

Mount Vernon School

Making Project, Community, and Competency-Based Learning Visible

Overview:

Location: Atlanta, GA

Focus: Inquiry, Innovation, and Impact

Profile: Private school

Start of Partnership: 2019

Vision: Prepare all students to be college-ready, globally competitive, and engaged citizen leaders

Grade range: PK-12

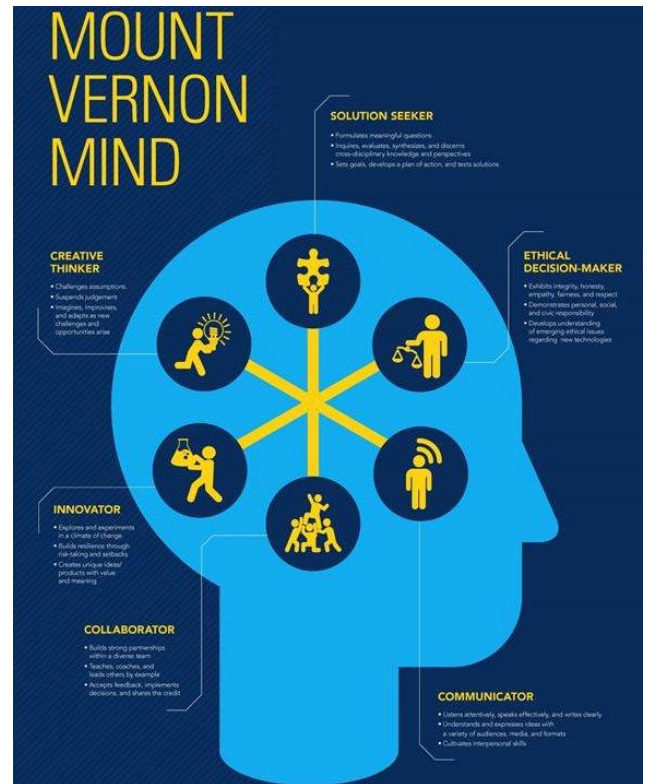
Website: mountvernon.school.org

Student Impact: 3,300 students

Background. Inquiry, innovation, and impact are the three tenets of Mount Vernon School. Their goal is to prepare students to become engaged citizen leaders who are eager to make their impact on the world.

Using human-centered design thinking as a guide, Mount Vernon fosters a learner-centered culture where students are encouraged to ask questions, find unique solutions to problems, and take agency over their learning. Inspired by Tony Wagner's Global Achievement Gap and the World Economic Forum's research, Mount Vernon educators created [The Mount Vernon Mind](#)—a set of mindsets that fosters ways of interacting with the world in order to make a positive difference and contribution and blurs the line between the classroom and the real world.

Additionally, they developed a robust, custom taxonomy of academic competencies to pair with their existing mindsets. With these trans-disciplinary mindsets and learning outcomes in place, they faced their next challenge: How do you manage a competency library, provide meaningful real-time feedback, and track competency development over time in multi-categorical areas? In short, they wanted a platform that could accommodate their learning targets and help them make student learning and progress toward those targets more visible.



Goals

- Empower learner agency and decision-making, and foster the development of executive functioning skills throughout the learning experience.
- Develop a proactive, problem-solving mindset that engages learners in real-world work now, and prepares them for college and their futures beyond the classroom.
- Make progress toward these academic and social-emotional learning competencies visible and measurable to educators, students, and families.

Approach

- Design a learning experience that aligns to the skillsets, mindsets, and competencies that are most important to thriving in the real world.
- Prototype a system that allows educators and students to collaborate on setting goals, measure progress, and provide and receive support toward mastering competencies.
- Develop and test this system of continuous goal-setting, assessment, and feedback, prior to validating it, and applying it at scale throughout the school.

Results

- With student-owned projects informed by a feedback loop and visible progress toward learning targets, Mount Vernon saw an increase in student agency.
- Teachers began reflecting on assessment practices and implementing micro-changes they could test and refine to maximize impact.
- Teachers saw a marked improvement in the quality of student work.

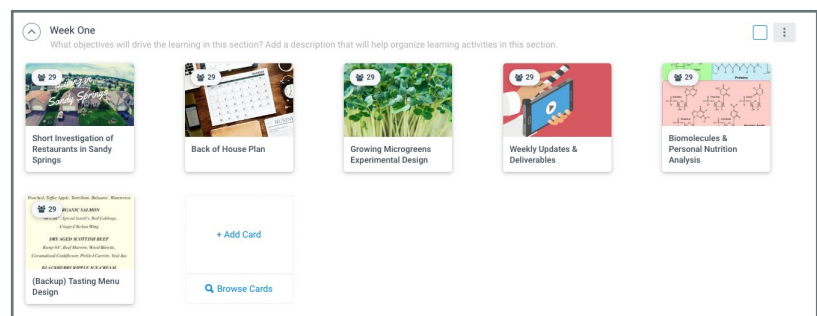
Six years ago Mount Vernon implemented a cutting edge program in its upper school: Innovation Diploma (iDiploma). This student-led program focuses on human-centered design, enabling students to get inspired, create, and implement high impact work. Through it, students have been able to network and build relationships with professionals outside the classroom, affect positive change in partner organizations, and be active citizens in their community. Mount Vernon has partnered with Learner-Centered Collaborative and has leveraged the Altitude Learning platform to support iDiploma and develop a solution to the challenge of planning learning experiences, setting goals, executing non-traditional lesson plans, and capturing and measuring interdisciplinary progress—both within the classroom and out in the real world. This system needed to enable fast, continuous feedback, manage complex projects, and track a wide set of academic and social-emotional milestones.

In response to a design brief, iDiploma ninth graders helped their local community in Sandy Springs, GA address a bold challenge: How can a pop-up restaurant bring leaders from different cultural contexts together to converse and collaborate? Students were tasked with launching this pop-up restaurant—they were responsible for both back- and front-of-house planning, conducting field research, forming project groups, and jigsawing the work (just as teams do in the corporate world every day). This meant that each learner’s experience was unique. To add to the complexity, educators weaved together lessons on biology, humanities, and the mindsets to provide the essential knowledge and skills for the project’s success. How could we begin to measure learning in such a unique, cross-curricular project?

The Altitude Learning platform helped educators and students manage the planning, gather evidence, and track individualized feedback on the competencies and skill sets that were requisite to creating a successful pop-up restaurant.

Plan

Behind each card is a self-guided learning experience aligned to specific competencies. Therefore, when work is assessed it tracks progress toward those competencies.



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“We were looking for a system that would allow us to do more robust, vigorous assessment in a real-world setting. Altitude Learning is much more akin to the type of evaluation, feedback and assessment that you would want in a workplace, and that’s not how traditional LMS and assessment systems are set-up”

– Bo Adams, Chief Learning and Innovation Officer, Mount Vernon School

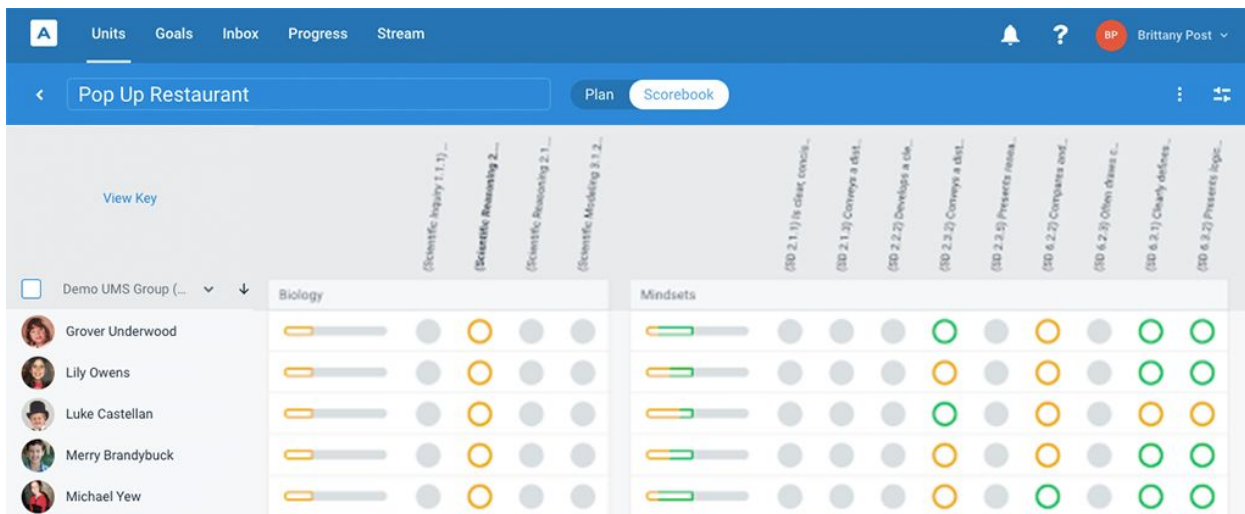
Engage

Educators created cross-curricular Cards that allowed students to practice and showcase specific competencies for each step of the learning process. Some Cards applied to all students, others were assigned to specific working groups. The Meal Development Team, for example, pitched their menu ideas to the class. During the pitches, educators provided formative and narrative assessment on a Card to provide real-time feedback on specific competencies such as writing and public speaking.

Evaluate

Because Mount Vernon's competency library is cross-curricular, students received feedback on a single competency from a variety of educators. This is a marked shift from the more common siloed approach to assessment, where humanities teachers assess language arts standards and science teachers assess science standards. Using the Altitude Learning platform, the iDiploma team created a collaborative assessment model that provides a 360-degree view of mastery.

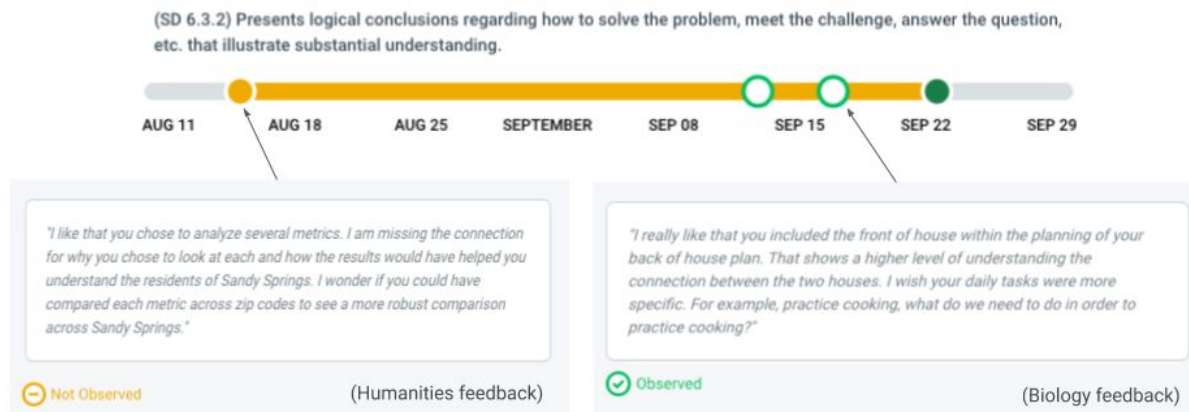
With groups simultaneously working on different competencies, teachers used Scorebook to keep a finger on the pulse of the group's overall progress toward mastery.



Using Scorebook, teachers can quickly spot trends and opportunities for enrichment or remediation. Each row represents a student and each column is a competency to be mastered.

Understand

Teachers and students were also able to track individual growth using Progress, a comprehensive portfolio of all assessed student work organized by competency. Students could monitor their progress over time and see all educator feedback for a skillset or competency in one view. During student-led conferences, iDiploma teachers leveraged Progress when students reflected on their learning and identified the competencies they wanted to focus on next.



The Progress tool makes progress toward competencies over time visible. With easily accessible feedback from teachers spanning courses and subject areas, students have a clear understanding of areas for improvement as they work toward mastering competencies.

Share

All this learning was visible to families via Stream. Through Stream, families could see each learning activity, evidence of student work, and feedback from the educator. This increased transparency of the learning process is critical for families to understand and trust these new innovations in learning.



"Students piloting the Altitude Learning Platform have a better understanding of their growth"

- Bo Adams, Chief Learning and Innovation Officer, Mount Vernon School

Impact on Learning

After three months of partnering with Learner-Centered Collaborative, iDiploma educators and students are capturing, measuring, and tracking cross-curricular, meaningful learning—on campus and beyond. They've created portfolios of learning evidence aligned to their custom academic and mindset competencies to demonstrate the robust vigor embedded in their project-based approach. As a result, learners see evidence of their progress and play an active role in the learning process.

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When I first started this project, one part of me thought that there was absolutely no way we would be able to put together the proposed event in just six weeks, while the other thought that six weeks was a really long time to be working on a dinner party when all our group was doing was really just setting up the space. As the project progressed, I was wrong about both of my guesses. We did put together an amazing event for seventeen leaders from around Sandy Springs, but we also did a lot of work over the course of the six weeks, and the extent of what our group had to do was beyond just place settings.

9th Grade iDiploma Student
Mount Vernon School

To learn how Learner-Centered Collaborative is enabling competency-based assessment practices for students everywhere, visit www.LearnerCentered.org.