ABOUT HOPE STREET GROUP

Hope Street Group (HSG) launched its first State Teacher Fellows (STF) program in Kentucky in 2013; since that time, the program has expanded to Hawai‘i, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Utah. With the aim of amplifying teacher voices to inform state and district policies that impact educators, the program provides training, tools, resources, and support to cohorts of State Teacher Fellows (STFs) in each state.

ABOUT THE HSG HAWAI‘I STATE TEACHER FELLOWS PROGRAM

The Hawai‘i State Teacher Fellows program provides a vehicle for educators in the Hawai‘i Department of Education (HIDOE) to elevate the teaching profession and expand the dialogue about public education. Teacher Fellows from across the Hawaiian islands collaborate to provide input to state programs and policies, and positively impact students and communities. As part of this overall effort, HSG Hawaii State Teacher Fellows conduct focus groups and surveys with HIDOE educators each year on different high-priority topics. To learn more and get involved, click here for the website, or look for @HSG_HI on Twitter or Facebook.

HSG HAWAI‘I 2018 DATA COLLECTION

The 2018 Hawai‘i State Teacher Fellows fall data collection focused on Project-Based Learning in the HIDOE. Teacher Fellows distributed online surveys to Hawai‘i educators, and held 85 in-person focus groups with 409 teachers. Focus group and survey respondents are from every regional complex (K-12 mini-district) across the state on Hawai‘i Island, Kaua‘i, Lana‘i, Maui, Moloka‘i, and O‘ahu.
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND LOCAL RECOMMENDATIONS

This report presents key findings about utilizing Project-Based Learning in the HIDOE, based on information HIDOE educators shared via online surveys and in-person focus groups. Project-based learning (PBL) is a teaching method through 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. PBL is student-centered learning connected to the community and world. Teachers facilitate the process, and provide guidance and strategic instruction throughout.

The HSG Hawai‘i State Teacher Fellow focus groups and survey findings on PBL can help inform educational leaders as they implement the statewide Hawai‘i Department of Education/Board of Education Strategic Plan. The three focus areas for the HIDOE Implementation Plan 2017-2020 are:

- **School design**: The purposeful design of schools to ensure that every student is highly engaged in a rigorous, creative and innovative academic curriculum, in their learning environment, and in powerful applied learning practices aligned to college and careers.

- **Student voice**: Students’ perspectives and aspirations are highly valued in the classroom, school, and community, and influence the design of educational programs, learning experiences, and school structure through student choice practices.

- **Teacher collaboration**: Teachers continuously team to evaluate practice, design learning collaboratives, discuss student progress, identify community opportunities, and to mitigate challenges through change processes focused on highly effective, student-centered practices that improve the schools and raise student achievement.

PBL is aligned to the above HIDOE focus areas as one example of an applied learning approach that can increase student engagement, incorporate student voice, and connect to teacher collaboration.

Desired and observed outcomes of PBL are also aligned to HIDOE General Learner Outcomes, such as self-directed learner, community contributor, complex thinker, and quality producer. In addition, the HIDOE Office of Hawaiian Education cited PBL as one of four approaches that help strengthen Na Hopena A‘o (HĀ) statewide outcomes for students, the public school system, and communities. HĀ outcomes are place-based, culture-based and community-rooted skills, behaviors and dispositions.
A national research report cited by the Office of Hawaiian Education on the effectiveness of PBL in pre-K through 12th grade classrooms finds that (pp 8-9):

- Students in project-based classrooms exhibited greater gains in content knowledge than their traditionally taught peers, and gains were also higher in group skill development and information literacy skills.
- PBL has positive effect on student attitude and self perception. Students reported enjoying the active, hands-on approach to content, improved perceptions of the subject matter, and greater engagement with subject matter.
- Teachers noted reduced disciplinary actions, citing increased student engagement as the “chief reason.” Teachers also reported that “the real-world focus of the projects allowed students who did not generally shine in academic discussions to share their knowledge.”
- Several studies mentioned in the research found that the “beneficial academic effects of project-based instruction were most pronounced for middle- to low-achieving students.”

HIDOE educator responses to HSG survey reflect some of these national findings. Of the local teachers that indicated they use PBL, 86% see it as valuable for students. Some of the ways they view it as valuable include: increasing student engagement, increasing students’ critical thinking and problem solving skills, and improving students’ understanding.

HIDOE survey responses, combined with input from 85 statewide focus groups, provide a helpful window into the supports that are needed for teachers, leaders, and the system when implementing HIDOE “high-leverage action items” for school design, student voice, and teacher collaboration initiatives.

HIDOE PROJECT-BASED LEARNING: FOCUS GROUPS

In 85 focus groups across the state, 409 teachers discussed PBL implementation challenges and surprises, including suggestions for resources, training, and professional learning.

PBL implementation surprises and challenges: Teachers shared surprises that came up during their implementation of PBL, frequently mentioning being surprised by higher levels of student engagement and learning. When teachers shared challenges that arose during their implementation of PBL, the following themes emerged: finding time; using a new pedagogical approach; securing funding and resources; increasing student engagement in some student groups; holding students accountable for learning; aligning standards with PBL projects; and differentiating PBL for varied student needs.

School practices for expanding and improving PBL practices: Teachers suggested that schools could provide time to plan and implement PBL; opportunities to observe PBL instruction; examples of PBL; financial support; and experts or mentor teachers for PBL trainings and implementation.

Statewide practices or policies to support implementation of PBL: Teachers shared that key statewide practices or policies that would support them in implementing PBL include: training and funding; supporting time for learning and implementation; sharing PBL practices statewide and providing access to model PBL projects across the state; supporting the development of community partnerships; and trusting in teachers’ abilities.
A majority of survey respondents reported using PBL practices in the classroom:

- 75% of teachers reported using PBL practices at least once per year
- 30% reported using PBL from several times a quarter to daily

86% of teachers using PBL feel that it is valuable. These teachers identified the following three most valuable results of PBL:

- Increased student engagement (91%)
- Increased critical thinking and problem solving skills (71%)
- Improved student understanding (65%)

Although 86% of the teachers that use PBL feel that the approach is valuable:

- 22% of teachers who use PBL felt uncomfortable, very uncomfortable, or unsure of their comfort level

The majority of surveyed educators use PBL practices, but survey results indicate that students are not necessarily experiencing PBL in an integrated way:

- 62% do not know of specific classrooms, schools, or complexes that have successfully integrated PBL throughout the student experience
- 51% reported they had not been offered or received professional development on PBL, and this varied by grade level and content area

Educators identified the following supports as the three most important factors for successfully integrating PBL throughout the student experience:

- Planning and preparation time for teachers (78%)
- Teacher training (55%)
- Funding for resources (49%)

Educators felt that the following resources, trainings, and professional learning experiences would expand and improve PBL practices:

- Professional development (74%)
- Observing at a school implementing PBL (66%)
- Receiving a PBL curriculum (63%)
RECOMMENDATIONS

1. School and complex area leaders interested in using PBL can implement it as a vehicle for achieving existing state/school implementation goals, versus an add-on to already full plates and competing priorities. PBL approaches are aligned to statewide General Learner and HĀ Outcomes, and the three focus areas in the HIDOE statewide implementation plan (School Design, Student Choice, and Teacher Collaboration).

Under the HIDOE 2017—2020 Implementation Plan, schools will create a 3-year leadership development plan focused on school models, student voice, community engagement, and innovation. Including PBL in school design plans and 3-year leadership development plans would align to the following HIDOE “high-leverage action items” under the three focus areas:

- Increase student choice in the classroom and school (an essential component of PBL projects)
- Increase applied learning opportunities in the school and community; encourage creativity and innovation
- Engage students in identifying ways to integrate HĀ into student-led actions
- Document how schools are currently creating time to collaborate on curriculum development
- Prioritizing professional growth around opportunities for learning about highly effective/engaging school models

HIDOE teachers and national researchers have identified clear benefits to PBL. Given these benefits, and the alignment of PBL to HIDOE statewide strategic objectives, it is a concern that only 40% of elementary school educators and 55% of high school educators surveyed have been offered and/or have received professional development in PBL. In addition to school-level plans, complex areas can create targeted, differentiated plans for teacher collaboration and professional development:

- Teachers indicated different support needs by grade level and subject area. “Training for teachers” was less important to CTE teachers and fine arts teachers than elementary, math, and world languages teachers. (A37-A39).

- 40% of elementary teachers said they have not received any training on PBL, compared to 25% of high school teachers (A41). Complex areas can help to close this gap and show how PBL can be implemented in earlier grades. This is consistent with 2017 HSG data collection results, where elementary schools needed much more support and information about linking to career readiness efforts than high schools. All age groups benefit from linking to these things along a continuum.

- For all categories of respondents, “planning/prep time for teachers” was the most often cited “important factor” in integrating project-based learning. When creating school and complex area plans, leaders should know that this is not just related to school schedules. Thirty percent of elementary school teachers indicated “school schedule” was an important factor in successfully integrating project-based learning, while only 5% of high school teachers noted this (A37). However, while school schedule became less of a concern in the progression from elementary school to high school, the need for planning/prep time for teachers stayed consistent as the most important factor.
2. **Further study any existing HIDOE connection between a school’s usage of PBL approaches and measures of student engagement and achievement, and share promising practices and approaches for assessing PBL across diverse schools.**

HIDOE can apply funding and resources toward an increased understanding of PBL as a potential vehicle for improving Social Emotional Learning outcomes, student perceptions of school climate, attendance, and measures of student engagement, and overall academic results measured by Strive HI. The HIDOE State Office can identify campuses where PBL is implemented in an integrated way throughout the school. In addition, HIDOE can identify and share concrete resources for assessing PBL that connect to current priority outcomes, so teachers do not feel stretched thin by potentially competing assessment tools.

3. **To support schools, complexes, and complex areas in integrating and expanding PBL, HIDOE State Office leaders, Complex Area Superintendents, and Principals can collaborate on a proposed support matrix.**

*Sample Tri-Level Support Framework for PBL*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State Supports</th>
<th>Complex/CA Supports</th>
<th>School Supports</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Statewide training on PBL with continuing education credits, linking to PBL to procurement language and PD on common core and next gen science standards</td>
<td>Local, community-specific, model PBL projects for new teachers to try</td>
<td>Differentiated PD based, especially for elementary school teachers</td>
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<td>Provide learning strands on PBL at existing HĀ summits, and show how to do PBL through HĀ lens (p. 16)</td>
<td>Time set aside to focus on PBL planning, collaboration, gathering materials, and communities of practice</td>
<td>Integrating PBL into school design plan, including teacher PD and student voice</td>
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<tr>
<td>Guides and toolkits for establishing community partnerships that advance PBL</td>
<td>Resource leads to support and develop community partnerships for PBL, including career-connected learning</td>
<td>Time set aside for thematic collaboration and planning with community partners</td>
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<td>Statewide sharing of stories and inspiring practices (video, newsletters, conferences); funding learning exchanges with “bright spot” examples</td>
<td>Exchanging resources, supports, and ideas for implementing promising practices K-12</td>
<td>School classroom “walks,” growing successful classroom practices and integrating them into school-wide practices</td>
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