standards and performance expectations that are consistently applied to all students.
- All forms of assessment are standards-based, and success is defined by the achievement of expected standards, not relative measures of performance or student-to-student comparisons.
- Formative assessments measure learning progress during the instructional process, and results are used to inform instruction.
- Summative assessments evaluate learning achievement, and results record a student’s level of proficiency at a specific point in time.
- Academic progress and achievement are monitored and reported separately from character traits, and behaviors such as attendance and class participation, which are also monitored and reported.
- Academic grades communicate learning progress and achievement to students and families, and grades are used to facilitate and improve the learning process.
- Students are given multiple opportunities to improve their work when they fail to meet expected standards.
- Students can demonstrate learning progress and achievement in multiple ways through [differentiated](#) assessments.
- Students are given opportunities to make important decisions about their learning, which includes contributing to the design of learning experiences and learning pathways.

*Adapted from <http://greatschoolspartnership.org/proficiency-based-learning/about-pbl-simplified/ten-principles-proficiency-based-learning/> 23 August 2017

9. ***What do I do when I have an issue with Slate that requires tech support?***

Send an email to: Slate.Support@Baxter-Academy.org

Moving to Slate: Glossary of Terms

As we continue to tighten our Proficiency-Based Learning teaching through our implementation of Slate, it will be helpful (and necessary) to use common language while communicating with each other, students, and parents. The following guide establishes Baxter’s use of relevant terminology.

Assessment - A learning task that will yield information about a student’s proficiency. It may be formative or summative.

Backward Design* - Backward design, also called *backward planning*, is a process that educators use to design learning experiences and instructional techniques to achieve specific learning goals. Backward design begins with the objectives of a unit or course—what students are expected to learn and be able to do—and then proceeds “backward” to create lessons that achieve those desired goals.

Criteria - The descriptions of what student work may look like on a given indicator, at a given level. In other words, the sentences in the boxes of your rubric.

Evidence - Summative assessments which, taken together, teachers use to determine students' level of proficiency. Baxter students will produce at least THREE pieces of evidence at a certain level of each standard before they are deemed proficient at that level.

Formative Assessment* - A wide variety of methods that teachers use to conduct in-process evaluations of student comprehension, learning needs, and academic progress during a lesson, unit, or course. Formative assessments help teachers identify areas where students are struggling. An assessment is formative because it is used to inform instruction and respond to students' needs; it may be in any form.

Indicator (called "Skills" by Slate) - The major categories of academic skill or knowledge that teachers evaluate in order to determine proficiency of a standard. In other words, the words along the left side of a rubric. Example indicators of the Research standard: Inquiry, Information Gathering, Application.

Standard* (called "Competency" by Slate) - Learning standards are concise, written descriptions of what students are expected to know and be able to do. In other words, the title of the rubric. Examples: Research, Computer Science, Heredity and Evolution, Economics.

Summative Assessment* - Assessments used to evaluate student learning, skill acquisition, and academic achievement at the conclusion of a defined instructional period—typically at the end of a project, unit, course, semester, program, or school year.

Tasks (called "Assignments" by Slate) - When we ask our students to engage in a learning experience that provides us with formative feedback on their learning, we will refer to it as a "task". These are recorded in Slate for teacher's, student's, and parents' benefits; these data do *not* constitute evidence of proficiency as they are formative and not summative.

*Adapted from: <http://edglossary.org/understanding-standards/> 16 August 2017