PERSONALIZING LEARNING

in this issue ...

FOCUS 21
PERSONALIZING LEARNING

I SAY

Russlynn Ali

CEO and co-founder, XQ

// [T]he transition from the old system to a new, competency-based system places considerable burdens on teachers. … [P]roviding detailed feedback and customized support is simply not manageable at scale without fundamental redesign of our high schools and the tools and supports teachers need to manage their instructional loads. … Certainly, better tools will help. So will improved preparation, training, and compensation. But the job itself — not to mention the structure of the school around it — is also going to have to change. Like their counterparts in higher-performing countries, our teachers will need more noninstructional time to devote to student feedback and support. Already, some of our best 'next generation' schools are figuring this out. We need to learn from them, and fast."

Source: *Show What You Know: A Landscape Analysis of Competency-Based Education,* available at xqsuperschool.org/competency-based-education-cbe/part1.

Leadership development at all levels

Leadership Development

Learning Forward supports organizations in implementing sustained, standards-based professional learning grounded in a cycle of continuous improvement.

Learning Forward supports:

- **DISTRICT LEADERS** to promote continuous improvement in teaching and learning.

- **SCHOOL LEADERS** to ensure that educators are working in learning communities engaged in ongoing cycles of continuous improvement.

- **TEACHER LEADERS** to form learning teams that engage in a cycle of learning that includes analyzing data, setting learning goals, and implementing new instructional strategies.

We help transform your system into a true learning system through onsite, customized support for your school or district.

For more information, visit consulting.learningforward.org or contact Tom Manning at tom.manning@learningforward.org

learningforward

THE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING ASSOCIATION

AUTHORS CLARIFY WHAT PERSONALIZED LEARNING IS — AND WHAT IT CAN DO

How do we engage every student in rigorous and meaningful learning? How do we ensure that each of them is prepared for a successful future, whatever he or she might choose that to be? Our equity imperative compels us to meet the unique needs of each student, and therefore to prepare all educators to achieve that ambitious goal. A growing focus on this goal is helping to fuel a movement for personalizing learning.

In this issue of *The Learning Professional,* we embrace the current dialogue and debate about what personalized learning is and can be, giving voice to diverse perspectives and approaches. (See, for example, "What does personalized learning mean? Experts weigh in" on p. 28.)

Some of the issue's authors write about schools in which students determine their own projects and learning goals. Others paint a picture in which all students access the same content but at their own pace. All share a common goal of educational equity, and all place a high priority on preparing and supporting educators with quality professional learning.

In this issue, the expanded Focus section includes articles on how professional learning can equip teachers to personalize learning for their students as well as articles on how educators can experience personalization themselves.

As they illustrate, personalization does not mean educators engage in professional learning disconnected from one another or from collective goals (see, for example, "One vision, many paths" on p. 54). Rather, it means their learning is tied to specific needs and is job-embedded, consistent with the Standards for Professional Learning (Learning Forward, 2011).

As we explore varying ways of personalizing learning to students and educators with diverse needs, it is important to consider the role of race, class, and culture. As Sonia Caus Gleason (p. 10) and Sukey Leshnick, Jackie Statum Allen, and Daniela Berman (p. 36) point out, personalization may have different meanings and implications depending on one's background.

As always, our professional learning efforts should include thoughtful consideration of how the terms and approaches we use are interpreted by diverse families and school settings.

NEW ONLINE CONTENT

With this issue, we are adding exclusive online content to our new *The Learning Professional* website: **learningforward.org/the-learning-professional.**

The new site has a more engaging look and feel, easier access to articles, and a more robust search function. You'll find articles by Marion Wilson about a multitiered professional learning approach that groups teachers according to their needs and by Laureen Avery about a microcredentialing effort for mainstream teachers of English learners.

On the subject of new content, we've posted our call for submissions for upcoming issues of *The Learning Professional* in 2020 on the website at **learningforward.org/the-learning-professional/write-for-us**. Check out the topics and keep the great articles coming.

REFERENCE

Learning Forward. (2011). *Standards for Professional Learning.* Oxford, OH: Author. ■

Suzanne Bouffard (suzanne.bouffard@ learningforward. org) is editor of *The Learning Professional.*

VOICES

LEARNING IS A JOURNEY

"Excellent teaching is a long-term journey, and we have to start looking at teachers' overall development as professionals. They won't all learn the same things in the same way at the same time.

"Personalization turns professional learning into a journey rather than an episodic moment in time. It enables the kind of continuous learning that is embodied in Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning."

— *Monica Martinez,* p. **9**

WITH PROFESSIONAL LEARNING, PRIORITIES MATTER

All executives make choices about what to prioritize. Their priorities are evident by where they spend their time, what they say, who they talk with, and where they spend money. I believe that professional learning is most likely to achieve its full power to advance school systems when state superintendents and district CEOs highlight it and invest in it as a driving priority. Those who do put the following responsibilities at the top of their to-do lists.

EMBRACE THE LEARNING SCIENCES.

Those leaders committed to results from professional learning commit to understanding and leveraging what they learn from relevant research literature. Successful superintendents know that leadership now demands becoming more knowledgeable about the learning sciences. Learning sciences is a design science that incorporates research and practice. Redesigning schools based on scientific research on how students and adults learn best requires rethinking how the central office and schools are organized and supported.

DEMAND RESULTS.

While understanding research literature can guide the planning and implementation of professional learning, assessing the impact of learning within a system's context offers data about whether educators' efforts achieved their intended results. Creating a culture that consistently measures impact and assesses progress to document outcomes requires that educators in a system not only understand that outcomes are an expectation but also that they have the resources and skills to analyze and use data to continually inform changes and decisions. Executives establish this culture and provide resources.

ENSURE ALIGNMENT.

The foundation for achieving results for students through professional learning is connecting adult learning to student learning and ensuring that student learning goals align with an overall vision for academic excellence in the district. Superintendents lead the establishment of the vision. The vision drives what students and educators learn as well as the student standards at every level and in each subject area along with the high-quality instructional materials in use to achieve those standards.

Every arm of the organization works and executes in concert when every single district employee commits to a commonly held vision. Superintendents engage a cross-district team of school and system leaders to achieve alignment, from the chief academic officer to the director of curriculum and instruction to the chief learning officer to the human resources officer to the leaders of schools to the board of trustees.

The responsibility for professional learning sits in various offices and departments. Executive leaders reduce fragmentation and silos through the organizational chart and the culture and expectations they uphold for collaboration and results.

Monica Martinez

PERSONALIZATION TURNS LEARNING INTO A JOURNEY

What does personalization look like for teachers? That's an important question for districts and schools to ask themselves as they seek to personalize learning experiences for students.

Teachers can't be expected to do what they don't know and haven't experienced themselves. At an even more fundamental level, all teachers need professional learning that meets their needs if they are to grow in their practice.

Teachers are at different points on a continuum from beginning to proficient, yet many districts do one giant training for teachers in different content areas and grade levels who have different educational backgrounds and levels of experience.

Schools are moving away from one-size-fits-all learning experiences for students. Why wouldn't we do the same for teachers? Excellent teaching is a long-term journey, and we have to start looking at teachers' overall development as professionals. They won't all learn the same things in the same way at the same time.

Personalization turns professional learning into a journey rather than an episodic moment in time. It enables the kind of continuous learning that is embodied in Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning.

An important question to begin personalizing professional learning is: Who is helping teachers identify their needs and customize their learning? Teachers must have a strong voice in driving their professional learning, but they deserve the input and support of peers, coaches, and instructional leaders.

Furthermore, they should be working toward a set of common goals with other staff so that teaching and student learning don't become fragmented.

Another important question is: What structures will enable personalization? We can leverage some promising approaches that already exist, such as the following.

Personalized learning plans: Like students, teachers can benefit from having a multiyear learning plan that documents goals and progress. One strong example I have seen of this approach is at High Tech High in California, where every teacher regularly revisits his or her plan with his or her instructional leader.

Mentor teachers: New or inexperienced teachers can benefit from the specific and personalized feedback from a veteran teacher mentor. For this to work, the relationship must be nonevaluative and both partners should have time to observe one another's classrooms, reflect, and practice.

Ongoing coaching: By its one-on-one nature and responsiveness to current teacher practice, coaching is an important strategy. When a teacher names something she wants feedback on, she's identifying and addressing her learning needs in a timely and active way. As I travel and observe dozens of schools, I see a need for more emphasis on coaching. Many schools and leaders have not yet been willing to invest in the staff resources required. Others rely heavily on external organizations and don't build the internal capacity needed for sustainability.

Teacher committees: Some schools have a standing professional learning committee composed of teachers who are responsible for working with colleagues to identify what teachers

Monica Martinez (monica@xqinstitute. org) is chief school support officer at XQ and a member of Learning Forward's board of trustees.

MAKE PERSONALIZATION THE AGENT OF EQUITY

When people talk about their favorite teachers, they usually speak of being known and encouraged as a learner and as a treasured and understood person. The personalization movement in education seeks to make this experience less episodic, to cultivate those types of experiences for *every* student, with regularity.

With systematic approaches to embrace and tend to each learner's gifts and challenges, personalization can be an equalizer. But for this to happen, we need to be intentional about increasing access and support, especially for students of color and the economically poor. We need to make personalized learning the agent of equity.

Just as wealthier families have more access to personal trainers and health care providers, curated entertainment playlists, and bespoke prom dresses, their children historically have more access to personalized learning experiences.

Wealthier communities are more likely to offer course choices and opportunities beyond the regular education curriculum, including more varied special education and support services, Advanced Placement options, extended day learning offerings, sports with their expensive equipment and fields, arts, and other extracurricular activities.

Furthermore, in more moneyed communities, families typically have the means to hire personalized options that schools don't provide, such as extra tutoring or college coaching, and they are more likely to have flexibility to drive their children to activities that suit their interests and passions — or the means to hire someone who does.

Higher-needs communities have less access to these resources, both within public education and outside of it. Statistically, students of color are more likely to be in schools that receive less funding, and subsequently experience fewer robust opportunities for learning broadly and personalization specifically. Family income currently drives both educational opportunities and outcomes (Carnevale, Fasules, Quinn, & Campbell, 2019).

Personalization can only be an equity lever if we acknowledge historic inequities and attend to them with fierce attention. Persons of color have suffered the most and benefited least from the laws, policies, and practices — including those in schools — that have made the U.S. prosperous and powerful.

Personalization can be a counterpoint to a national history that has rendered people of color invisible and less valuable. It can honor the richness of backgrounds, resilience of different groups, and individual gifts of students who encounter discrimination on a daily basis.

But this will not happen automatically. It requires intentional effort, especially in communities that are rich in racial, cultural, and linguistic diversity while being cash-poor. Educators can begin to make this effort by taking the following steps.

CHECK ASSUMPTIONS AND MINDSETS THAT HOLD PERSONALIZATION BACK.

Our knowledge about students and their families is essential to personalizing, and there is no substitute for understanding and appreciating each other across race, class, and cultures. And what could be more enriching?

We know that in high-poverty communities, the backgrounds of students contrast with those

Sonia Caus Gleason (scausgleason@ nmefoundation. org) is director of strategic learning and evaluation at Nellie Mae Education Foundation.

of teachers, and that in urban settings, teachers are largely white and students of color make up the majority of the population. While racial and ethnic minorities make up 20% of U.S. public school teachers, they make up 51% of public school students (Geiger, 2018).

It's impossible to ignore that, whatever our background, we've each grown and lived in contexts that sometimes quietly and sometimes overtly taught us to discriminate, favoring some ways of communicating or behaving over others. Our mindsets filter what learning we offer.

These basic facts require professional learning to embed attention to learning about cultures and races other than our own, and how we may be manifesting biases that can unintentionally give some students more access to interesting and challenging work than others.

ATTEND TO AND ADVOCATE FOR CULTURALLY COMPETENT PEDAGOGY, CURRICULUM, AND ASSESSMENT.

Educators should consider how their approaches to teaching and assessing connect with students' values and backgrounds. The nature and wording of engagement and feedback matter. For example, one study investigating how to restore students' trust in school found that offering "wise feedback" that emphasizes "the teacher's high standards and belief that the student was capable of meeting those standards" was particularly effective with African American students, especially the African Americans most mistrusting of school (Yeager et al., 2014).

Cultural competence also reveals

itself in content. Students need to connect what they're learning to prior knowledge and experiences, and they need to see themselves and people like them in the subject matter and materials. There is a growing range of resources online and elsewhere to help individual educators improve their cultural competence, but there is an overarching need for policies and resources to support more inclusive curriculum and pedagogy.

COLLABORATE WITH COLLEAGUES AS NECESSITY, NOT NICETY.

Personalizing in a way that meets the equity imperative is too much for any one teacher to do alone, especially in large schools and in upper grades when classes are departmentalized. Collaboration becomes a necessity. Relational trust among adults makes schools stronger and raises student achievement (Bryk & Schneider, 2002).

Professional communities create a relational space for educators to contribute to and draw upon. These may include colleagues within and beyond our schools that help us tap the range of information and resources educators need to personalize. When an equity commitment is the driver, educators are pressed to go beyond the usual people and places we tap, find what individual and groups of students need, and use personal knowledge to help colleagues on the same quest.

PERSONALIZE IN A WAY THAT CONSIDERS AND EMBRACES FAMILIES.

Customized learning and giving youth voice in shaping their education is not necessarily a go-to mindset

across all race, class, and culture groups. In fact, the opposite is often true in working class and immigrant communities.

Many parents believe children should do what the teacher asks, be respectful, compliant, and appreciative of their school and teachers. Many of us have heard a parent say, "Just let me know if my child steps out of line in your classroom." This was as true when I was raised as a daughter of displaced citizens in the '70s as it is now.

Does this mean these families are against personalization? I don't think so. While many lead with the desire to have their children follow the rules and behave in school, it does not mean they don't recognize their children may need special supports.

If a child is falling behind, families typically don't wish this to be so, even if they do not know what to do about it, even if they don't know that something could be done. Nor does a family's desire for their children to be good in school mean they don't understand that their children have gifts, though they may not be clear on whether or how to pursue educational dreams amidst competing priorities.

It becomes important, in the push to personalize, to understand the potential and needs of students alongside the sensibilities and wishes of families for their children. Personalizing requires a dialogue with students and their families.

EMBRACE HUMILITY AND INTENT IN PROFESSIONAL LEARNING.

It's brave and important work to embrace an equity commitment, especially as we recognize our country has not significantly narrowed the

achievement gap for students of color, English learners, and the economically poor since the War on Poverty in the 1960s.

The U.S. has tried many innovations over time, and we are not getting to every student doing well. Not close. Yet in the face of that, to say each and every student is important, and to seek to personalize for them, is a daring move.

It says that we don't know everything but are committing to what's needed. It says we're willing to check our own assumptions and prejudices to understand what we may be doing that holds students back.

It means there's a willingness to draw upon people within and beyond our schools to serve and challenge students. It means there's

an understanding that we can't make headway without family perspectives in the mix.

This combination of intent and humility, of together listening, testing, learning what works, and adapting, is what will allow us to make headway. It says each student deserves to be known and treasured, and there's a demonstrated commitment to learn and do what's needed to make that happen.

REFERENCES

Bryk, A. & Schneider, B. (2002). *Trust in schools: A core resource for improvement.* New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation.

Carnevale, A., Fasules, M.L., Quinn, M., & Campbell, K.P. (2019). *Born to win, schooled to lose: Why equally talented students don't get equal chances*

to be all they can be. Washington, DC: Georgetown Center for Education and the Workforce.

Geiger, A.W. (2018, August 27). *America's public school teachers are far less racially and ethnically diverse than their students.* Pew Research Center Fact Tank. Available at www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/08/27/americas-public-school-teachers-are-far-less-racially-and-ethnically-diverse-than-their-students.

Yeager, D.S., Purdie-Vaughns, V., Garcia, J., Apfel, N., Brzustoski, P., Master, A. … Cohen, G.L. (2014). Breaking the cycle of mistrust: Wise interventions to provide critical feedback across the racial divide. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General, 143*(2), 804-824. ■

PROVIDE SUFFICIENT RESOURCES.

Superintendents create budgets that establish and sustain effective professional learning. District leaders also work with their teams to manage schedules that provide ample job-embedded learning time. They staff their systems to include instructional

coaches and others with expertise critical to sustaining continuous improvement.

District leaders allocate resources to support the learning of leaders themselves. Principals and district administrators have unique learning needs within an aligned system, as do superintendents and board members.

The superintendent's authority and decisions impact hundreds to thousands of learners along with the communities they serve. While the actions here are certainly not the only responsibilities of a district leader committed to high-quality professional learning, I'd argue they are essential. ■

---

need, either as a whole or for smaller groups, such as new teachers or English language arts teachers. Science Leadership Academy in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, balanced a long-term commitment with diverse voices by establishing a standing committee with various teachers serving annually.

Maintaining a learning culture, for both adults and students, is an important factor in whether these

strategies will be implemented successfully. Personalization is more likely in open, trusting cultures where teachers feel safe to open their doors and invite others to give constructive feedback.

Some schools have the opportunity to build this culture from the ground up, like many that are part of the XQ school network. XQ provides resources and support to help these schools reimagine high school and what

adolescents can achieve. Others have to make intentional efforts to alter their culture.

For students and teachers alike, we need schools to make learning constant, not episodic. If we are going to prioritize equity and assume collective responsibility for all students, we have to do the same for teachers. Each of us is only as good as the whole. ■

OUR TAKE
Tracy Crow

ARE PERSONALIZATION AND HIGH-QUALITY MATERIALS MUTUALLY EXCLUSIVE?

Learning Forward believes districts that don't prioritize the use of high-quality instructional materials are neglecting a pivotal ingredient in establishing equitable learning conditions (Learning Forward, 2018). If offering every student the opportunity to experience rigorous teaching and learning is part of a district's mission — and there are very few systems where this is not true — then high-quality materials are essential.

We also acknowledge that ensuring each student's access to rigorous content is necessary but not sufficient. Intellectual engagement is a critical factor in instruction and learning. As authors throughout this issue of *The Learning Professional* demonstrate, personalization gives students multiple entry points to content and helps them develop agency in their learning. Addressing their interests, needs, and unique approaches to learning are factors in whether they succeed at high levels.

Are personalizing learning for students and implementing high-quality instructional materials mutually exclusive? Can we support teachers to implement high-quality materials and nurture their agency and autonomy in their classrooms at the same time?

Learning Forward's just-completed four-day Summer Institutes in Boston raised these questions for me. We facilitated the institutes in conjunction with our content colleagues Student Achievement Partners and BSCS Science Learning. With educators from across the country in districts large and small, we explored the rationale for focusing team-based professional learning squarely on student standards and high-quality instructional materials.

Participants dove deeply into one of three content areas — mathematics, science, or language arts — to study student materials and how they represent the shifts in approach to teaching content as prescribed by college- and career-ready standards and the Next Generation Science Standards. We engaged them in the process of reviewing and selecting high-quality materials, and in the kind of content-focused, effective professional learning we believe should be the norm for them, their colleagues, and those they lead or support. Finally, teams examined the five-stage learning team model described in *Becoming a Learning Team* (Hirsh & Crow, 2018) to consider how to support teachers as they implement instructional materials with students.

MATERIALS LAY THE GROUNDWORK

As we emphasized throughout the institutes, materials on their own aren't the whole story. They only lay the groundwork for high-quality teaching and learning when they are part of an instructional vision that starts with high standards for students and encompasses aligned materials, professional learning, and assessments.

Tracy Crow (tracy.crow@ learningforward. org) is director of communications at Learning Forward.

Still, making the case for adopting high-quality instructional materials is sometimes a hard sell for educators. Teachers value the opportunity that developing lessons gives them to tailor instruction for the students in the room and create engaging and unique learning experiences. Teachers also know better than anyone the specific needs and interests of the students in the classroom on any given day.

In an environment where student data drives professional learning, as outlined in the Standards for Professional Learning (Learning Forward, 2011), personalization is not an add-on, but is integral to the work of ensuring equity. When teachers know where specific learning challenges lie, they establish the foundation for personalizing learning. They set learning goals for themselves and for students, and they create learning agendas to prepare themselves to meet student needs.

They continually monitor progress to know that any learning experience they create is on track to achieve its intended outcomes, and they make adjustments when necessary. They experience support for new tools specifically created to drive personalization, and the professional learning designs for that support mirror how students will use such tools.

The rich learning in which we engaged during the Summer Institutes made clear that, with materials in hand, teachers don't lose their autonomy; rather, they use their considerable expertise and creativity to ensure that each and every student has access to the content in the materials. For some students, attending to unique needs may require enrichment; for others, tiers of support or scaffolding.

HELP EACH STUDENT THRIVE

The professional learning that teachers engage in, ideally in teams, prepares them to do this challenging but important work by offering time for intensive study of content, support from knowledgeable peers and coaches,

and discussions about which concepts may present challenges to a particular student and how to address them.

Ultimately, we believe that high-quality materials, personalization, and ongoing job-embedded professional learning must co-exist in the journey to help each student thrive. This is a complex balance, and we are still figuring out what it looks like. As always, we encourage you to share with us your approaches and what you are learning from them.

We know that achieving our equity goals of ensuring that each and every student has access to effective teaching

and learning requires defining and aligning these elements.

REFERENCES
Hirsh, S. & Crow, T. (2018). *Becoming a learning team* (2nd ed.). Oxford, OH: Learning Forward.

Learning Forward. (2011). *Standards for Professional Learning.* Oxford, OH: Author.

Learning Forward. (2018). *High-quality curricula and team-based professional learning: A perfect partnership for equity.* Oxford, OH: Author. ∎

RESEARCH

NEW LANGUAGE, NEW PERSPECTIVE

Education leaders have begun to criticize the often-used phrase "achievement gap" for being deficit-focused and failing to acknowledge the role of structures and systems in creating differences in educational outcomes.

In a recent study, researchers found that teachers placed a higher value on addressing differences in group outcomes when they heard the phrase "racial inequality in educational outcomes" than when they heard the phrase "racial achievement gap."

RESEARCH REVIEW
Elizabeth Foster

WRITING INSTRUCTION STUDY BENEFITS FROM TEACHERS' INSIGHTS

THE STUDY

McKeown, D., Brindle, M., Harris, K.R., Sandmel, K., Steinbrecher, T.D., Graham, S. … Oakes, W.P. (2019, June). Teachers' voices: Perceptions of effective professional development and classwide implementation of self-regulated strategy development in writing. *American Educational Research Journal, 56*(3), 753-791.

The debate about how to measure and quantify the impact of professional learning on teachers and students is often peppered with statements about how we don't know what works. In fact, many studies that examine a specific strategy or program, often as a component of a larger professional learning system, find measurable positive effects. These studies are important to educators, professional learning advocates, and the field as a whole.

Understanding both the specificity and the generalizability of such studies helps build an awareness that professional learning is critical and has impact, especially when we carefully consider which strategies work for which educators and students under what conditions.

Learning Forward is working to bring precision to conversations about the outcomes of professional learning, especially by examining the specific components that drive outcomes. You can see this focus in our publications, the networks we facilitate focused on educator-identified outcome measures, and our efforts to compile and share data from districts and affiliates.

While large-scale randomized controlled trial studies are critical to understanding professional learning and its impacts, studies that are small, qualitative, and focused on teacher responses are equally as important to drive this goal of precision and, in turn, inform decisions about funding and support for professional learning.

A recent study by Debra McKeown and colleagues is important not only because it highlights professional learning about a model of writing instruction of interest to many educators, but also because it examines teachers' reflections about their experiences in professional learning.

Building on a larger quantitative study, this qualitative study elicited teachers' insights about the elements of the professional learning they found beneficial for instruction and student outcomes.

A PROFESSIONAL LEARNING APPROACH TO IMPROVE WRITING

McKeown and colleagues looked at how 2nd- and 3rd-grade teachers in three rural schools experienced and responded to professional development related to a writing instruction method called self-regulated strategy development (SRSD).

SRSD is a complex instructional approach that includes "active, discourse-based, scaffolded, and explicit learning of: strategies for genre-specific and general writing employed across the writing process" (p. 757). SRSD instruction includes as core principles engaging students as active collaborators, attention to social and emotional learning, and a commitment to teacher adaptations.

The SRSD strategy is well-researched and recognized by the What Works Clearinghouse as an evidence-based practice. More than 100 studies by multiple research teams have found that SRSD

Elizabeth Foster (elizabeth.foster@learningforward.org) is associate director of standards, research, and strategy at Learning Forward. In each issue of *The Learning Professional,* Foster explores recent research to help practitioners understand the impact of particular professional learning practices on student outcomes.

achieves significantly higher effect sizes than other instructional approaches in writing.

The current qualitative study built on a larger mixed-method research study on the impact of SRSD professional learning on teacher practice and student outcomes. In that study, teacher teams were randomly assigned to professional development in one of two writing areas selected by the educators to align with local and state goals: opinion essay writing or story writing.

Each option formed the control group for the other, because previous studies have shown that the story writing professional learning does not impact essay writing and vice versa. This allowed the researchers to use a randomized controlled trial without withholding professional learning from any teachers.

Teachers engaged in 12-14 hours of professional learning over two days about one week apart, as well as readings, outside preparation, and collaborative discussion. The professional learning incorporated characteristics supported by the research about the elements of effective professional learning — intensive, collaborative, focused on outcomes, and aligned to the curriculum — which align with the Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning (Learning Forward, 2011).

The researchers noted that they intentionally mirrored the stages of SRSD in their professional development with these teachers: Develop background knowledge, discuss it, model it, support it, and demonstrate independent performance.

At the beginning of the professional learning, teachers described their previous experiences in writing instruction, professional learning, and preservice preparation, as well as their goals for students and current challenges, using student work examples. Teachers then reviewed SRSD techniques and sample lesson plans, then the professional learning leaders modeled lessons.

Teachers created lesson plans based on their classroom contexts and student needs and practiced instructional techniques in pairs. They reflected and received feedback from their peers and the professional learning leaders. They discussed components of the SRSD approach, such as student self-assessment, and how to adapt lessons to specific student needs. Teachers also made plans for regular peer meetings to reflect on implementation and challenges.

Observers visited classrooms after every three or four lessons to provide feedback and support to teachers and measure implementation fidelity. In addition, the professional learning leaders offered ongoing informal support and sent weekly emails sharing ideas and observations from their research team meetings.

GOING BENEATH THE SURFACE WITH FOCUS GROUPS

In a previously published quantitative report, researchers identified that the SRSD and associated professional learning resulted in significant and positive outcomes for students in both the opinion essay and story writing conditions.

Implementation of SRSD specifically related to opinion essay writing resulted in significant and meaningful improvements in the number and quality of opinion essay elements as well as in student writing overall. Students who received whole-class, teacher-implemented SRSD instruction in story writing demonstrated significant and meaningful improvements in elements

and quality of story writing. In both groups, the intended outcomes were achieved.

The sub-study conducted by McKeown and colleagues built on these findings and mined teachers' reflections to gain further insight about both teachers' and students' experiences. McKeown and colleagues conducted and recorded focus groups with 14 of the 20 participating teachers, then coded and analyzed the themes, using well-established methods for inter-rater agreement.

During the focus groups, teachers discussed their evaluations of the components and adequacy of the professional learning, how the professional learning might be enhanced in the future, how they implemented SRSD, changes or adaptations they made to meet students' needs, changes they would make in the future, and how they believed the professional learning could be improved.

Student behaviors

Teachers' observations and reflections augmented the quantitative findings about improved student outcomes. Teachers were able to observe specific student behaviors in ways that the quantitative study did not allow. Teachers identified that students became more independent writers, better able to organize ideas to leverage in opinion writing and persuasive writing, more able to write to real-world situations, in part because they became more comfortable with how to start an assignment and formulate arguments.

Teachers also observed increased confidence in writing for some students. Students were quicker getting to task and enjoyed writing more than before the implementation. One teacher said, "I had one (student) who wrote zero in the beginning and wrote a persuasive paragraph in the end. He grew a lot and he was able to write and stay focused and keep on track, check all his parts, had his rocket (graphic organizer), and the whole bit" (p. 778).

Teachers identified a mix of social, emotional, and academic outcomes. There was consensus among teachers that this strategy "allowed kids to grab on to something that had been missing in other kinds of writing instruction" (p. 780).

Professional learning components

Teachers also reflected on the components of professional learning and their impact on their teaching and their students. Teacher data provided important insights about perceptions, evaluations, recommendations about the professional learning, and suggestions for improvement.

Overall, teachers said they were happy with the SRSD professional learning and offered specific reflections about what worked and what did not:

- Active, interactive learning and practice were perceived as helpful and supportive.
- Cognitive modeling and using "self" statements were challenging.
- Teachers reflected about the ideal size of learning group — six to 10 — a small but important detail for professional learning design. Smaller groups helped teachers feel "safe" and "made us try." Because of the size of the group, one teacher said, "I got to do it, not just say I saw someone do it."
- Most teachers found the detailed model lesson plans to be an important learning tool and a helpful reference for planning instruction.

Teachers also shared feedback about the specific instructional aspects of SRSD that they learned. For example, many teachers and their students were initially challenged by the strategy of using "self-talk" about what to write and how, but grew more comfortable with it over time.

Balancing fidelity and adaptation

Fidelity of implementation was high throughout the study, but teachers

had been encouraged to adapt the strategies they learned as needed by their students. Teachers recognized the need to adapt when students became disengaged, for instance, or did not have the expected background knowledge, but were concerned with fidelity to both the SRSD design and the research project parameters.

In addition, teachers reflected on specific tools and strategies such as mnemonic devices, graphic organizers, and model lesson plans. These detailed notes would be helpful for educators especially interested in the SRSD instructional model.

GENERALIZABILITY AND CONNECTION TO THE STANDARDS

This study speaks to several Standards for Professional Learning, including the **Learning Designs** standard. The way the teacher voice and reflections highlight which elements of the professional learning have a positive or challenging effect on students is critical information for the design of future professional learning.

For instance, teachers sharing that a strategy is not having the intended impact can lead to an adjustment or tweak to the overall approach, including classroom-tested strategies that offer a range of options for other educators. In addition, research like this provides detail and insights into Learning Forward's focus on the intersection of high-quality instructional materials and professional learning.

These findings are a reminder that qualitative data can be simple and telling, revealing that materials are too time-consuming, or difficult for students to engage with for a long period of time. These are the details that can provide design tweak ideas and midcourse corrections.

REFERENCE

Learning Forward. (2011). *Standards for Professional Learning.* Oxford, OH: Author. ■

Set a systemwide vision for professional learning

Professional Learning Planning

Learning Forward supports districts to develop a systemwide vision for professional learning that impacts educator practice and student achievement.

Build the guiding document for professional learning in your system, and secure buy-in from stakeholders. Outline an agreed-upon vision, mission, and goals for professional learning related to four critical areas:

- Content and pedagogy;
- Coherence and relevance;
- Measurement and impact; and
- Professional learning culture.

We start with the essential components of a professional learning plan and work with you to identify your key focus areas and customize your plan.

For more information, visit consulting.learningforward.org or contact Tom Manning at tom.manning@learningforward.org.

learningforward
THE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING ASSOCIATION

ESSENTIALS

■ **TEACHING AND LEARNING INTERNATIONAL SURVEY**
TALIS 2018 Results (Volume I)
OECD, 2019

The Organization for Economic and Cooperative Development (OECD) has released the latest report in its series of international teacher surveys. OECD researchers survey teachers from around the world every five years to learn about their working conditions and learning environments. The latest report about the Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) 2018 focused on the knowledge and skills required to teach and included findings about professional learning. Across countries, more than 90% of teachers and principals attended at least one professional development activity in the year before the survey. But only 44% of teachers participated in peer learning or networking, even though they identified collaborative learning as one of the best forms of professional learning. Among teachers' priorities for future focus areas are teaching in multicultural/multilingual settings and teaching students with special needs.
bit.ly/2SkcvXP

■ **IMPROVING PHYSICS TEACHING**
• Helping Physics Teachers Who Don't Know Physics
Science Daily, June 25, 2019
• Comparing Advanced Placement Physics Teachers Experiencing Physics-Focused Professional Development
Journal of Science Teacher Education, May 1, 2019

A recent study published in the *Journal of Science Teacher Education* adds to the literature on the benefits of content-focused professional learning. It compared two groups of Advanced Placement high school physics teachers who had no training or expertise in teaching the subject.

One group participated in a National Science Foundation-funded three-year program designed "to improve their understanding of physics concepts and to assist them in developing teaching strategies to help their students better retain what they learn about physics," according to *Science Daily*. Teachers engaged in the professional learning scored 40% higher than control teachers on a classroom observation measure that assessed lesson design and implementation, content, classroom culture, communicative interactions, and student/teacher relationships. Those teachers shifted their practice over time to use more inquiry-based, hands-on, and conceptually focused teaching methods.
Science Daily article: **bit.ly/2Lnlffs**
Journal article: **bit.ly/30IBOWT**

■ **RETHINKING 'ACHIEVEMENT GAP' TERMINOLOGY**
'Achievement Gap' Language Affects Teachers' Issue Prioritization
Educational Researcher, July 11, 2019

Education leaders, researchers, and other experts have begun to criticize the often-used phrase "achievement gap" for being deficit-focused and failing to acknowledge the role of structures and systems in creating between-group differences in educational outcomes. A long history of social science research shows that the terminology we use affects how we think about issues and whether and how we act on them. A group of education researchers hypothesized that teachers would place a lower priority on addressing differences in group outcomes when hearing the phrase "racial achievement gap" than when hearing the phrase "racial inequality in educational outcomes." Results published in the *Journal of Educational Psychology* from a national randomized survey experiment supported this hypothesis. The researchers recommended that "teachers, education leaders, researchers, and journalists should therefore give thought to the messaging and language they use when discussing issues regarding race and education."
bit.ly/2JD1jTP

■ **MODERNIZING THE TEACHING WORKFORCE**
Modernizing the Teaching Workforce for Learner-Centered, Competency-Based, Equity-Oriented Education: State Policy Recommendations
iNACOL, July 2019

The latest in a series of iNACOL briefs about preparing educators for learner-centered education focuses on the role of state policy. The report shares five key strategies for leveraging state policies and structures to support teachers in meeting 21st-century demands of student learning and workforce needs. The recommendations are anchored to the vision outlined in a CompetencyWorks report about personalizing learning, *Moving Toward Mastery: Growing, Developing, and Sustaining Educators for Competency-Based Education*. It includes lessons from the field from the state of Virginia and elsewhere.
bit.ly/30Dbl7h

FOCUS

PERSONALIZING LEARNING

PERSONALIZATION PUTS STUDENTS AT THE CENTER

The movement to personalize learning is growing, but what does it mean for students and educators? In this issue's Focus section, we look at a trend that is inspiring both excitement and questions.

The section begins with articles on how professional learning can equip teachers to personalize learning for students to build agency and mastery.

It concludes with articles on a theme we hear frequently in the field: Educators must experience personalization themselves if they are going to facilitate it for their students.

Despite diverse perspectives on the definition and role of personalized learning, authors share some common beliefs: Students should be at the center; technology should be a means rather than an end; and personalization should not mean isolation.

MAKE THE MOST OF THE MOMENTUM

LET'S PREPARE EDUCATORS TO HARNESS PERSONALIZED LEARNING'S POTENTIAL

BY REBECCA E. WOLFE AND LILLIAN PACE

On any given school day, the majority of students in the United States and many other countries experience the same kind of schooling as their parents — and even their parents' parents. And yet, today's students live in a world that looks vastly different. The voices demanding that we move our education system far beyond its 20th-century roots grow louder every year.

Educators, parents, employers, and advocates in all corners of the education world are calling out the ways in which our prevailing systems devalue educators' professionalism, sort and batch children according to their skin color and ZIP code, and turn the joy of learning into marching lockstep through tests and worksheets.

A promising antidote to this grim outlook has risen in the past 10 years in the form of personalized learning approaches. At its most basic, personalized learning is "driven by good teaching and strong student supports centered on the needs of each student" (Ambrose, 2019). What's behind that statement is a vision of teaching and learning that goes far beyond traditional instruction and calls into question how we prepare educators to lead those changes.

The movement for personalized learning is grounded in three driving forces:

1. Changes in technology, our economy, and other social trends are altering what it means for learners to be ready for life beyond high school.
2. Insights from the learning sciences have busted the myth of the "average learner" and underscored the unique strengths, challenges, contexts, and needs of each learner.
3. We need to make far greater gains in closing opportunity gaps and ensuring that we meet the needs of all youth, especially our most vulnerable youth, and help them develop to their full potential.

The potential of personalized learning to meet learners' needs, close opportunity gaps, and prepare them to craft their own futures was a focus in KnowledgeWorks' *2006-16 Map of Future Forces Affecting Education* (KnowledgeWorks, 2006) and all of its subsequent forecasts on the future of learning (e.g. Prince, Swanson, King, & Saveri, 2018).

After more than 10 years of reflecting on the current state and emerging trends in teaching and learning, the team at KnowledgeWorks recognizes that personalized learning is gathering momentum, and that educators and those who support them

What is new in today's personalized learning approaches is putting equity in the foreground of the system.

need the knowledge and capacity to realize its benefits.

THE EDUCATOR'S ROLE

There is no shortage of hype around personalized learning, including lack of clear definition and disparate ideas about what it should look like. At KnowledgeWorks, we use the term personalized learning to refer to educational systems and approaches that are rooted in the equitable belief that all children can learn, are student-centered, and involve whole-child supports.

In this definition, personalized learning is a systemic approach and not interchangeable with technology. Technology is additive and supportive of great teaching and learning. In this vision, as a result of having engaged in high-quality, relationship-based personalized learning experiences, every child will emerge from his or her education experience with self-confidence, independence, and solid preparation for whatever unique path awaits.

Many of the principles of personalized learning simply reflect

good teaching and learning practices. However, for a setting to be personalized, some of these practices — such as connections to meaningful work — take on greater import.

There have been several attempts in the past decade to better describe, codify, and support how the role of the educator shifts in a modern personalized learning approach. One of the earliest of these was the Teachers at Work research released as part of JFF's (formerly Jobs for the Future) Students at the Center initiative (Cervone & Cushman, 2012). Cervone and Cushman spent time in six early adopter schools pursuing student-centered approaches and captured eight core elements of personalized teaching:

1. Strong relationships with students;
2. Anytime, anywhere, and real-world learning;
3. Personalization and choice in curricular tasks;
4. Technology that is integral to teaching and learning;

5. Appropriate challenge levels for each learner;
6. Clear, timely assessment and support;
7. Supporting social and emotional growth; and
8. Fostering autonomy and lifelong learning.

Since then, many studies and reports have reinforced this list (e.g. Levitzky, Merin, Murphy, & Klemm, 2017; Jobs for the Future & CCSSO, 2015; Jenkins, Williams, Moyer, George, & Foster, 2016). Across this work, a key emerging insight is that teaching in personalized learning settings is distinguished by profound changes in relationships.

Relationships between student and teacher shift from teacher as holder of knowledge and student as vessel to be filled to students as active seekers of mastery facilitated by teachers as learning partners. Relationships among teaching peers move from isolated planning days complemented by lunchroom venting to frequent

PERSONALIZED LEARNING IN ACTION: A view from 2 districts

BY VIRGEL HAMMONDS AND ROBIN KANAAN

Transforming a learning community from a traditional system to a personalized environment that serves every learner isn't easy. It requires a strong vision for teaching and learning driving every decision, from how a district budgets to how teachers co-create classroom rules with their students. Aligning resources and activities to that vision is a necessity, as is gathering data to inform the work and gauge impact.

But most challenging is rethinking what teaching and learning can be. That happens through supporting teachers in taking risks, using learner-centered practices and building them up so that once they've seen the changes in their classrooms and their schools, no one can imagine going back.

If we approach the work with the belief that students should own their learning, it helps guide the work. To create systems that put students at the center of their learning, we must partner with education leaders in school districts across the country to transform traditional, time-based systems to personalized, competency-based systems.

One learning environment that demonstrates what learning can look like when students are kept at the focus of all work is in Batesburg-Leesville, South Carolina.

LEXINGTON COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT 3
BATESBURG-LEESVILLE, SOUTH CAROLINA

Lexington County School District 3, near Columbia, South Carolina, began its district transformation toward personalized learning with a strong sense of community and a focus on student needs. The district's vision, "Preparing students for the future … now," illustrates its commitment to serve students and families while pursuing personalized learning. Personalized learning is seen as the district's overarching strategy, and its vision is consistently articulated at each of the district's four buildings, driving the strategic planning process.

With an established vision and an aligned strategic plan in place, the learning community partnered with KnowledgeWorks to measure progress. In Batesburg-Leesville, this meant completing the KnowledgeWorks District Conditions Navigation Tool and site assessment, which combines an online survey of community stakeholders, classroom visits, and teacher, administrator, student, and community member focus groups to act as a formative assessment of the district's implementation of the *District*

Conditions for Scale: A Practical Guide to Scaling Personalized Learning — a set of conditions KnowledgeWorks believes must be present to scale personalized learning districtwide (Williams, Moyer, & Jenkins, 2014).

KnowledgeWorks used the data collected to create an opportunity analysis for the district, outlining areas of strength and opportunities for growth across 13 systemic areas related to implementing personalized learning. The analysis also detailed suggested priority action steps and provided baseline data to measure growth and communicate impact over time. Data also informed the professional development and support plan for the district.

"The opportunity analysis process was a great experience for our schools. Our staff thrives on feedback, so being able to have a different lens shared with us for our work on personalized learning was extremely valuable," said Angie Rye, the district's chief academic officer. "It has allowed our administrators to affirm practices, refocus on areas that are still in progress, but most importantly plan for our next steps with professional learning for both teachers and administrators."

Collecting data and developing data-driven priorities is only the first step. The next step is capacity building, which includes developing student-centered

collaboration characterized by deep attention to improving student learning and engagement.

Administrators spend less time evaluating and remediating staff and more time on building a culture of trusting relationships, setting conditions for risk-taking, and supporting teachers

to lead and learn. Educators' and students' relationships with curriculum and assessments focus on interest, passion, inquiry, connection, and authentic demonstrations of learning to meet high standards instead of rote regurgitation of facts and formulas.

At a more granular level, there

have been several attempts to define, codify, and provide indicators of standards and competencies of teaching in a personalized manner. *Educator Competencies for Personalized, Learner-Centered Teaching,* produced by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and JFF's Students at the

classroom practices, creating strategies to increase social and emotional skills, building a competency-based learning continuum, and extending learning opportunities through community engagement and partnerships.

Educators need to know and understand how to do these things, but a top-down approach is not sustainable — districts must build the capacity of educators from within. Coaches and other instructional leaders need to develop not only the content knowledge to achieve the desired change but grow their ability to manage change and coach others in the necessary skills to personalize learning.

Lexington 3 educators and instructional leaders are getting this kind of personalized support by participating in professional learning hosted several times a year across the state by South Carolina Department of Education's Office of Personalized Learning.

District teams deepen their understanding of personalized learning: the why, the what, and the how, and develop strategies for scaling and spreading content in a systemic K-12 approach.

These sessions are part of the state department's larger strategy to scale personalized learning across the state, one of the cornerstones of Superintendent Molly Spearman's educational priorities to "create a system of instruction that will prepare every graduate for successful life after high school. The foundation for that instruction is effective classroom

teachers and principals who facilitate personalized learning for every student every day."

MARYSVILLE EXEMPTED VILLAGE SCHOOL DISTRICT
MARYSVILLE, OHIO

Many of the tools and processes KnowledgeWorks employs in learning communities such as Batesburg-Leesville were prototyped and refined in Marysville Exempted Village School District in Marysville, Ohio.

Superintendent Diane Mankins started her district's path toward personalized learning so they could better serve all students well. "There was no vision set for the district," Mankins said. "There was this sense that we had good teachers, good kids, that everybody was working really hard, but our arrows were all pointing in different directions."

For Mankins, and for us, the first step was recognizing the importance of establishing a vision for teaching and learning and aligning behind that vision.

With Marysville as a collective thought partner, KnowledgeWorks created a professional development framework aligned to the *District Conditions for Scale: A Practical Guide to Scaling Personalized Learning*, as well as a refined version of the District Conditions Navigation Tool. Marysville coaches and administrators constructed a professional development curriculum for instructional leaders.

Building internal capacity in Marysville has enabled sustainability within the district in addition to building an evidence base from which other districts implementing personalized, competency-based learning can benefit. And, ultimately, the winners are the students benefitting from the work. According to Marysville Early College High School graduate Elijah Mejia, the experience within the district was "a foundation for a fantastic future."

We know that transforming traditional, time-based systems to personalized, competency-based systems can't be done without developing the capacity of communities and educators to imagine, build, and sustain the kinds of innovative learning environments that allow each student to thrive. That gives all students the foundation they need for their own fantastic futures.

REFERENCE
Williams, M., Moyer, J., & Jenkins, S. (2014). *District conditions for scale: A practical guide to scaling personalized learning.* Available at knowledgeworks.org/resources/district-conditions-scale-personalized-learning.

•

Virgel Hammonds (hammondsv@knowledgeworks.org) is chief learning officer and Robin Kanaan (kanaanr@knowledgeworks.org) is director of teaching and learning at KnowledgeWorks.

- - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - -

Center, is a comprehensive document that compiled research on high-quality teaching and learning sciences and cross-walked competencies from 12 existing educator frameworks spanning a continuum from traditional to fully personalized instruction.

The two organizations then worked

with close to 100 state agency, district, school, and supporting educators and researchers to home in on what an educator's skills, knowledge, and dispositions would look like in personalized, student-centered settings (Jobs for the Future & CCSSO, 2015).

The document and accompanying

online tool identified four major domains of personalized educators: intrapersonal (need to process), interpersonal (need to relate), cognitive (need to know), and instructional (need to do). CCSSO is leading a coalition of nonprofits and associations to streamline and strengthen educator

A NEW FOUNDATION FOR READINESS

Work will be market-driven and user-centered

Work will be modularized and recombined

Work will be data- and metrics-driven

Solve problems

Thrive in ambiguity and uncertainty

Think differently

INDIVIDUAL AWARENESS: Emotional regulation

Core social-emotional skills

Communicate and create with numbers

Take initiative and self-advocate

SOCIAL AWARENESS: Empathy and perspective-taking

SELF DISCOVERY: Deep self-knowledge

Learn anything, anywhere

Make friends with people and machines

Cultivate inclusive communities

Work will be grounded in relating

Work will be interwoven with learning

Foundational cognitive and metacognitive practices

PREPARING EVERY LEARNER FOR THE FUTURE

Changes in technology, the economy, and other social trends are altering what it means for learners to be ready for life beyond high school. In preparation for this emerging world of work, as well as for the complexities of personal and civic life, learners will need to develop a strong foundation for readiness as illustrated at left.

pipelines, including refreshing CCSSO's InTASC Model Core Teaching Standards for effective practice (CCSSO, 2011) with a closer eye to culturally competent, student-centered competencies that align with the educator competencies.

No one claims shifting to personalizing learning is quick or easy. And most who advocate for personalized approaches for students recognize the irony of subjecting educators to nonengaging, traditional, one-offs as a way to learn to personalize for students. As a result, numerous organizations have developed means to help educators not only teach in personalized ways, but also experience personalized professional development.

Here are some examples: Fuse RI,

run by the Highlander Institute, is a teachers-helping-teachers fellowship that places active educators to coach other schools as they explore personalized methods. The Institute for Personalized Learning runs mixed modality professional learning workshops and coaching in Wisconsin. Next Generation Learning Challenges supports school networks using design thinking methods.

The LearnNext multiorganization initiative led by 2Revolutions provides open source courseware and learning progressions for educators. KnowledgeWorks partners at the district and state levels to help systems and schools move toward personalized, competency-based learning transformation.

THE ROLE OF POLICY

Growing interest in personalized learning has sparked significant policy change over the past decade, and those policies have implications for educator preparation and support. Federal, state, and local policymakers are championing reforms that range from pilot initiatives to statewide conversations about how to redesign the education system to support personalized learning for all students.

Thirty-five states have established an innovation or pilot program to empower local educators interested in personalized teaching and learning models (ExcelinEd & Foresight Law+Policy, 2019), and 39 states have leveraged new flexibility granted by the federal Every Student Succeeds

Act (ESSA) to embed personalized learning policies in their state plans (KnowledgeWorks, 2018).

These policy changes will require a new approach to instruction that empowers educators to meet all students' needs and design rigorous and innovative learning pathways that align to students' interests and career aspirations.

The U.S. has yet to see a state fully align its policy system to support a statewide shift that includes building educator capacity for personalized learning, but a handful of states are already leading this charge. For example, in 2019, South Carolina's Office of Personalized Learning held its first statewide professional development conference, North Dakota kicked off quarterly convenings with district design teams focused on personalized, competency-based education, and Idaho launched the Idaho Mastery Education Network with a dedicated appropriation of $1.4 million.

As the movement grows, states will need to reexamine policies that support educators and leaders to intentionally align preservice, credentialing, professional learning, and evaluation systems to ensure educators have the skills to succeed in personalized learning environments. Equally important, states should ensure that educators benefit from the same level of personalization as their students.

Following the lead of the organizations and efforts mentioned above, states need to ensure educators and leaders have the resources and flexibility to master their own competencies and progress to deeper levels of expertise throughout their career.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Pulling these practice shifts and supports and policy trends together, the following are important implications for professional learning and leading:
1. Professional learning for adults should mirror the principles of personalization that we are espousing for our students.
2. Educators should leverage technology to maximize impact, not to replace strong teaching and learning.
3. Higher education and policy need to support educators to keep pace with changes in learning approaches.
4. We should look through a research lens to determine if personalized learning is achieveing its goals. If not, why not? Is it the instructional design or its implementation?
5. Equity must drive the work.

Personalized learning approaches are inherently designed to ensure all students get what they need, when they need it, to reach their highest potential. But good intentions aren't enough. Every decision in schools, from asssessment to discipline and everything in between, needs to be viewed through the lens of, "Will this enhance equity and close opportunity gaps?" Administrators, teachers, and students need to support each other in making that question a regular and frequent occurrence.

The concept that learners should be at the center of teaching is not new. What is new in today's personalized learning approaches is putting equity in the foreground of the system. All teachers and students should be partners in the transformation of learning, and supporting educators to make that shift is a responsibility we all share.

REFERENCES

Ambrose, C. (2019). *Personalized learning isn't about technology. It's about giving every student an opportunity to learn.* Available at knowledgeworks. org/resources/personalized-learning-technology-students.

Cervone, B. & Cushman, K. (2012). *Teachers at work: Six exemplars of everyday practice.* Boston, MA: Jobs for the Future.

Council of Chief State School Officers. (2011, April). *InTASC Model Core Teaching Standards.* Washington, DC: Author.

ExcelinEd & Foresight Law+Policy. (2019). *State progress toward next generation learning: A national landscape.* Tallahassee, FL: ExcelinEd.

Jenkins, S., Williams, M., Moyer, J., George, M., & Foster, E. (2016). *The shifting paradigm of power: Personalized learning according to teachers.* Available at knowledgeworks. org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/ teacher-conditions.pdf.

Jobs for the Future & Council for Chief State School Officers. (2015, August). *Educator competencies for personalized, learner-centered teaching.* Available at studentsatthecenterhub. org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/ EducatorCompetencies_081015.pdf.

KnowledgeWorks. (2018). *ESSA personalized learning dashboard.* Available at knowledgeworks.org/ resources/essa-personalized-learning-dashboard.

KnowledgeWorks. (2006). *2006-16 map of future forces affecting education.* Available at knowledgeworks. org/resources/map-future-forces.

Levitzky, D., Merin, M., Murphy E., & Klemm, K. (2017). *Mapping mastery: Building educator capacity for personalized learning.* Available at www1.headwaycloud.com/clients/91/ uploaded_files/mappingmastery_naate. pdf.

Prince, K., Swanson J., King, K., & Saveri, A. (2018). *Forecast 5.0 – The future of learning: Navigating the future of learning.* Available at knowledgeworks.org/resources/ forecast-5.

•

Rebecca E. Wolfe (wolfer@ knowledgeworks.org) is vice president for impact and improvement and Lillian Pace (pacel@knowledgeworks.org) is vice president of policy and advocacy at KnowledgeWorks. ■

WHAT DOES PERSONALIZED LEARNING MEAN?

EXPERTS WEIGH IN

BY SUZANNE BOUFFARD

We asked five experts what it means to personalize learning for students and what role professional learning should play in these efforts. Reflective of the diversity in the field today, their responses reveal both commonalities and notable differences (for example, some see technology as central, while others believe personalization can happen without any technology at all). But all agreed on the importance of building educators' capacity through high-quality professional learning.

•

Suzanne Bouffard (suzanne.bouffard@ learningforward.org) is Learning Forward's associate director of publications.

SUSAN PATRICK
President and CEO, iNACOL
and co-founder, CompetencyWorks

Personalized learning tailors learning to each student's strengths, needs, and interests. Students co-construct their goals and have "voice and choice" in determining what, how, when, and where the learning occurs. Personalized learning is *per person*. That means each student receives the help he or she needs, every day, to reach the highest possible community-driven standards and develop the skills needed to succeed.

In contrast, our current education model dictates that students progress at roughly the same pace, and many students fail after a high-stakes test at the end of a unit instead of receiving individualized, timely supports until they master each concept.

It needs to be said that a conflation is happening with personalized learning and educational technology. They are quickly becoming shorthand for one another, and that is unfortunate. While technology is an important learning tool — it can, for example, help educators manage increased access to content, research, and ideas — personalized learning is a far bigger idea. It is essential, equity-driven, and people-powered pedagogy.

Educators are critical to the success of personalized learning, but their role has to be reimagined. They will draw on a range of experiences and act in a variety of roles, including instructional designers, resource managers, coaches, facilitators, change managers, and advocates.

Professional learning for personalized learning must impart clear, specific educator competencies; develop teachers' professional judgment for operating in a student-centered learning environment; and build greater assessment literacy. These skills are built over time. Professional learning therefore cannot be done once and then shelved.

Susan Patrick

ERIN FIGULA
Director of professional learning,
LEAP Innovations

Personalized learning is a pathway that unlocks opportunity for all students by preparing them to be creative, confident thinkers, ready for our ever-changing world. Educators draw upon real-world experiences to bring learning to life, but learning is led by the learner. Students advance based on demonstrated competency, not time spent on a subject.

Personalized learning is rooted in a deep understanding of each student's academic and nonacademic needs, interests, and strengths. Educators thoughtfully connect to a student's identity, culture and context, and draw upon real-world experiences to bring learning to life. By this definition, personalized learning looks different in each classroom.

This transformation hinges on professional support that itself is personalized to teachers' unique context and learning style, mirroring the type of student experience they ultimately will create. Our organization helps educators develop the knowledge and skills to bring their visions to life so that they can design learning experiences that engage and inspire students.

In our largest program, which we call the Pilot Network, educators receive a minimum of 102 hours of professional learning over 18 months. They explore the evidence base for high-quality personalized learning and participate in a yearlong implementation pilot, in which they create detailed profiles for each of their students, physically redesign their classrooms to support a range of learning modalities, and interpret data on student progress. Coaches support teachers as ideas emerge and challenges arise. Teachers who embrace these practices often tell us they'll never return to their old way of teaching.

Erin Figula

JENNIFER SUBLETTE
Director of professional learning,
Albemarle County Public Schools,
Charlottesville, VA

In Albemarle County Public Schools, having all students own their learning is important for our equity goal of a rich and rigorous learning environment for all.

Jennifer Sublette

At the high school level, our district has had great success in traditional metrics like test scores, but not with all of our students. We recognize the need to expand the notion of what rigorous success looks like so that students see there is more than one version of how to succeed.

To meet the goal, we are working to integrate elements of project-based learning, differentiation, and other methods of personalization in our high schools. Our immediate goal is to push innovation at a small scale, learn from it, and then scale it up. Across the schools, you will see a range of instructional practices on any given day, and that is intentional.

At one of the high schools, which we call the Center One school, the work is 100% student-driven passion work. Its students don't opt out of their comprehensive high school, but instead choose to go there 50% of the time and to the Center One school 50% of the time.

For those students who want this and are ready for it, Center One allows them to dive deep into their passions. As one student said, "I get to work on what I love for one whole day every other day instead of one period a week."

We are looking at what practices we can replicate from the Center One school in traditional schools — for

BETHENY GROSS
Associate director,
Center on Reinventing Public Education,
University of Washington Bothell

A personalized learning experience is one that is responsive to and makes use of each student's talents, interests, background, and needs to develop students' academic, social, and emotional competencies.

Betheny Gross

A student's pathway is unique to him or her. This doesn't mean that students work in isolation, but rather that the bundle of experiences they engage in over time adds up to the best mix of experiences for each one of them, be those experiences group or independent, in- or out-of school, teacher- or student-led.

Throughout, educators play an important role in guiding students in self-reflection of their goals, progress toward those goals, and what they need to help them achieve those goals.

But the system to provide for personalized learning is underdeveloped. Important questions include: What do schools look like that do this work? How should we train educators differently, and how do we shift our current training systems and policies to do that?

To address these questions, CRPE's 2018 report, *Personalized Learning at a Crossroads,* examined the first two years of an initiative that funded six districts and regional partners to design, launch, and replicate personalized learning models (Gross & DeArmond, 2018). (The initiative was funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's Next Generation Systems Initiative and Next Generation Learning Challenge Regional Funds for Breakthrough Schools.)

Researchers observed classrooms in 39 schools, surveyed 908 participating teachers (as well as a nationally representative sample of 3,600 teachers), and conducted over 450 interviews with teachers, principals, superintendents, and central office staff. We found that:

- Personalized learning had strong supporters in schools, and teachers put significant effort into changing their practices.
- Principals let teachers define personalization for themselves, which impacted academic rigor, created inconsistencies, and caused student frustration.
- Though teachers were asked to innovate, principals and central offices did not provide sufficient strategies and supports for doing so.

Our results suggested that there is more work to do in building educators' capacity. District leaders and regional partners can help create a path forward that includes, but is not limited to, building knowledge management strategies and identifying which schools should innovate and which should adopt and adapt.

REFERENCES

Blazar, D., Heller, B., Kane, T., Polikoff, M., Staiger, D., Carrell, S. ... & Kurlaender, M. (2019). *Learning by the book: Comparing math achievement growth by textbook in six Common Core states.* Research Report. Cambridge, MA: Center for Education Policy Research, Harvard University.

Clayton, T.C. & Marken, S. (2019). *What do teachers and students really want from ed tech?* Presented

example, incorporating lab environments and regrouping time and kids. We also rechartered our charter middle school so that it is now 100% mastery-based grading. As the director of professional learning, I am working on this question of how to use our learning from the smaller centers as a resource for teachers in other schools.

I am also continually working with teachers on harnessing the power of project-based learning in a meaningful way. Too often, what educators call project-based learning ends up looking like a bunch of identical student products instead of a reflective and constructive learning process. Also, projects tend to get really big really fast and then teachers end up marching through a traditional academic year with one big project at the end.

We are encouraging teachers to do quick project-based learning cycles instead. When students experience more frequent cycles, they become more reflective and learn more from the process.

We start by asking teachers, "How do you take something you're already doing and increase the project-based elements without feeling you need to build the Taj Mahal?" A project can be one week long and still be rigorous.

As we bring in new elements to our schools, we have to make sure teachers see how the elements connect to each other and that they are not disparate new initiatives. In the past, we have had pockets of innovation, but that left students' experiences up to chance. Thoughtful, coordinated professional learning helps create a shared sense of what we're working toward: a powerful instructional experience for students.

NIRVANI BUDHRAM
Senior program officer,
Robin Hood Learning
+ Technology Fund,
The Robin Hood Foundation

Nirvani Budhram

Personalizing learning is the approach in which students have choice over their learning based on interests and needs, flexible pacing, and/or access to differentiated content based on learning needs. Teacher and student instructional decisions are frequently based on data.

Differentiation is important for equity. All students deserve access to rigorous content and excellent instruction, but currently access is not equitable. Students of color and those from low-income families have less access to rigorous coursework and instructional materials than their peers.

But high-quality instructional materials alone are not enough, according to a study from the Center for Education Policy Research at Harvard, which found no significant differences in achievement growth for schools using different math textbooks and curricula (Blazar et al., 2019). Even with high-quality instructional materials, differentiated support is necessary to ensure that struggling and striving students can access and master rigorous content.

Technology is part of the solution for offering that differentiation, and professional learning providers need to make technology and differentiation part of their practice. Otherwise, they are preparing teachers for classrooms that are not reflective of current practices. After all, 65% of teachers are using technology for instruction on a daily basis (Clayton & Marken, 2019), yet teachers often say they need more professional learning on how to use technology effectively.

At the Robin Hood Foundation, we see the power of using technology for personalizing learning, and we are investing in partners in New York City to use technology for blended literacy. Blended literacy, as defined by the Robin Hood Learning + Technology Fund, seeks to combine the advantages of content-rich literacy instruction with a personalized and blended (face-to-face and technology-supported) approach.

Our investments fall into three buckets: curriculum development and revision, professional learning designs and implementation, and research. Our investments in professional learning include support to Literacy Design Collaborative, TNTP, CenterPoint Education Solutions, and Teaching Lab. Our focus is on teachers and students in schools with large populations of low-income students. Our aim is to transform literacy instruction to improve student achievement.

---

at the New Schools Venture Fund Summit, May 9, Oakland, CA. Available at vimeo.com/337847562.

Gross, B. & DeArmond, M. **(2018).** *Personalized learning at a crossroads: Early lessons from the Next Generation Systems Initiative and the Regional Funds for Breakthrough Schools Initiative.* Seattle, WA: Center on Reinventing Public Education. ■

TECH UNLOCKS TEACHERS' CAPACITY

SOFTWARE IS A TEACHING TOOL, NOT A TEACHER REPLACEMENT

With a boost from education technology, teachers can use their time, attention, and energy in new ways to make a bigger difference for their students.

BY THOMAS ARNETT

What is personalized learning? If nothing else, it's a term that's hard to pin down. Educators of various stripes use the word "personalized" to label a variety of approaches — ranging from student-designed projects and internships to software-based adaptive learning, to a whole host of activities and practices in between.

Yet most efforts to personalize learning have a common idea at their core: Students' learning needs differ, and therefore students deserve an education that is responsive to those needs. Whereas conventional education functions best when students conform to the system, personalized learning is about redesigning the system to meet individual students' needs.

Personalizing learning for students is by no means a new idea. Over a hundred years ago, John Lancaster developed a model of schooling that grouped students by mastery in different subjects, which would today be considered a form of competency-based education (Dockterman, 2018). In our modern era, mainstream schools

have long encouraged differentiated instruction.

Furthermore, if you call up memories of your best teachers, you'll likely find that what made them great was how they personalized learning for their students: They cared about students as individuals, they believed in each student's potential, and they worked hard to give students the particular supports they needed to be successful.

Nonetheless, meeting students' individual learning needs has never been easy and seems to only become more challenging with the passage of time. Teachers today struggle to keep up with society's expectations. It isn't enough for them to just cover their curriculum. We expect them to differentiate their instruction, address students' social and emotional challenges, close achievement gaps, address bias and discrimination, and ensure all students are prepared for life in the 21st century.

It's hard to imagine teachers measuring up to these goals just by getting better and working harder. As one teacher shared recently in the *Los Angeles Times*, "I cannot help but ask myself, daily, how so many people

do this job. If someone as committed as I am to children and education is drowning in expectations, crying at night, falling prey to monthly illness due to lack of sleep, who does survive this business?" (Babcock, 2018)

THE ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY

Fortunately, what makes personalized learning today different than efforts to personalize in the past is the role technology can play in making personalized learning possible at scale. A key way to unlock teachers' capacity comes from using technology to take lower-order work off teachers' plates.

When we consider the long march of progress across human history, our common story is interwoven with advances in technology. From the wheel, to the steam engine, to the supercomputer, technologies expand what people are capable of producing. Food, clothing, housing, energy, and entertainment are all far more affordable and accessible than they were just a few generations ago because technology has steadily pushed out the frontier of human productivity.

Technology can play a similar role in education. Teachers' time is scarce, and the demands on their plates often

go beyond their human capacity. But with a boost from education technology, teachers can use their time, attention, and energy in new ways to make a bigger difference for their students.

Technology helps address teachers' constrained capacity in two key ways. First, it can **enhance** teachers' effectiveness at the things they already do. For example, a chalkboard enhances how teachers convey information by allowing them to complement their verbal explanations with visual representations. Similarly, high-quality curriculum enhances teachers' lesson plans by directing them to effective teaching methods. As a more recent example, IBM Teacher Advisor is a web-based instructional planning tool that helps teachers find high-quality lesson materials tailored to their students' learning needs.

Second, technology can **expand** teachers' capacity for designing and leading learning activities that are otherwise impossible or impractical. For example, technologies like Lexia Core 5 personalized instruction model expand teachers' ability to take daily snapshots of students' learning and give students targeted instruction in ways that are almost unfeasible for a teacher to do manually.

Similarly, when technologies for writing instruction, such as Ecree or NoRedInk, provide automated feedback on the grammar and structure of students' essays, teachers can focus more of their feedback on other important elements of quality writing, such as reasoning, rhetoric, and style. Similarly, math instructional technologies like Khan Academy give teachers a manageable way to implement mastery-based instruction, a strategy that is hard to coordinate otherwise.

WHAT TECHNOLOGY CAN'T DO

As technologies become more common in classrooms, some worry that technology's ultimate end will be to push teachers out of their jobs. This could happen if we set a low bar for

Software is great for generating immediate, automated feedback on students' mastery of basic knowledge and skills. But higher-order feedback falls outside its purview.

what we expect quality education to look like — drill-and-kill instruction measured solely through tests with narrowly defined "right" answers. Yet when we consider the high aims of personalized learning, we see that technology's limitations make teachers more valuable than ever.

Technology can't provide higher-order feedback.

Software is great for generating immediate, automated feedback on students' mastery of basic knowledge and skills. But higher-order feedback falls outside its purview.

Consider, for example, essay grading. For years, word processors have been able to point out corrections for spelling and grammar errors. More recently, intelligent software now offers feedback on elements of structure and style, such as whether a student has a topic sentence at the beginning of each paragraph and whether each paragraph contains evidence related to the topic sentence and the essay's thesis.

But software cannot give feedback on many of the qualities that really define great writing, such as whether the student's rhetoric and logic will resonate with her intended audience. It takes a human to give feedback on the more nuanced aspects of human communication.

In contrast, learning becomes far more personal for students when teachers have the time to give regular, individualized feedback on higher-order skills. But in a conventional classroom, how often do English teachers have time to conference individually with students about the quality of their

writing, especially when correcting grammar and structure already takes up so much of their time?

Unfortunately, most teachers' days quickly fill up with planning lessons, writing quizzes, running copies, covering content, participating in staff meetings, and grading lower-order assignments, with little time left for many of the high-value activities described here.

The same holds true in other academic domains. Software can't tell students if their research questions for a science project are worthwhile and reasonably scoped, nor can it tell them which engineering and design challenges they should tackle to improve a simple machine. Additionally, software can't coach soft skills, such as working effectively in teams, navigating interpersonal conflict, setting personal goals, and persevering through obstacles. The skills students will need to future-proof their careers against the rise of machines are also the skills they can't learn from machines.

Technology can't get to know a student.

Software today can access a lot of data about a student: home address, race and ethnicity, diagnosed learning disabilities, family income, attendance records, test scores, browser history, and even keystrokes and mouse clicks.

But with all that data, can software really know a student? Can a computer understand how his social status at school leads him to feel when he's assigned to work with a particular group of peers on a class project? Or can it predict that she'll enjoy reading a particular novel because it reminds her of her best friend from the town where she used to live?

Software can make a lot of useful inferences based on patterns it finds in the data it collects. But it can't collect data on all the important factors that shape a students' learning experiences, nor can it model all of the psychological complexity of childhood and adolescence. Real knowing and

understanding is a human-to-human experience.

Yet how many teachers have time to meet regularly with each of their students one-on-one just to ask about how they're doing, let alone attend students' extracurricular activities or visit students' homes to get to know their families? Caring about students isn't constrained by time, but showing that you care is.

Fortunately, the more software can keep track of the measurable aspects of students' learning, the more teachers can focus on knowing the immeasurable attributes of their individual students.

Technology can't care about a student.

Where do students get the motivation to learn? At times, motivation may come from pure intellectual curiosity. But more often than not, motivation comes from relationships. For example, a student stays after class for extra tutoring because he cares what his parents think of his grades and he believes his teacher's confidence that a little extra practice will help him get the grades he wants. Or a student becomes excited about science because a teacher she loves also loves science.

Students often work to learn and achieve for the praise and approbation of people who matter in their lives. Software, for all its wondrous abilities, can't offer that sense of genuine caring.

COMBINING TEACHERS AND TECHNOLOGY

Software and devices can't make learning holistically personal, but neither can teachers personalize learning on their own. In short, the classroom of the future — if made to be more personal — will inevitably involve a mix of both teacher and technology. Each will play a role that complements the other.

As you aim to make learning more personal in your school or district, there are questions to consider that will be specific to your context. Nonetheless,

Software, for all its wondrous abilities, can't offer that sense of genuine caring.

no matter how you define and design personalized learning, here are four essential considerations to keep in mind as you help teachers develop their capacity to use technology effectively to personalize learning.

Focus on the *why*. Personalized learning is about meeting students' individual needs. As you select, develop, and roll out tools and practices, you should continually ask, "How do all these things amplify an educator's capacity to better meet students' individual learning needs?"

Remembering this question will help you avoid adopting tech for tech's sake or using tech merely as a low-quality substitute for teacher-led instruction. Similarly, it will help you persevere with bold new personalized learning practices that stretch beyond the norm.

Give educators job-embedded support. Most schools recognize that teachers need up-front training on how to use new tools and practices. Yet many neglect the importance of ongoing support. As educators take new tools and practices to their classrooms, they wade into a messy world of creative problem-solving as they figure out how to adapt those tools and practices to their contexts and integrate them with existing routines and practices.

Inevitably, there will be bumps in the road. In those moments, teachers need coaches and colleagues who can help them get over bumps before they turn into roadblocks. Professional learning communities can offer a critical forum for sharing what works and troubleshooting what doesn't.

Use technology to personalize learning for teachers. Teachers come to personalized learning with different levels of readiness. Furthermore, different content areas and instructional

strategies lend themselves to different approaches to personalization. Fortunately, many of the pioneers in technology-enabled personalized learning have shared their best practices online.

Keep an eye on actual progress. Any new practice, no matter how much it promises to amplify educator capacity in the long run, exacts a tax on capacity. Teachers have to spend time upfront learning how to implement new technologies and practices, and then spend time on an ongoing basis managing new technologies and maintaining new practices.

As you roll out personalized learning, continually monitor whether personalization strategies that make sense in theory are bearing fruit in practice. Verify that actual benefits outweigh potential drawbacks.

Although it's hard to define a set of practices that constitute personalized learning, it should be clear what personalized learning is not. Personalized learning is not a particular tool, strategy, technology, or instructional model. Rather, it is about using tools, strategies, technologies, and instructional models in ways that amplify educators' capacity to meet students' individual learning needs.

REFERENCES

Babcock, N. (2018, December 9). Betsy DeVos was (sort of) right. We should arm teachers — with supplies, support and a livable salary. *Los Angeles Times.* Available at www.latimes.com/opinion/op-ed/la-oe-babcock-teachers-20181209-story.html.

Dockterman, D. (2018, September 5). Insights from 200+ years of personalized learning. *Science of Learning.* Available at www.nature.com/articles/s41539-018-0033-x.

•

Thomas Arnett (tarnett@ christenseninstitute.org) is a senior research fellow at the Clayton Christensen Institute. ■

BRIDGING THE GAP

STUDY REVEALS
SUPPORTS
TEACHERS NEED
TO MOVE FROM
UNDERSTANDING
TO IMPLEMENTATION

BY SENGSOUVANH (SUKEY) LESHNICK, JACKIE STATUM ALLEN, AND DANIELA BERMAN

Inside Prodeo Academy's St. Paul, Minnesota, campus, students walk quietly across polished wooden floors in their navy-and-white uniforms. The majority of the school's 77 students are refugees, many of whom have emigrated from Thai refugee camps that shelter Karen and Kayah ethnic minorities from Myanmar.

Down the hall, a peek inside Kathleen Boland's mixed K-1 classroom reveals a learning environment that feels reassuringly recognizable, yet quietly revolutionary. As she animatedly taps out phonics exercises around a table with five students, at a nearby table a handful of children quietly work on phonics worksheets. On the bright carpet, another cluster of students complete self-paced activities.

Flexible seating in the form of colorful bucket chairs allow students choice and variety in their learning environment. In an inviting reading nook called the Peace Corner, where students are allowed to take three short breaks per day, a child daydreams in a rocking chair.

While the scene in Boland's classroom appears almost magical, it's the fruition of careful research and hard work. Although individualized learning, also known as student-centered learning, isn't a blanket solution to every pedagogical problem, it means that teachers are equipped for the delicate balancing act of supporting some students as they forge ahead toward new challenges while helping others catch up on foundational concepts.

Boland collaborates with Principal Liz Ferguson and her fellow colleagues on the school's curriculum development and design. Each Prodeo teacher is equipped with a 105-minute daily period for prep, research, and grading.

There's also a weekly data analysis meeting with Ferguson and, every six weeks, a data day when educators assess, reflect, and rechart their classroom's course. This kind of explicit structural design is necessary, Ferguson says, to help educators make the leap from a more traditional instructional model.

When students talk about their experience at Prodeo, however, it's not data, technology, or structure that pop up in conversation — it's choice, the freedom of self-paced assignments, and joy. "Math is easier for me to understand because I can go at my own pace," one elementary student said. "In reading, I like that I get to pick my own books. It makes it so I really like reading" (Chandler, n.d.).

STUDENTS AT THE CENTER

Individualized learning is about placing students at the center of their educational experience while meeting

them at their individual achievement levels and engaging them in the process of learning.

In 2016, the Bush Foundation launched its individualized learning strategy with the goal of supporting its region — Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, and the 23 Native nations that share the same geography — to become the national leader in individualizing education to meet the needs and ambitions of all students.

At its core, the foundation believes individualized learning makes education more relevant for students in terms of who they are (cultural relevance), how they learn (instructional relevance), and what they aspire to do (career relevance).

These three dimensions of individualized learning represent a unique approach within the student-centered learning field — particularly cultural relevance. The three dimensions, which ideally should all be present in order to best engage and provide students meaningful learning experiences, comprise an approach that recognizes and meets the needs, interests, and agency of the whole learner. Together, they represent a transformative change from the traditional school model to one that makes the experience of education personal and relevant to every student.

To increase the number of schools engaging in individualized learning in the region, the Bush Foundation is pursuing a three-part strategy, called Inspire, Equip, and Connect.

The Inspire portion of the strategy is designed to encourage implementation of individualized learning by building awareness, understanding, and enthusiasm for the power and possibility of a more relevant education experience through cohort learning experiences and an annual regional convening.

Under the Equip part of the strategy, the foundation invests in building the capacity of those who want to implement more individualized learning practices in their schools

While most of those participants pointed to specific practices in their contexts that enhance instructional relevance and career relevance, they were less likely to offer concrete ways in which their learning environments considered cultural relevance.

through grants to intermediary organizations that work directly with schools.

Finally, with the Connect part of the strategy, the Bush Foundation brings together people who have already begun implementing individualized learning so that they can support and learn from one another.

While a good amount is known in education research about approaches to individualized learning (e.g. differentiated instruction, personalized learning plans), little is known about the scope and scale of efforts to individualize learning in the Bush Foundation's region of focus.

To support its learning and future investments, the Bush Foundation commissioned Social Policy Research Associates to conduct a regional scan in 2018 to learn about the current conditions, practices, and challenges to implementing individualized learning strategies within the region.

The scan involved telephone interviews with 41 school or district leaders, funders, and intermediary organizations; and a survey of 158 school leaders representing 303 schools across the region. This article draws considerably from that scan to highlight key practices and challenges facing educators as they seek to transform learning environments.

A FUNDAMENTAL SHIFT IS NECESSARY

Overall, the baseline scan found

that most educators in the Bush Foundation's region shared the same belief about transforming their education systems: To individualize learning, there must be a fundamental shift in how educators conceptualize learning and the role of school in a child's life.

Central to this shift is the acknowledgement that the traditional, one-size-fits-all approach to teaching and learning is insufficient to prepare students for lifelong learning. This shift requires knowledge about what individualized learning looks like and how to implement practices.

The research from Social Policy Research Associates revealed that the level of understanding of individualized learning was very much on a continuum across the region. The majority of study participants were at least familiar with the more common terms used to describe student-centered approaches — such as personalized learning — and most were familiar with individualized learning.

However, deeper understanding of actual practices related to individualized learning was quite varied and often limited to specific districts, schools, or educators. Despite at least a basic familiarity with the concept of individualized learning, only about two-thirds of school leaders who responded to the survey reported implementing it in their schools, suggesting a widespread lack of knowledge about how individualized learning best occurs.

Moreover, while most of those participants pointed to specific practices in their contexts that enhance instructional relevance and career relevance, they were less likely to offer concrete ways in which their learning environments considered cultural relevance.

The Bush Foundation's region is quite diverse, with great variation across cultural communities and schools. Included in the portfolio of schools being served by Foundation partners are public school districts in urban and suburban areas, small rural schools,

tribal schools, independent schools, and charter schools.

Given this diversity, the majority of participants indicated a recognition of the need to connect learning to the communities from which their students come and have regular and equitable celebrations of their students' unique identities and cultural backgrounds. However, the way forward was not typically clear.

BRIDGING THE GAP

In combination, the findings from the scan point to the fact that bridging the gap between understanding and implementation — particularly around cultural relevance — represents both a challenge and an opportunity to bring individualized learning to students from a wealth of cultural backgrounds and identities across the region.

Because individualized learning is a significant shift from the traditional way that educators engage with students and learning in the classroom, educators require in-depth support to make that change.

The schools and districts featured in the scan were using professional learning communities, districtwide professional development, outside organizations or consultants, conferences, and book studies to equip educators with the knowledge and tools they need to implement individualized learning.

Here are other needed supports for educators the scan revealed.

More information about how to do individualized learning well. Some ideas identified by respondents included enhanced professional development opportunities, such as through professional learning communities where teachers come together to share their experience and learn from each other.

Opportunities to observe practice. Educators reported that an effective strategy for enhancing teacher knowledge and understanding of individualized learning is through direct observation of individualized

> **Because individualized learning is a significant shift from the traditional way that educators engage with students and learning in the classroom, educators require in-depth support to make that change.**

learning in action. These activities included teachers observing colleagues' classrooms, site visits to other schools or districts within the same state, and multiday trips to other states to learn from their schools.

Community engagement and buy-in. Participants emphasized the importance of involving the broader community in supporting educators' development. One field leader explained that designing culturally relevant lesson plans depends on "understanding the cultural community [of the school] and developing pedagogy based on that."

Thoughtful assessments. For educators to individualize instruction, they need access to real-time assessment data that provide a comprehensive picture of students' successes and challenges. Just as individualized learning represents a different conception of education, it also requires a different way of assessing student growth than what traditional school-based assessments currently offer.

Reimagined roles for educators. Through exposure to individualized learning in action and through trying on individualized learning practices in the classroom, educators are beginning to see a fundamental shift in their role. School leaders pointed out that educators are beginning to embody the role of the facilitator of learning, in which their primary role is acting as a guide for learners. As one school leader described, educators "are facilitators of learning, not the 'sage on the stage' anymore."

Flexibility and autonomy. Educators identified local autonomy

and flexibility as key ingredients for schools' ability to innovate and make individualized learning a reality. Schools that have successfully implemented individualized learning practices exercised their local autonomy to test out new ideas aligned with individualized learning principles. However, many school leaders still felt encumbered by state and federal requirements that are designed for a traditional education framework.

Looking ahead, the Bush Foundation is using the insights from the 2018 baseline scan to inform its individualized learning strategy and deepen the capacity of the region to deliver student-centered learning experiences.

In thinking about how to best equip the region in this way, the foundation sought partnerships with several school intermediary organizations that provide customized support to schools and educators. Sourced through an open competitive grant program, these intermediary organizations are working to build the capacity of about 75 schools in the region to implement individualized learning through activities such as school redesign and planning, school community engagement, leadership coaching, and staff professional development.

REFERENCE

Chandler, S. (n.d.). One classroom, many paths. *bMagazine.* Available at bmag.bushfoundation.org/one-classroom-many-paths.

•

Sengsouvanh (Sukey) Leshnick (sukey@spra.com) is a principal and director of the Education Division at Social Policy Research Associates. Jackie Statum Allen (jallen@ bushfound.org) is education portfolio director at the Bush Foundation. Daniela Berman (daniela_berman@ spra.com) is an associate at Social Policy Research Associates. ■

STUDENT-LED LEARNING TAKES WELL-PREPARED EDUCATORS

BY JOE BATTAGLIA

For more than 20 years, the Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center (known as the Met) has been personalizing learning to our students' interests and needs.

The Met, which today is a network of six small, public high schools in Providence and Newport, Rhode Island, is the founding school of Big Picture Learning, a network of more than 65 diverse schools that use innovative models to make learning meaningful and tailored to students.

Students at the Met develop agency for their own learning through a combination of strategies that include internships with local businesses and organizations during the school day, intentional connections between their internships and academic skills, and

individual learning plans. Our goal is for all students to become engaged, lifelong learners and responsible citizens.

Learning at the Met is student-led and adult-facilitated. That doesn't mean educators don't have a role to play. Quite the contrary, they play a crucial role. They manage students' individual learning plans (which cover all learning goal areas) and scaffold the students' self-determination in their educational paths.

Relationships between educators and students are a key part of engaging learners and facilitating their personalized learning pathways. For this to work, our educators need to be in constant communication with one another and have ongoing support. Professional learning that is reflective and collaborative is therefore foundational at the Met.

One tool that has been helpful in our professional learning efforts is the method of improvement science — using short cycles of inquiry to continuously iterate on and enhance the programs and supports for educators. We use this method to create more consistency and coherence in how educators review student work and use the results to drive further instruction, especially in math.

ABOUT THE MET

Staffing at the Met looks different than at a traditional school. Each of the six buildings has one principal, eight or nine advisors, one quantitative reasoning teacher (what many would consider a math teacher), one social worker, one special educator, and one learning specialist.

The advisors are teachers or school leaders who meet with students on a

---

WHY THE WHAT MATTERS NOW NETWORK?

The What Matters Now Network has backstopped our efforts, providing national and state-level elevation of this work for quantitative reasoning specialists, peer accountability among school leadership, and technical assistance support throughout our efforts.

---

regular basis to plan and navigate their learning pathway. Each student has the same advisor for his or her entire high school career. Advisors oversee and facilitate students' learning plans, help them identify their interests, find internships that relate to those interests, and serve as trusted adult mentors.

Students also learn from specialists — teachers who manage specific skill learning. Quantitative reasoning teachers, who teach math skills, are a key part of the team. They, like all educators at the Met, prioritize students' ability to reason and apply knowledge over rote memory of content.

Each year, 30% to 35% of students enter the Met three or more years behind in math (and in reading). And while there are specific skill deficiencies to remediate, we also want to prepare students to be career- and college-ready, rebuild mathematical confidence, excel at the mathematical competencies, and learn to love learning.

The staffing structure, combined with the intensely personalized nature of student learning work at the Met, necessitates frequent meetings among staff (and between staff and the learning

---

team of the parent, student, and mentor).

It also necessitates that these meetings be effective and efficient — and that all our team members are learning and growing together to design, scaffold, and execute student learning plans and ensure that all students have access to high-quality teaching and learning.

For example, in English language arts, we have worked together as a community to assess (and drive improvement in) academic rigor in writing, by using the Six Traits Writing Rubric developed by Education Northwest. This has given us a common way to provide consistent feedback on students' writing skills.

ADDRESSING A NEW CHALLENGE

A few years ago, the Met embarked on a concerted effort to support the quantitative reasoning team to engage in a similar effort. We were, and continue to be, focused on the goal of upholding equity for our diverse student body and ensuring that all of them become competent in key mathematical reasoning skills. We believed a key leverage point was reviewing student work through common assessments.

The quantitative reasoning team had formed a professional learning community (PLC) that engaged in lesson studies and examining student work using structured protocols. But when we began working toward common math assessments, we found that the team didn't have sufficient buy-in to make meaningful progress.

Team members didn't understand the purpose of this work or the value of using common assessments to drive professional learning that would

improve student outcomes. We were grappling with how to move forward.

Then last year, we saw a window of opportunity when we joined the What Matters Now Network, a coalition of educators at the state, district, and school levels working to apply the concepts of improvement science to professional learning. The network is facilitated by Learning Forward and the Center for Public Research and Leadership at Columbia University with support from the Carnegie Corporation.

Rhode Island is one of three states in the network. The state's coalition is a collaboration among the Rhode Island Department of Education, the Governor's Office of Innovation, Smithfield Public Schools, and us. Our coalition is focusing on methods for reviewing student work, using the improvement science approach of testing changes that are small enough to

WHAT IS IMPROVEMENT SCIENCE?

In education, improvement science is a disciplined approach to educational inquiry: Through it, teams of educators engage in rapid PDSA (plan, do, study, act) cycles in order to test hypotheses and use data to inform smart and real-time decision-making.

learn from quickly but are foundational to potentially larger solutions.
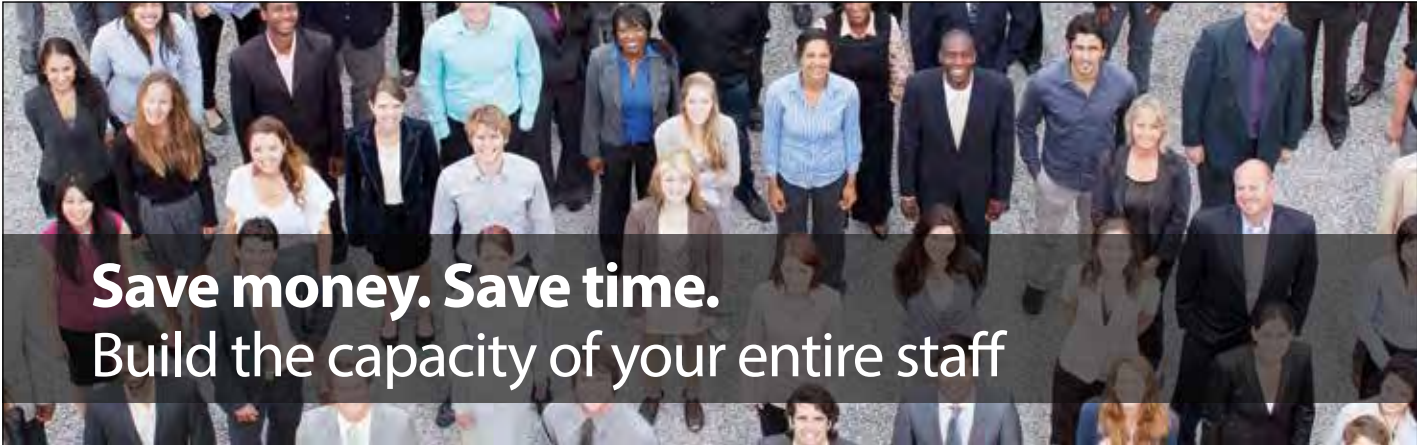
As a part of and with support from the network, our team at the Met designed a plan to institute short cycles of inquiry (see "What is improvement science?" above) about how to assess the impact of math instruction, beginning with geometry skills and competencies.

To do this, the quantitative

reasoning team reviewed its scope and sequence to identify the eight to 10 most foundational skills or competencies for the year and developed a short exit ticket common assessment for each of them. The topics ranged from segment addition to multistep volume problems, and they were created in a way to allow for open interpretation of the problem and provide various ways to communicate the thinking and solution process.

Before administering each assessment, the team reviewed and discussed all of the different ways students might provide and communicate a solution, how students might miss the solution, or how they might miscommunicate the solution.

Doing this not only promotes our goal to preserve an equitable education for each student, but it also allowed us to engage more deeply through an improvement science lens: By first

predicting student successes and areas of potential struggle, our quantitative reasoning specialists were then able to engage in Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycles to test the efficacy of various teaching, learning, and intervention strategies to ensure all students mastered all 10 of the identified foundational skills and competencies.

Tangibly, this means that the team looks at various and individual ways of approaching a problem, categorizes them, and then zooms out to aggregate instructional interventions. Could an English learner misread a math term? What intervention would mitigate that? Is the term necessary to know in English? If not, how could the question be rewritten or the work introduced before the exit ticket?

PLAN-DO-STUDY-ACT

As part of each of the PDSA cycles, the team first planned and engaged in its teaching strategies, administered the common assessment, then reconvened to review student work. This reconvening, or the "study" section of improvement science's PDSA cycles, was grounded in the use of a Looking at Student Work protocol developed at the What Matters Now Network convening.

Using this protocol, team members scored the work, grouped students in their classes depending on the type and level of needed teaching intervention, and identified those next instructional steps that they would implement in their group.

Engaging in these next instructional steps started the next round of the PDSA cycles for the What Matters Now Network, helping to ensure fluid and continued improvement on instructional strategies to reach full proficiency across all identified core competencies.

At the beginning of this process, the team, while invested, moved cautiously and asked many questions: What would this data be used for? Are our circumstances similar across buildings? What can we really tell from these

data? Still, with all these questions, the team followed the written Looking At Student Work protocol and the prompting of the team facilitator.

Given this caution, the first PDSA cycle through the What Matters Now Network focused most deeply on engagement and ownership of the process by quantitative reasoning specialists. Looking back, this was the right move: As the first cycle closed, the team was more comfortable in preparing, reviewing, and sharing its work and commitments. Team mindset shifted notably to a more open, solutions-focused approach.

This gave space to test a new hypothesis (or "change idea" in the language of improvement science) through the second cycle of inquiry. During the second PDSA, the quantitative reasoning team added one additional question to the Looking at Student Work protocol, asking teachers not just what instructional approach they chose but how teachers implemented their instructional next steps.

To gather — and be able to reflect on — the data for these questions, we created a tracking tool so that staff could document these post-assessment interventions. Now, in addition to reviewing the assessments, we are reviewing how the interventions identified by these formative assessments influence learning.

By the end of the year, any of the team could and would create a common assessment or lead the protocol. Team members owned the process and distributed leadership among themselves.

LOOKING AHEAD

As we look to engage in next steps in the What Matters Now Network, we will take learnings from our improvement science efforts this year. We know that team buy-in is paramount and that we need to provide time for inquiry and reflection and, ultimately, ownership before we roll out new instructional efforts with our

teams.

To that end, one of the school's next steps is to co-create a tool that better categorizes and tracks the interventions by quantitative reasoning teachers, allowing educators to own the process.

Additional insights from our efforts in improvement science — especially around the need for explicit and specific data — will inform our work to disaggregate data collected to have a better look at where our interventions are working and where they may not be showing an effect.

Finally, we plan to expand this project to our algebra curriculum and classes. This will open up our conversations and research into best practices that promote equity in mathematical education — an important undertaking because all students need to be supported in a way that maximizes their learning outcomes.

This is a process that can happen in any school. While sometimes the terminology about improvement science and short cycles of inquiry can seem exclusive and technical, the process is simple and powerful. As we engage in this process, we become better educators, more able to observe what needs to be done.

Overall, this process of short cycles of inquiry isn't just the ability to reflect, plan, and implement well. It also stokes a larger conversation about what goals should be and remain the key targets and why. It causes us to question and challenge assumptions that may need to be clarified, understood better, or eschewed and replaced. It creates fertile space for deeper, broader, and more fulfilling professional learning that enables us to better serve students and families.

•

Joe Battaglia (jbattaglia@metmail. org) is director of curriculum and instruction at the Met school in Providence and Newport, Rhode Island. ■
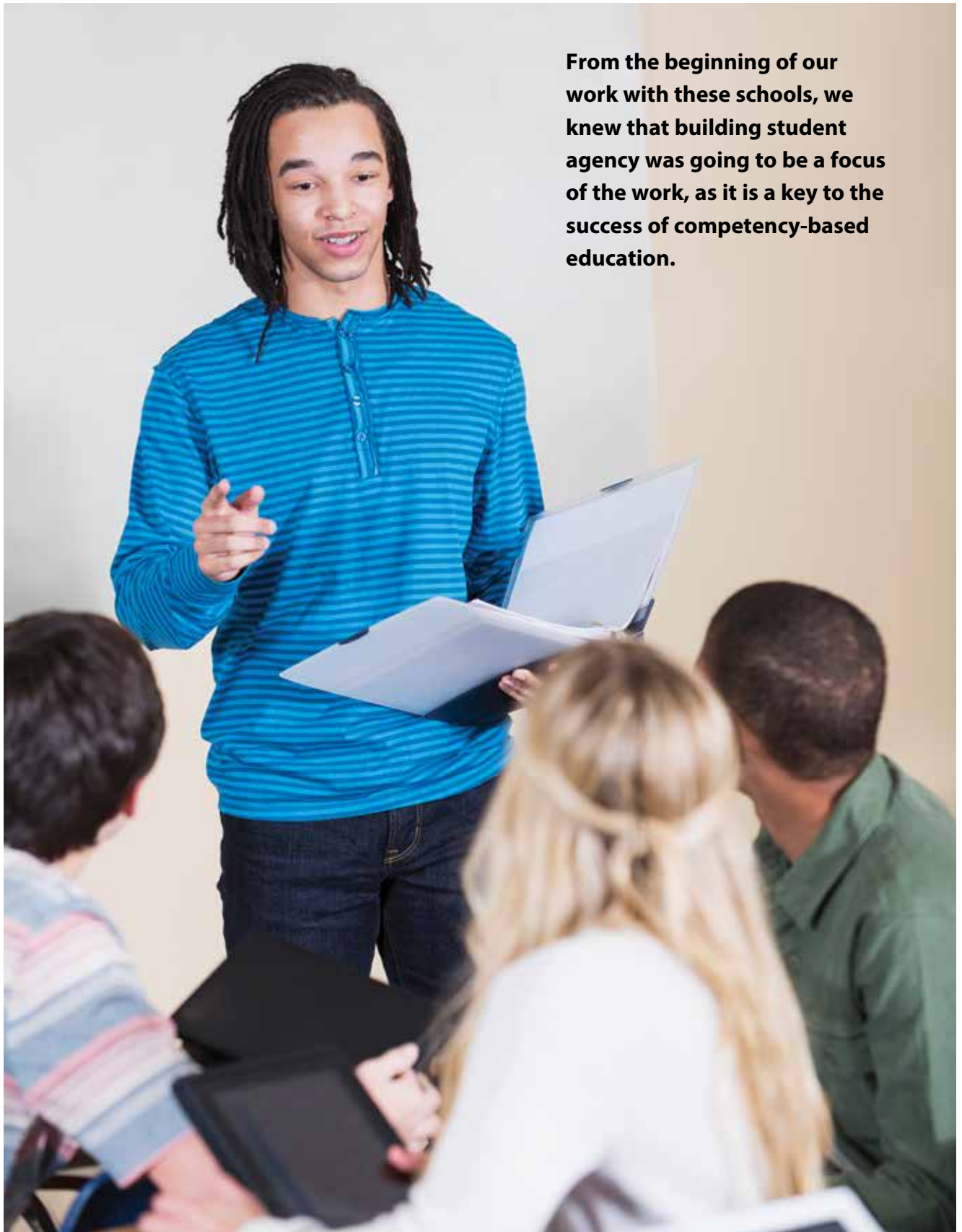
From the beginning of our work with these schools, we knew that building student agency was going to be a focus of the work, as it is a key to the success of competency-based education.

STUDENTS TAKE OWNERSHIP OF LEARNING

TENNESSEE PROGRAM DEVELOPS AGENCY THROUGH COMPETENCY-BASED EDUCATION

BY ADRIANA HARRINGTON, REGINA HENRY, RACHAEL MILLIGAN, NINA MOREL, AND JULIA OSTEEN

Imagine walking into an 8th-grade science classroom and hearing a discussion among students about a challenging assignment they recently completed. These students have spent the last few days studying how earth's mineral, fossil fuels, and groundwater resources are distributed across the globe and have written paragraphs on how these resources have influenced population growth in certain areas of the globe.

Two students are evaluating their work using Webb's Depth of Knowledge (Aungst, 2014), a framework that categorizes tasks by the complexity of thinking required to complete them, and one says to her partner, "You know you have to create something new using the information

you have learned for it to be level 4."

Another student who found a recent unit on mechanical versus electromagnetic waves especially challenging decided to attend optional review sessions, complete retakes, and be persistent in asking clarifying questions. Working through the content in multiple ways and taking time to build her knowledge and confidence meant that the next time she didn't understand a concept in class, she raised her hand and asked — something she never would have done before.

These students in Beth Hines' 8th-grade physical science class at West Collierville Middle School in Tennessee are building ownership and agency for their learning. As a result of owning

the learning process, they and their peers are seeing grades as reflections of learning rather than a prize or status to attain. These shifts can only occur if principals, teachers, and students have opportunities for agency — the capacity and propensity to take purposeful initiative.

West Collierville Middle School is one of 18 diverse schools across Tennessee piloting implementation of competency-based education. Competency-based education creates individualized pathways for students by focusing on demonstrating mastery and allowing students to advance through curricula as mastery is achieved.

One of several personalized learning strategies led by the Tennessee Department of Education (n.d.), the

competency-based education pilot, launched in 2018, supports educators in shifting learning to a more student-centric endeavor. It offers flexibility in how students learn, demonstrate mastery, and progress through content, all of which requires the development of agency.

The teams represent 18 schools from 11 districts, both urban and rural. Planning began in spring 2018 and implementation in the fall. Seventeen teams developed their own plans, while one worked with Summit Learning, an online personalized learning platform. Professional learning for educators was at the center of planning and implementation. Teams of educators from the pilot schools participated in professional development coordinated by the Tennessee Department of Education, Lipscomb University, and the Appalachian Regional Comprehensive Center to develop and implement elements of competency-based education.

Five professional development days covered topics including how to develop a competency, what agency is and how it can be developed, and developing a growth mindset. The sessions included guided team time for each school to develop an implementation plan with goals, strategies, logistics, and communications plans.

When the professional development team (of which we were a part) began working with the pilot schools in spring 2018, each team had a different comfort level with competency-based education. Some schools had spent two years transitioning to mastery-based grading, in which educators build proficiency scales that define the progression of learning and rate students on levels of proficiency to signify mastery of content standards. Some were in the very infant stages of the journey but believed deeply in building efficacy in students.

Taking into account their respective starting places, we walked school teams through the process of developing and

implementing a plan that made sense for their specific context. We supported the school teams as they began to think differently about high-quality instruction and the role of the teacher, and we pushed them to build on work all schools in the state had already been doing to implement rigorous college- and career-ready standards.

From the beginning of our work with these schools, we knew that building student agency was going to be a focus of the work, as it is a key to the success of competency-based education. Eventually, it became clear that teacher agency was paramount and that teachers must experience agency themselves in order to cultivate it in their students.

Over the course of the pilot, three lessons on agency surfaced: Developing agency is more than offering choice; agency is a skill that needs to be explicitly taught and scaffolded based on teacher and student levels of readiness; and developing agency requires educators to shift to a facilitative approach.

BEYOND CHOICE

Our first day of professional learning with the pilot schools focused on laying the foundation of competency-based education implementation strategies. We engaged teams in developing "why" statements about the new approach and in goal setting. We also reserved a block of time for teams to think about what strategies to implement in their schools, such as student goal-setting, blended learning, systematic formative assessments, student-led data conversations, and flexible scheduling.

However, 45 minutes into the two-hour block, it was clear that this was quickly turning from a productive struggle to an unproductive one. We had fallen into the trap of designing professional learning without assessing prior knowledge and without sufficient scaffolding of the learning.

We gave school teams resources on different strategies to implement and

time to reflect on which would be best suited for their schools. Many teams, however, did not have enough context on what each strategy was and how it could be used to make a decision. In retrospect, we could see that teams needed an overview of each type of strategy and then time to reflect on the pros and cons for their unique settings.

After this experience, we focused more intentionally on thinking about where appropriate facilitator-directed learning needed to occur and how to phase in choice and appropriate differentiation based on session feedback. When rolling out larger, newer topics, such as assessment in competency-based education, we started with facilitator-directed learning, then designed the rest of the sessions with options for participants to select their own topic or team time with guidance from the Lipscomb University team. Schools could then select the order that made the most sense for them based on their comfort level.

As part of this scaffolding, we recognized the need to explicitly confer agency upon the teachers. Like students, most teachers are not used to having the freedom and being trusted to make their own choices. We found that by saying, "You have the autonomy to make these changes in your classroom and school," then modeling those changes allowed educators to view their role differently and feel supported with making changes in their school contexts.

SCAFFOLDING AND SKILL-BUILDING

Because each school team was at a different spot along a continuum of knowledge and adoption of competency-based education elements, it was clear from early in the process that most of the work would have to be personalized for each team. With the guidance of the Standards for Professional Learning (Learning Forward, 2011), we personalized and customized the sessions through modeling, reflective questioning,

Beth Hines, science teacher at West Collierville Middle School in Collierville, Tennessee, works with students on showing mastery of the chemistry concept of balanced chemical equations.

coaching, and providing feedback.

Teams developed their own rationale, goals, and communication and implementation plans. Their plans served as the basis of the continued work together during the pilot training days, and we employed varying types of support depending on their needs. Teams regularly reflected on what was going well and the challenges to address so that we could all learn and improve as we went.

Through this process, we modeled the kind of agency-building strategies that principals could use with staff and that teachers could use with students. As Principal Beth Robbins from West Collierville Middle School said, "Building teacher agency allows the teachers to build student agency."

She provided support for teachers to build their own agency through professional learning community meetings that included teachers sharing and analyzing student progress data and then taking the lead in determining ways to increase student outcomes. Beth Hines, the 8th-grade science

teacher, reported that as a result of the support she received, she in turn built her students' agency. She provided students with tools to track their own progress and communicate that progress to their families themselves.

At Gibbs Middle School in Knox County, the 6th-grade team also created opportunities to develop student agency, initially by building classroom community. From day one, students develop their own classroom norms and verbalize what type of learning works best for them in different settings. Furthermore, when something doesn't work in class, teachers work with students to reflect on where the learning didn't work or where the process went wrong, and then they develop solutions together.

Cindy White, Gibbs Middle School principal, said, "Our schoolwide strategy was to provide staff with a toolbox of ideas for building a student-centered learning environment through promoting student agency." The school provides structures for student goal-setting and tracking progress. It also

instituted weekly student advisory sessions to connect every student with a caring adult and weekly student circles where students can share their voices.

FROM A DIRECTIVE ROLE TO A FACILITATIVE ONE

Teachers in a competency-based education approach are encouraged to move from a directive role — the "sage on the stage" who sets all the expectations and guidelines — to a facilitative role in which they guide students to become drivers of their learning outcomes.

A facilitative approach supports student success in a competency-based education model because students are responsible for choosing how they will learn and determining their own progress towards mastery. Amanda Varney, a 7th-grade math teacher at Vance Middle School in Bristol, explained, "Learning is achieved at different paces and not in a rigid, linear fashion."

This theme was evident at all of the participating schools in this

> "Students feel that they have some control in what they are learning, and we've been fostering a community of support in the classroom with students helping each other without judgment. And it's inspiring."
>
> — *Amanda Varney, 7th-grade math teacher, Vance Middle School, Bristol, Tennessee*

pilot initiative, although each school made the shift in different ways. One way that Varney demonstrated that she made the shift from directive to facilitative was in classrooms tasks. For example, she asked the students, "How we can develop an energy savings plan for our new middle school?" Students completed research and developed a plan using ratios, rates, and proportional relationships to analyze costs and determine the most cost-effective plan.

Even though parameters were in place, students had the freedom to apply and analyze the information about the various types of energy and its costs as they saw fit. Varney facilitated student thinking through questioning and feedback. As a result, she said, "Students feel that they have some control in what they are learning, and we've been fostering a community of support in the classroom with students helping each other without judgment. And it's inspiring."

As another example, in a traditional setting, the teacher directs when the student will be tested based on when the content has been covered. But in Hines' science classes at West

Collierville Middle, students determine when they are ready to demonstrate mastery of the content.

ENGAGED LEARNING

All of the teams in the competency-based education pilot joined voluntarily and were eager to learn together. During the course of the pilot, team members often felt uncomfortable, as if they were building a plane while flying it. But intentional development of agency has eased the discomfort and sparked excitement over the potential that the work ahead will raise educational outcomes to a new level.

Principal White from Gibbs Middle School believes it is important for teachers to stop directing and keep pushing toward maximizing facilitation. "Only then will we begin to have motivated students engaged in the learning," she said.

REFERENCES

Aungst, G. (2014, September 04). *Using Webb's Depth of Knowledge to increase rigor.* Available at www.edutopia.org/blog/webbs-depth-knowledge-increase-rigor-gerald-aungst.

Learning Forward (2011). *Standards for Professional Learning.* Oxford, OH: Author.

Tennessee Department of Education. (n.d.). Personalized learning [website]. Available at www.tn.gov/education/instruction/personalized-learning.html.

•

Adriana Harrington (adriana.harrington@tn.gov) is director of project management, consolidated planning and monitoring at the Tennessee Department of Education. Regina Henry (regina.henry@lipscomb.edu) is assistant dean of advising, Lipscomb Online, Lipscomb University. Rachael Milligan (rachael.milligan@lipscomb.edu) is managing director, Ayers Institute for Teacher Learning and Innovation at Lipscomb University. Nina Morel (nina.morel@lipscomb.edu) is dean of Lipscomb Online, Lipscomb University. Julia Osteen (julia.osteen@lipscomb.edu) is technology integration specialist, Ayers Institute for Teacher Learning and Innovation at Lipscomb University. ■

Career Center

Manage your own career

- Distinguish yourself with special badging icons for Learning Forward members and Academy graduates.
- Upload resumes anonymously
- Receive timely job alerts
- Access career resources and job searching tips and tools.

Recruit for open positions

- Find job seekers with advanced professional learning expertise using our Learning Forward member and Academy graduate badging icons.
- Promote your jobs directly to Learning Forward job seekers.
- Search the resume database and contact qualified candidates proactively.

As you expand your networks, knowledge, and skill sets through your affiliation with Learning Forward, you will find your career growing in new and exciting directions.

The Learning Forward Career Center supports you in your professional journey.

Access the career center at careers.learningforward.org.

learningforward
THE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING ASSOCIATION

Connecting highly qualified educators with relevant career opportunities

---

Effective coaches impact student outcomes

Instructional Coaches Academy

Learning Forward's Instructional Coaches Academy provides comprehensive learning and ongoing guidance for coaches and the leaders who support them. We give coaches the knowledge and skills they need to support great teaching and learning.

Develop your coaches by developing skills in:

- Building relationships
- Leading professional learning
- Coaching individuals and teams
- Leading data-driven conversations
- Conducting classroom observations
- Applying a cycle of continuous improvement

Give your coaches the skills they need to excel.

For more information, visit consulting.learningforward.org or contact Tom Manning at tom.manning@learningforward.org.

learningforward
THE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING ASSOCIATION

Want to personalize learning
for students?

EXPERIENCE IT YOURSELF FIRST

BY AMY GEURKINK-COATS

Personalized learning for students is gaining steam across the country and pushing on traditional instructional practices. But many teachers have never experienced personalized learning themselves, making it challenging to implement it for students (Sawchuck, 2015). How do we develop professional learning for educators to support the success of these new efforts and ensure learning for all?

As personalization experts Tom Vander Ark and Karen Cator (2015) said, "If we want more students to experience powerful learning, we need to create development pathways that allow school and district leaders to benefit from the same blended, competency-based, and deeper learning

experiences that they seek to create for students."

Parkway School District in west St. Louis County, Missouri, sought to develop a professional learning process that follows this advice and puts educators in charge of their learning. Just as effective teachers differentiate lessons based on student background knowledge, missing skills, and interest levels, we aimed to personalize professional learning.

GETTING STARTED

In 2017, our annual educator needs assessment survey data showed a desire to include a personalized professional learning option in addition to the workshop-based professional learning structure most often used across the district. Educators wanted a flexible personalized professional learning model that ensured all educators could participate in meaningful, applicable professional learning. Administrators wanted a professional learning model that ensured application of new learning to the classroom.

The district professional development committee, a representative group of educators from all levels and areas, identified four critical components that would guide the development of a new, personalized professional learning option:

1. Educators should have the opportunity to select topics to meet current needs for students, content, or pedagogy.
2. Educators should be offered

<table>
<tr><td style="background-color:#fbf3c7">

PERSONALIZED PROFESSIONAL LEARNING HANDBOOK

View or download the Parkway Schools professional learning handbook at **bit.ly/2XX7nv2.**

</td></tr>
</table>

incentives to participate.
3. Flexibility in the timeline and mode of learning (online/ in person, individual/group) should be a priority.
4. Transfer of professional learning to instructional practice should be at the core of the process.

Over 18 months, our approach to achieving these four components evolved. Just as we expect our teachers to do, we learned from each experience, reflected, and transferred the learning into changed practices so that teachers and students could improve.

FIRST ITERATION

We first looked to online microcredential modules. To complete a microcredential, the educator signed onto one of a variety of online providers, selected the topic to study from a list of offerings, completed the learning modules (typically reading articles or watching videos), created the required evidence, and submitted it to the provider. The scorer awarded the microcredential or provided feedback on what improvements were needed.

In our district, the educator submitted proof of the awarded microcredential to the district talent development coordinator. We incentivized the process by offering compensation, typically a $75 stipend per completed microcredential.

The online nature of the system met the critical component of flexibility in timeline and increased the choice in topics available for educators to select. However, we faced several big challenges:

1. The list of offerings was not exhaustive, and several educators were interested in learning about topics not offered.
2. Because the providers were third-party vendors, district staff had no say in the requirements to earn the microcredential, and educators became frustrated by the wide variety of expectations from one microcredential to another.
3. Our criterion about transfer of the learning to practice was not at the core of the process, and we had no way to add it to the process of achieving the microcredential.

SECOND ITERATION

An important shift in mindset occurred when we decided to stop looking for or providing content and focus on incentivizing *transfer* to practice. We had been struggling to meet the criterion of professional

TIER 3: **EVIDENCE OF IMPACT** SCORING GUIDE		
Requirement	**Not yet on track**	**On track**
Successful completion of Tier 1 and Tier 2 requirements.	Tiers 1 and 2 are not yet successfully completed. Return to Tiers 1 and 2, complete, and resubmit.	Successful completion of Tier 1 and Tier 2 requirements.
Submit data demonstrating progress toward goal (positive or negative). • May be any type of data: formative, summative, survey, perceptual, checklist, etc.	Data **are not** submitted.	Data **are** submitted.
Submit 250- to 350-word document or one- to two-minute video reflection: 1. Explaining the data submitted. 2. Identifying the learning goal(s) measured. 3. Reflecting on results (positive or negative) toward learning goal.	Minimum requirement in length **is not** met.	Minimum requirement in length **is** met.
	1. Explanation of the data is somewhat muddled or unclear.	1. Explanation of data is articulate and specific.
	2. Learning goal(s) measured is/are not identified.	2. Learning goal(s) measured is/are identified.
	3. Does not reflect on results.	3. Reflection clearly considers the data results.

learning that applies to educators' current needs for students, content, or pedagogy because we were unable to offer, or find a vendor that could provide, learning on the nearly infinite number of topics that educators wanted and needed. We also were not allowing educators to take ownership of their learning opportunities.

To earn a stipend in the second iteration, educators submitted an electronic request for approval to the coordinator of talent development identifying the learning topic, at least two sources of new learning from relevant or research-based resources, and an implementation plan.

For example, an educator interested in flexible seating might identify a book on flexible seating and a webinar on student-centered classroom redesign as two resources of new learning.

The plan for implementation might include surveying students multiple times to gain ideas for flexible learning areas and determine success of implemented flexible seating on student learning.

Another educator interested in implementing engagement strategies might list a workshop on high engagement structures and an article from Learning Forward's *Tools for Learning Schools* newsletter on the connection between engagement and achievement. The plan for implementation might include lesson plans redesigned to include engagement structures.

To demonstrate transfer, educators submitted artifacts — typically photos, lesson plans, short videos, or student work — to the coordinator of talent development with a short reflection. For the first time, any educator, teaching any subject pre-K-12, could participate in the learning they most needed to meet the specific, immediate needs of students. And because the educator was designing the learning, it could be completed online or offline, individually or with a group. Moreover, evidence of application was at the core.

The challenge proved to be the completion rate. While the compensation amount — $300 — was considerable, the requirement to demonstrate evidence of learning was new to most educators and required a significant increase in the amount of work compared to our previous system of credit for attendance only.

THIRD ITERATION

To address this completion challenge, we restructured the process and divided requirements and compensation into four tiers. Educators could determine which level of learning they were interested in pursuing and were awarded compensation after successful completion of each tier, as follows.

Tier 1: Evidence of learning. Educators summarize and make meaning of new learning from two research-based professional learning resources. One resource may be a one-time event, such as a professional learning session at a conference or nonprofit organization or a visit to an industry site, museum, etc., but the other must be a researched-based professional resource such as a published text, article, or professional learning webinar or course. They submit evidence of learning via a 500- to 600-word written reflection or a two- to three-minute video. Successful completion results in $75.

Tier 2: Evidence of implementation. Evidence of application is what makes this process more potent than traditional

TIER 4: **EVIDENCE OF SHARING** SCORING GUIDE		
Requirement	**Not yet on track**	**On track**
Successful completion of Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3 requirements.	Tiers 1, 2, and 3 are not yet successfully completed. Return to Tiers 1, 2, and 3, complete, and resubmit.	Successful completion of Tiers 1, 2, and 3.
Submit detailed lesson plan or overview of practice.	Detailed lesson plan/overview **does not** include enough explanation of lesson/project/ learning for others to implement.	Detailed lesson plan/overview **includes** enough explanation of lesson/project/learning for others to implement.
Submit 250- to 350-word document or one- to two-minute video reflection (can be embedded with above): 1. Explaining lessons learned. 2. Suggesting revisions if lesson/project/ action were to be implemented again.	Minimum requirement in length **is not** met.	Minimum requirement in length **is** met.
	1. Lessons learned were missing or superficial.	1. Lessons learned were meaningful and specific.
	2. Suggested revisions if implemented again were missing or superficial.	2. Suggested revisions if implemented again were meaningful and specific.
Links to any resources required for others to implement.	**Does not** include links to any resources required for others to implement.	**Includes** links to any resources required for others to implement.

professional learning — and what really matters for students. The educator submits artifacts demonstrating implementation of the new learning in the form of pictures, work samples, anchor charts, whole- or small-group video, lesson plan, etc., along with a 250- to 350-word reflection or one- to two-minute video identifying the desired outcome of learning and explaining the artifact(s) submitted. The educator must define the connection to curriculum or professional best practices. Completion of Tier 1 and Tier 2 together results in $150 compensation.

Tier 3: Evidence of impact. Educators measure the impact of their changes in practice. Not every change yields positive results, and even beneficial changes in practice may not produce significant positive results on the first attempt, but including measurement and data in the professional learning model helps us measure whether we are spending time on practices that impact student learning. For compensation at this tier, it does not matter if the results

were positive or negative. Payment is awarded for implementing a measurement tool and reflecting on the results via a one- to two-minute video or a 250- to 350-word reflection. Completion of Tiers 1-3 earns $225.

Tier 4: Evidence of sharing with others. Too often, an educator implements a change in practice, but it goes unnoticed and uncelebrated by those right down the hall. At Tier 4, educators share their practice in a way that other educators can follow and implement in their own settings. Through a 250- to 350-word reflection or one- to two-minute video, educators summarize how they shared strategies and lessons learned with colleagues and describe next steps in their practice. Completion of all four tiers results in an educator earning $300.

FINAL TWEAKS

The only core component remaining to address was allowing for choice and flexibility in the timeline for completion. Meeting this goal was the simplest, and most apparent, tweak of the entire process: removing the deadlines for

submission. By shifting from end-of-semester deadlines to open submission, we addressed all critical components.

The final step of the transformation process was communicating to educators about the new approach. Because educators were not used to having the ability to lead their own development, they needed a handbook to move them through the process step by step. We created a personalized professional learning handbook to outline the four steps in the process and scoring guides for each of the four tiers. (See the guide for Tier 3 on p. 52 and for Tier 4 above.)

RESULTS

Since fall 2018, over 200 educators in the district have participated in a personalized professional learning experience. In post-survey feedback, educators are overwhelmingly positive about the experiences with comments like these:

"This is awesome. … Dollar for dollar, this is probably the best way to improve teaching. A lot of the larger

ONE VISION, MANY PATHS

PERSONALIZED LEARNING
BLENDS TEACHER INTERESTS
WITH A COLLECTIVE PURPOSE

BY PAUL EMERICH FRANCE

Educators deserve professional learning tailored to their needs, but far too many models for personalization are built on a faulty foundation of myths. Those myths include the assumption that personalization necessitates large investments in technology and the erroneous belief that it must look different for every educator.

These myths make the workload of personalization unsustainable and create divides between teachers instead of the collaboration educators really need. It is important to challenge these myths and develop approaches that honor both the individual and collective. When we do so, we become liberated by balance and have the opportunity to make professional learning meaningful and relevant.

PERSONALIZATION MYTHS

People often confuse personalization with individualization. They assume that the more distinct and separate learning is for each individual, the more personalized it will be. This type of thinking leads us to believe that teachers should learn only what they want to and when and where it's convenient.

The reality is that personalized learning need not be individualized. Instead, it must be meaningful and relevant to any given learner. We usually find meaning and relevance through the opposite of individualization: identifying a greater purpose than ourselves, seeking camaraderie, and making human connections.

Models for personalized professional learning must account for this. Professional learning should be meaningful and relevant to individual teachers *in the context of* helping all teachers unite in a collective consciousness of professional learning.

> **Professional learning should be meaningful and relevant to individual teachers in the context of helping all teachers unite in a collective consciousness of professional learning.**

This enables teachers to collaborate with one another and garner support on personal goals from fellow educators.

Unfortunately, this is not what we generally see when we hear about personalized professional learning. We often see teachers turned toward computers, accessing individualized sets of articles or instructional videos. The notion of individualization leads to the presumption that technology must be at the center. Without technology to manage the complexity of individualized goals, courses, and projects, how else would we keep everything organized? This results in educators working on their own passion projects, entirely isolated from a sense of collective purpose or camaraderie.

PERSONALIZING IN THREE DIMENSIONS

The solution for these misdirected efforts is balance. It is possible to honor individual teachers' passions and interests while uniting all educators under a collective professional purpose. It is possible if we think of professional learning in three dimensions:

- **First dimension:** We honor the collective consciousness of a professional learning environment, uniting all teachers under one common vision for teaching and learning.
- **Second dimension:** We support professional learning in small groups or teams, fostering

a collective consciousness and purpose in smaller, more intimate settings.

- **Third dimension:** We leverage coaching models to nurture the inner dialogues of educators toward professional goals and personal satisfaction.

This is parallel to the way I frame personalized learning for students in three dimensions (France, 2019). In the classroom, we leverage the collective consciousness, small groups, and the inner dialogues of students. In connecting the dimensions for educators and students, we can support educators' individual learning and help them experience a model of professional learning that they can expand to students.

The three dimensions are not mutually exclusive. Instead, they support one another, which is why it's important that all three are well-structured and healthy.

THE FIRST DIMENSION:
THE COLLECTIVE CONSCIOUSNESS

In 1893, sociologist Emile Durkheim developed the concept of the **collective consciousness.** The collective consciousness refers to the values, beliefs, and knowledge that any given group of people share (Durkheim, 1893). The collective consciousness matters because it is what unites a group of people.

Focusing on this first dimension

allows us to pay attention to equity and justice, which must be at the heart of our intentions for learning. All educators must feel they are part of the learning community. Social isolationism is a direct threat to equity.

The collective consciousness of professional development can be defined by various structures, including a clear school vision, professional standards for teaching, and agreed-upon schoolwide initiatives.

A clear school vision gives all educators and leaders guidance for autonomous decision-making. Professional standards for teaching place productive constraints around pedagogy, providing a common language upon which educators can set individualized goals that operate in a relationship with collective goals. Schoolwide initiatives prioritize continuous innovation for all teachers, also promoting collective teacher efficacy in the process (Hattie, 2016).

In addition to running my own classroom, I lead a program for assistant teachers. When building our vision for autonomous and personalized professional learning, we felt it was important for all assistant teachers to participate in professional learning that is inherently meaningful and relevant to their everyday experiences as pedagogues. But simply allowing each of them to set individual goals without structure would have been a missed opportunity to connect them with the

school's collective consciousness.

Instead, we use Charlotte Danielson's Framework for Teaching (2007), which is intended to frame conversations around goal-setting. We also embrace our schoolwide initiatives around backward design (Wiggins & McTighe, 1998) and the Responsive Classroom approach to building classroom community and social and emotional skills (Responsive Classroom, 2015) when offering tools or strategies for goals related to classroom management, social and emotional learning, or curriculum design.

THE SECOND DIMENSION: SMALL-GROUP LEARNING

The second dimension for personalized learning is small-group interactions that make learning experiences meaningful and relevant to individual learners.

One way to do this is in grade-level teams. Because each grade level has slightly different needs, it makes sense for professional learning to vary slightly while still being connected to the collective consciousness of the school.

For example, if the collective goal is to build multidisciplinary units using backward design, kindergarten teachers might achieve this by building a play-based curriculum inspired by the famed early childhood centers in Reggio Emilia, Italy (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 2011), while 3rd-grade teachers build a project-based learning experience where students build a city, leveraging their understandings of humanities, area, and perimeter. In both cases, grade-level teams exercise their autonomy while simultaneously aligning with the school vision and initiatives, the school's collective consciousness, and professional teaching standards.

The second dimension comes alive through collaborative professional learning communities (PLCs) as well. In an effective PLC, educators are constantly asking themselves four questions (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many, 2010):

1. What do we want students to know and be able to do?
2. How will we know when they know?
3. What will we do if they don't know?
4. What will we do when they do know?

In PLCs, we can provide personalized professional learning by helping teachers reflect on their practice through interpersonal conversation and collaboration that focuses on specific students and classes. Ultimately, classroom decision-making is up to the individual educators, but it leverages the knowledge, experiences, and relationships that come from collaboration.

An additional way to develop the second dimension is through informal interpersonal relationships among teachers. It's not uncommon in schools for teachers to visit one another's rooms, sharing resources, venting about challenges, or celebrating one another's successes.

THE THIRD DIMENSION: THE INNER DIALOGUE

While the collective consciousness can give us a sense of purpose and direction, so can our inner dialogues. Inner dialogues are the voices inside each of us as learners. These voices tell us when to interact and when to disengage. It is the inner dialogue of any learner that constructs new knowledge from rich experiences. In classrooms, the inner dialogues of individual educators encourage them to try new things and innovate on their practice.

This kind of reflection and learning is driven by intrinsic motivation, which refers to the internal factors that contribute to an individual's decision-making and willingness to enact a behavior. Personalizing professional learning means tapping into teachers' intrinsic motivation in an effort to help them connect with their agency as adult learners.

In *Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us,* Daniel

Pink (2011) identifies three key components of intrinsic motivation: autonomy, mastery, and purpose. Each of these components is important for teachers and, in personalizing teachers' learning, each builds on the collective consciousness:

- **Autonomy** refers to an individual's ability to make decisions independently within the confines of the collective. Teachers must be able to make decisions within the productive constraints that the collective consciousness of a school provides. Many conflate autonomy with fierce individualism or radicalized independence, when, in reality, autonomy simply entails fostering autonomous decision-making within clearly defined boundaries and the values of the collective consciousness.
- **Mastery** implies continuously uncovering new knowledge — in this case, about pedagogy. It is not the notion that one has achieved or learned everything there is to know about a topic; it's the idea that there is continuous, observable, and palpable growth occurring. The collective consciousness can contextualize this growth through clear professional standards and reliable ways to capture successes and pedagogical progress.
- **Purpose** entails an understanding of one's role in a greater mission. Educators must be able to see the role that they play in the collective consciousness, possessing an innate understanding of how they fit into the shared knowledge, beliefs, values, and initiatives within the school.

CULTIVATING A CULTURE OF PERSONALIZATION

In personalized professional learning, a delicate balance exists

between the collective and the individual. Key to the balance is remembering that what makes learning environments the most personal is a sense of belonging. The human connection that comes from belonging feeds us on an instinctual level, providing the energy source for a sustainable model for professional learning.

Considering personalized professional learning in three dimensions allows us to strike this balance and find sustainability. It allows us to break down the barriers between the desires of the individual and the needs of the collective, granting them the opportunity to exist in the same space and support one another.

I often compare the personalized classroom to an ecosystem to illustrate the fact that it is not the individuals themselves that make learning inherently personal and meaningful, it's the connections that do so. An ecosystem cannot survive in an unhealthy environment. Without a healthy school culture and environment that promotes pedagogical innovation, the three dimensions described here would be built on a faulty foundation, and personalized professional learning would not thrive.

A key element of a healthy climate is teachers feeling psychologically safe taking risks and making mistakes.

I often compare the personalized classroom to an ecosystem to illustrate the fact that it is not the individuals themselves that make learning inherently personal and meaningful, it's the connections that do so.

Leaders can encourage this by showing teachers that an indicator of success is their willingness to take calculated risks and make mistakes in pursuit of curiosity and learning.

By creating such an environment and building on it with the three dimensions of personalized learning, we can transform the way professional learning occurs in schools. Doing so will create teachers who chart their own pedagogical paths and allow schools and systems to become hubs of innovation where all educators and students thrive.

REFERENCES

Danielson, C. (2007). *Enhancing professional practice: A framework for teaching* (2nd ed.). Richmond, VA: ASCD.

DuFour, R., DuFour, R., Eaker, R., & Many, T. (2010). *Learning by doing: A handbook for professional communities at work.* Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree.

Durkheim, E. (1893). *The division of labour in society.* New York, NY: Free Press.

Edwards, C., Gandini, L., & Forman, G. (2011). *The hundred languages of children: The Reggio Emilia experience in transformation* (3rd ed.). Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger.

France, P. (2019). *Reclaiming personalized learning: A pedagogy for restoring equity and humanity to our schools.* Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE/Corwin Press.

Hattie, J. (2016, July 11). *Mindframes and maximizers.* Visible Learning Annual Conference, Washington, DC.

Pink, D. (2011). *Drive: The surprising truth about what motivates us.* New York, NY: Riverhead Books.

Responsive Classroom. (2015). *The first six weeks of school* (2nd ed.). Turner Falls, MA: Center for Responsive Schools.

Wiggins, G., & McTighe, J. (1998). *Understanding by design.* Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

•

Paul Emerich France (paul. emerich.france@gmail.com) is an author, presenter, and National Board Certified Teacher at Latin School of Chicago in Chicago, Illinois. ■

Want to personalize learning for students? Experience it yourself first

PDs are nice, but leave little time to work on implementation. I like that implementation is the direct goal of this."

"I am still using the new learning I gained every day in my classes."

The most promising data is the almost universal willingness among participants to pursue more personalized professional learning. Our next goal is to develop a database to share the personalized professional learning submissions among colleagues to highlight and recognize the learning implemented.

REFERENCES

Sawchuk, S. (2015, September 3). Teacher evaluation: An issue overview. *Education Week.* Available at www.edweek.org/ew/section/multimedia/teacher-performance-evaluation-issue-overview.html.

TNTP. (2015). *The mirage: Confronting the hard truth about our quest for teacher development.* New York, NY: Author.

Vander Ark, T. & Cator, K. (2015). Preparing leaders for deeper learning [Web log post]. Available at blogs.edweek.org/edweek/on_innovation/2015/05/preparing_leaders_for_deeper_learning.html.

•

Amy Geurkink-Coats (acoats@ parkwayschools.net) is talent development coordinator for Parkway School District in Missouri. ■

RODNEY ROBINSON was named 2019 Teacher of The Year by the Council of Chief State School Officers. He teaches social studies and history to students in grades 6-12 at Virgie Binford Education Center, a school inside the Richmond Juvenile Detention Center in Virginia. He also works to develop alternative programs to prevent students from entering the school-to-prison pipeline.

Robinson has been recognized for his culturally responsive and civics-focused teaching that includes engaging students in conversations about racism and the history of incarceration. He cites some of his proudest moments as seeing his students learn to advocate for themselves.

Learning Forward recently asked Robinson to share his insights and advice about professional learning.

Rodney Robinson, 2019 Teacher of the Year, says his advice to teachers is to "take control of your professional development."

WHAT TEACHERS NEED TO REACH AT-RISK STUDENTS

Q&A with RODNEY ROBINSON

Q: How has professional learning influenced your career?

A: Professional learning has been my key to growth in my years as an educator. Pedagogy has always been a strength of mine, so I sought professional learning opportunities that built my content knowledge. The most meaningful professional learning experiences I have participated in were the Teaching American History Academy and the Yale Teachers Institute because they were both content-based. At the Yale Teachers Institute, teachers are treated as leaders who partner with Yale faculty to create curriculum units unique and specific to their student population. It also creates a nationwide network of teachers who share, communicate, and advocate for what is best for their students and the profession. When you get a group of like-minded teachers in a room together, problem-solving happens organically.

Rodney Robinson with students in his classroom at Virgie Binford Education Center, a school inside the Richmond Juvenile Detention Center in Virginia.

Q: How would you suggest improving professional learning, especially for teachers of traditionally underserved populations?

A: Administrators must abandon the one-size-fits-all model of professional learning and partner with teachers to give them voice and choice in their professional development. Teachers are the professionals who know what works best for their students. Allow them some autonomy to make decisions that will best benefit their populations.

My biggest piece of advice to teachers is to take control of your professional development. Constantly look in the mirror and assess your weaknesses, then find professional learning opportunities that build up your weaknesses in the classroom.

Q: What does it mean to you to personalize learning, and how is it important for your classroom at the juvenile detention facility?

A: Personalizing learning is all about making those connections that enhance or engage student learning and achievement.

My students have had bad experiences with school in the past, so it is imperative that I personalize the learning to create a positive experience that will empower them to make personal and communal change.

Q: What knowledge and skills do you need to personalize learning for students, especially students like yours who face a lot of challenges or may feel marginalized?

A: You need empathy and the ability to magnify your students' voices. This can be best accomplished by listening to your students without judgment or condemnation.

Create a safe space where the student voice is heard and valued. Once you establish the safe space, students will open themselves to learning, which will allow you to build on their experiences to create an engaging classroom environment.

The best piece of advice I can give comes from a teacher I know named Ben Talley. He says the only magic pill to dealing with reluctant or difficult learners is to love them. No matter what they do, keep loving and empathizing with them, and, eventually, the students will buy into their learning. ■

MICRO APPROACH, MAJOR IMPACT

WITH MICROCREDENTIALS,
EDUCATORS CAN TAILOR LEARNING
TO THEIR SPECIFIC NEEDS

BY DONNA SPANGLER

As a classroom teacher for 29 years before becoming an instructional coach, I have been on the receiving end of many well-intentioned school initiatives and professional learning experiences that have gone nowhere in terms of creating lasting, meaningful change. One of the reasons is that schools are complex systems, and we often try to do too many things at once. Often, the result is a lack of clarity that leaves people feeling confused, overwhelmed, and unsupported.

The antidote to this confusion is to be thoughtful and specific about your goal, and then go after it with great intensity and focus. This can be done at the school level, but it can also be done at the individual level through microcredentials — personalized, topic-specific opportunities for learning and credentialing in areas of educators' choosing.

When I became an instructional coach in the Derry Township School District in Pennsylvania, I set out to focus and personalize professional learning in my building by creating in-house microcredentials. Building on Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning (Learning Forward, 2011), this effort has helped balance district needs with the needs of individual teachers while applying the principles of high-quality professional learning.

WHAT ARE MICROCREDENTIALS?

Microcredentials create opportunities for continuing growth of all teachers based on specific needs. They provide ways for teachers to lead their own learning while allowing administrators to identify and address teachers' needs as well as the expertise teachers have to share with their colleagues.

Microcredentials are different from traditional professional learning approaches because they are:

- **Competency-based.** Microcredentials focus on evidence of teachers' skills and abilities, not on the amount of seat time they've logged in their learning.
- **Personalized.** Teachers select microcredentials to pursue based on their own needs, their students' challenges and strengths, school goals, district priorities, or instructional shifts. They work through specific activities that will support them in developing each competency.
- **On demand.** Microcredentials are responsive to teachers' schedules. Educators can opt to explore new competencies or receive recognition for existing ones any time of the day, using an online system to submit evidence for evaluation.
- **Shareable.** Educators can share the learning they gained through their microcredentials with other educators within and outside their school district, thereby serving as resources and mentors for other teachers.

When experienced in a consistent, ongoing way, this kind of microlearning builds up knowledge over time, even when the professional learning occurs in bite-sized pieces. And when it is done well, it produces real behavior change that results in improved teaching, because teachers must document their learning using work samples, videos, student work, peer observation, collegial collaboration, portfolios, teacher and student reflections, or other artifacts.

An assessor reviews the evidence of practice against a rubric to determine the teacher's progress toward the desired practice and decides whether to award the microcredential, often in the form of a digital badge, certification, or credential.

DEVELOP YOUR OWN MICROCREDENTIALS

When I first pitched the idea of creating a few in-house microcredentials to use with teachers as a choice for a

2017-18 voluntary pilot in our district's differentiated supervision plan, I was surprised that some administrators thought the only way to do microcredentialing was by purchasing them through a commercial platform or technology companies providing their own certification, badging, or microcredentialing.

In my opinion, buying a system is not the best way to get microcredentialing started. No one knows your school district better than the leaders and teachers in your district. You know your greatest systemic needs and challenges.

When you design your own focused learning for teachers, you personalize that learning and impact for your district, which can be especially helpful for transitioning new teachers or leaders into your school system. Purchasing an existing set of microcredential courses will save you time but won't get you the personalized focus that you desire.

In summer 2017, I designed an in-house microcredential pilot including the coursework, tasks, evidence requirements, and evaluation process. I spent that first summer using our school district's learning management system to design the coursework and tasks.

As a board member for Learning Forward's Pennsylvania affiliate, I understood the power of leveraging professional learning standards to improve teacher practice and student learning, so the Standards for Professional Learning were an ideal place to begin designing our microcredentialing process.

In the 2017-18 school year, we started with the Learning Communities and Data standards because these were areas in which our district needed to improve. We had had professional learning communities (PLCs) in place for many years, but there hadn't been systemic learning and attention given to them and the teams were not developing.

I also worked with an administrator to brainstorm the evidence of practice

we wanted teachers to submit. We designed the evaluation around the Danielson Framework (specifically Danielson's six clusters, which can be found at danielsongroup.org/framework/framework-clusters) to be as consistent as possible with the supervision model we use in Pennsylvania.

GETTING OFF THE GROUND

In fall 2017, I recruited some of our building staff as volunteers. I was looking to find a balance between creating a small, manageable pilot and one large enough to produce significant teacher support and student impact. I ended up with 16 teachers representing diverse content areas: three American cultures teachers, three English language arts teachers, three math teachers, three science teachers, one reading teacher, one music teacher, one technology education teacher, and one art teacher.

The course, broken up into three sections, ran from September through mid-April. Each month, teachers engaged in self-paced instruction (three to five hours per month) using materials aligned to district priorities and other professional learning. Learning occurred via a mix of online and face-to-face instruction.

By the end of the first section, all volunteer participants demonstrated competency through shared discussion board postings and reflection pieces submitted to administration. All participants were able to:
- Explain the evaluation requirements of the course;
- Identify what is and isn't innovative in education and explain why teachers today need to innovate;
- Define what a microcredential is and why it is different from traditional professional learning;
- Recognize there are seven Standards for Professional Learning and identify the two standards to be developed through this course;

- Explain why this course format will use Danielson's six Framework for Teaching Clusters; and
- Reflect on what personalized professional learning is and isn't.

In the second and third sections, coursework focused on macro-level practices (knowledge and skill development) and micro-level learning (practice and classroom application) in the areas outlined in the Learning Communities and Data standards.

In monthly increments, teachers read and viewed instructional content; engaged in asynchronous discussions with their volunteer colleagues, me as the instructional coach, and their administrator supervisor; and performed various tasks and submitted reflective pieces to the administrator for feedback and evaluation.

At the end of each month, an administrator in my building evaluated the teachers' submissions of evidence of learning, using the framework that we had designed to be consistent with the Danielson framework. Putting the administrator, rather than an instructional coach, in charge of this part ensured that the professional learning and evaluation process lines were not blurred.

SPOTLIGHT ON DATA

One of the things we really wanted to move forward within our building was teachers' use of student data and evidence of learning. This goal tied very tightly to Danielson's Cluster 2: a safe, respectful, supportive, and challenging learning environment.

We needed our PLCs to make the shift from spending most of their time talking about planning and sharing professional practice to spending a significant time creating and implementing SMART goals and examining student evidence of learning to make the critical shift from simply being a PLC focused on *teaching* toward becoming a highly effective PLC focused on *learning*.

In the first month of the data microcredential, teachers focused on examining the importance of data, setting a collaborative team SMART goal to implement as part of a data cycle, discussing what data teachers were using, and discovering how PLCs and teachers might use local data more intentionally than they currently did.

By the end of the month, participants were expected to:

- Discuss their views on the topic of data;
- Explain the importance of data when it comes to school improvement efforts;
- Articulate how data help teachers;
- Write a PLC SMART goal for implementation;
- Explain the differences between formative data, summative data, macrodata, and microdata, and data snapshots;
- Create a common formative assessment as a PLC to administer to students; and
- Track checks for understanding used during Tier 1 instruction.

To help them meet this month's objectives, teachers read and watched instructional content on how data help teachers, what teachers see in data, educational data background, and sources of data; participated in discussions about learning from data and teacher use of data; and reflected on tasks they'd performed, including:

- Identifying an instructional focus for PLC based on student need;
- Writing a PLC SMART goal for students to implement within three to four weeks;
- Creating a common formative assessment to administer to students; and
- Tracking checks for understanding conducted during Tier 1 instruction.

In the second month of the data microcredential, teachers participated in a 45-minute data dive protocol with the instructional coach in which they devised an action plan for students who demonstrated they had not yet learned the materials and for students demonstrating mastery on the common formative assessment.

EARLY SUCCESSES AND NEXT STEPS

After the first year of the microcredential pilot, all participating teachers had completed the microcredentials, and the results were resoundingly positive. Teachers demonstrated their learning in multiple ways, including submitting and using SMART goals, carrying out a data dive around student results, and creating and using a collaborative common formative assessment to drive instructional grouping for remediation and enrichment. Furthermore, teachers extended their learning and new practices into their PLCs.

Teacher responses on a feedback survey were very positive. Here are some sample comments from participants:

- "This pilot encouraged teachers to be proactive and to spread out thinking and analysis throughout an entire school year rather than just at midyear and end-of year meetings," said Darin Hickethier, an 8th-grade math teacher.
- "It made me look at what I'm doing and why in my classroom. I also enjoyed working with the instructional coach to improve my strategies," said Kaitlyn Roberts, an 8th-grade science teacher.
- "I really enjoyed the discussion with other teachers that I never get to work with. Listening to other viewpoints is critical to self-reflection and growth," said Sarah Smith, a 6th- and 7th-grade reading specialist.

Perhaps, though, the biggest testament to the entire microcredentialing process was that when we offered a second year of microcredentialing, all 16 members of the first-year pilot opted to continue.

Those who had completed the first two microcredentials in the first year moved on to microcredentials on video coaching and video collaboration. Video is a powerful tool to help teachers take ownership over their own professional growth, and it allows teachers to see exactly what it looks like when we teach and our students learn. In the first year, we had occasionally dabbled in using video as evidence of student learning, but faced technical challenges, which we were able to iron out in year two.

Another testament to success has been growing interest across the district. New volunteers participated in the year one program, which brought one-third of the building staff on board for the microcredentialing pilot in the 2018-19 school year. That same year, an elementary school in our district created its own pilot. They developed microcredentials around the needs of their building and teachers.

This kind of in-house microcredentialing allows districts and schools to design professional learning that meets the major challenges and opportunities they are facing so that instruction and learning can improve. The goal of professional learning must be changes in classroom practice — otherwise, educators are spinning their wheels. With in-house microcredentials, schools and districts can ask: How are we managing our challenges and making professional learning meaningful?

REFERENCE

Learning Forward. (2011). *Standards for Professional Learning.* Oxford, OH: Author.

•

Donna Spangler (dspangler@ hershey.k12.pa.us) is an instructional coach in Derry Township School District in Pennsylvania. ■

Learning Forward
CLASSICS

LOOKING BACK, LEARNING FORWARD

As Learning Forward celebrates its 50th anniversary, we're digging into our archives to bring you articles that have had a major impact on the field along with commentary from current Learning Forward staff and consultants. The esteemed contributors whose work we've selected have built a foundation of knowledge that undergirds all of our work. We encourage you to revisit their insights to stay grounded even as you push forward.

IN THIS ISSUE, Christy Colclasure, member services associate at Learning Forward, revisits an issue of *Journal of Staff Development* from 1999 on Powerful Designs.

"I've talked with many members over my 30-plus years at Learning Forward. Some I know by their voice when they call. Even if they aren't a regular caller, members frequently tell me how important *The Learning Professional* is to their work and request to share articles with their colleagues. Looking back, the Summer 1999 issue on Powerful Designs stands out as a popular one that was reprinted countless times. Members loved the issue and would rave about the content inside. It was used in schools' professional learning for quite a few years."

Christy Colclasure

Among the issue's features were short articles about more than a dozen effective professional learning designs. Here we reprint an overview of coaching written by Kathryn Harwell-Kee, a past president of the National Staff Development Council (now Learning Forward). Coaching is a powerful, enduring form of professional learning that continues to be core to our work.

— *Coaching* p.66

Good coaches are good listeners. They don't just dictate the right answer, they facilitate other people's reflection.

COACHING

BY KATHRYN HARWELL-KEE

John Dewey said the "chief aim of teacher education should not be immediate proficiency in technique, but rather thoughtful analysis and understanding" (Dewey, 1933). Reflection is the "magic dust" for improvement. Individuals and schools who do not have time to reflect do not have time to improve.

DEFINITION

Coaching provides a model of respectful collegial reflection about instructional decisions. The benefits are seen in student learning gains, increased teacher efficacy, and increased satisfaction with one's work and the collaborative culture found in the school.

What is coaching?

Coaching is teachers talking and acting in a purposeful way, with the goal of continuously improving their teaching practice. A coach is a critical listener/observer who asks questions, makes observations, and offers suggestions that help a teacher grow and reflect and produce different decisions. Coaching activities provide a structure in which these interactions can take place.

Is coaching the same as mentoring?

Mentoring is one form of coaching, but not all coaching is mentoring. In general, mentoring is when an experienced teacher provides information to a newcomer, sharing experience and knowledge and expertise with someone who has less of these things. Coaching, on the other hand, is a continuous growth process for people of all experience levels.

What makes someone a good coach?

How do you identify these people on your staff? Good coaches are good listeners. They don't just dictate the right answer, they facilitate other people's reflection. Find good coaches by looking around for the best teachers. Who listens to students? Who seeks to engender understanding in students,

instead of looking for them to recite the right answers? The same behaviors make people good coaches.

METHOD

What's the best way to bring people together for coaching?

There's no one best way. It varies among different schools and systems. Frequently, coaching partners find each other. It can start with a teacher who feels the need for feedback and seeks out a trusted, thoughtful colleague. In other cases, members of a teaching team could decide for themselves that they want to work in this fashion. Or perhaps a school or district will encourage coaching by providing an organizational framework that helps people find compatible colleagues with corresponding interests.

Does coaching require any special training?

Every coaching effort will benefit if participants are trained in effective coaching techniques and if they have time for study. Coaching is a learned skill, and even people who are natural coaches can improve by learning new techniques and practices. Reading professional literature on coaching can help identify techniques or programs suited to a particular school or district. (See box with resources.)

What forms can coaching take?

Coaching can take place in many situations, including one-on-one

RESOURCES ON COACHING

Costa, A. & Garmston, R. (1994). *Cognitive Coaching: A foundation for renaissance schools.* Norwood, MA: Christopher-Gordon.

Edwards, J.L. & Green, K.E. (1997). *The effects of Cognitive Coaching on teacher efficacy and empowerment* (Research Report No. 1997-1). Evergreen, CO: Author.

Garmston, R., Linder, C., & Whitaker J. (1993, October). Reflections on Cognitive Coaching. *Educational Leadership, 51*(2), 57-61.

Sparks, D. (1990, Spring). Cognitive Coaching: An interview with Robert Garmston. *Journal of Staff Development, 11*(2), 12-15.

conversations between colleagues, planned conferences, classroom observations, and group sessions where coaches reflect on what they're learning and how they're growing.

It's important for schools to provide time for teachers to talk and interact, but with new demands continually being placed on teachers, it's often harder than ever to find this time. Administrators who support coaching can help by designating existing staff development time for coaching activities, for example, or providing nonteaching time for teachers by using substitutes, or releasing teachers from duties at lunch or other times.

Some of the best coaching occurs at the end of the school day, when the challenges and experiences of the day are still fresh in teachers' minds. Many teachers are tired at this point, but often they find that coaching, rather than requiring even more energy, is actually quite invigorating. That's because

coaching is not a spectator activity. You can't sit quietly in the back of the room and grade papers or drift away. Coaching is an active discussion. Teachers are mentally stimulated, and frequently new ideas come to them and they're increasingly motivated.

Good coaching also means taking advantage of coaching opportunities that occur every day. You can have a meaningful discussion with a colleague during 10 minutes between classes, or while walking down the hall to a meeting. You can generate quality thinking and understanding by applying coaching skills to every conversation.

REFERENCE

Dewey, J. (1933). *How we think: A restatement of the relation of reflective thinking to the educative process.* Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath and Company. ■

A MAGAZINE PACKED WITH POWERFUL DESIGNS

The Summer 1999 issue of *Journal of Staff Development* included two-page overviews of 16 learning designs and explorations of three overriding concepts. The coaching description is reprinted on the preceding pages.

Notably, the issue also includes a Q&A with the late Susan Loucks-Horsley, who had recently co-authored a book on learning strategies for teachers of science and mathematics.

Additional learning designs and authors in the issue were:

- **Action research** by Jeffrey Glanz
- **Cadres** by David Rapaport
- **Cases** by Carne Barnett
- **Collaboration** by Sharon D. Kruse
- **Curriculum development** by Linda Fitzharris
- **Examining student work** by Ruth Mitchell
- **Immersion** by Glenda Lappan
- **Journaling** by Joellen Killion
- **Listening to students** by Shirley M. Hord and Harvetta M. Robertson
- **Mentoring** by Pam Robbins
- **Networks** by Ann Lieberman
- **On-the-job learning** by Fred H. Wood and Frank McQuarrie Jr.
- **Portfolios** by Mary E. Dietz
- **Shadowing students** by Bruce L. Wilson and H. Dickson Corbett
- **Study groups** by Carlene U. Murphy
- **Teams** by Richard J. Stiggins
- **Training of trainers** by Maureen L. Griffin
- **Tuning protocols** by Lois Brown Easton

CLASSIC ISSUE LEADS TO ENDURING BOOK

The popularity of this issue of *Journal of Staff Development* indicated that educators were hungry for more information about how to create and facilitate professional learning using a wide range of learning designs. NSDC responded in 2004 with the publication of *Powerful Designs for Professional Learning*.

Edited by Lois Brown Easton, *Powerful Designs* expanded on the 1999 journal issue to offer readers more information about each learning design along with additional designs and context for using the strategies to support particular learning purposes.

The book continued to resonate with educators so much that, with Easton's ongoing leadership and expertise, NSDC published a second edition in 2008 and Learning Forward published a third edition in 2015.

Purchase the book at **store. learningforward.org.** Each chapter is supplemented by online tools and resources.

TOOLS

MAKE YOUR CASE WITH DATA

Every educator is an advocate. Your voice can have a real impact on the decision-makers who control purse strings and policies. That impact can be especially strong when you support your story with data. Data that detail strategies and show progress make the case for continuing and scaling existing initiatives and supporting new ones. Learning Forward created the template on pp. 71-72 to help you identify and use data you already have to make the case for professional learning.

TOOLS

SPEAK UP FOR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING POLICY

BY MELINDA GEORGE

Educators collect data every day, including demographic data about teachers and students, the retention rates of teachers in a school system, the needs of the students they serve, and data tracking how well those students are progressing.

There are many purposes for that data and forums through which to share it. Don't be daunted — there are many kinds of evidence and data that can be useful beyond student test scores. Data awareness is key to recognizing what you have and how to use it.

DEPLOY DATA STRATEGICALLY

Knowing what to do with the data is as important as getting it. Tailor the data you collect and present to address the story you are telling. For example, if you are telling a story about professional learning initiatives to build the capacity of educators working with English learners, look for data that illustrate the need (e.g. where the gaps are in student learning) as well as data that show the progress made as a result of this targeted professional learning.

It is important to take the time to

collect the information and compile it in a format that is clear, succinct, and concise. Your story needs to provide enough information to grab the reader's attention while also being in a format that is digestible and shareable.

TELL YOUR STORY WITH DATA

We created this tool to make it easier for you to compile and present the data that tell your story. Once you fill out the template, you can use it internally to construct and practice the story you will share with policymakers to demonstrate the importance of professional learning. You can even print it and hand it out so they will have

---

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- A digital version of this tool in a fillable PDF form is available at l**earningforward.org/ department/tools.**

- More information and tools are available at **learningforward. org/advocacy** or contact melinda.george@ learningforward.org.

---

a tangible reminder after you leave.

On the first page, fill in the data about the district you represent. This is important context for your story. You should be able to find this data in district and school records.

On the second page, fill in the three key parts of your story that policymakers need to hear, using the data sources available to you:

- **Challenge:** What is the problem or need in your school, district, or state that you seek to address?
- **Solution:** What have you already done to address this need?
- **Impact:** Most importantly, what was the result of these actions?

Keep words brief and make numbers prominent so they are easy to see at a glance. Make sure to include your contact information so policy aides can be in touch with you about next steps.

•

Melinda George (melinda. george@learningforward.org) is director of policy and partnerships at Learning Forward. ∎

WHO WE ARE

DISTRICT DESCRIPTION

Number of students	Insert your logo here	% of Title I-eligible students
Number of teachers		Number of Title I schools
Number of schools		% of English learners
Per-pupil expenditure	Student-to-teacher ratio	Number of instructional coaches
	% of students receiving special education services	

DISTRICT SPENDING ON PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

	2018-19	2017-18	2016-17	2015-16	2014-15
Federal (Title II-A)	$	$	$	$	$
State	$	$	$	$	$
District	$	$	$	$	$

HOW THESE DOLLARS ARE SPENT

	2018-19	2017-18	2016-17	2015-16	2014-15
Coaching	$	$	$	$	$
Class size reduction	$	$	$	$	$
Courses/workshops	$	$	$	$	$
Other (personalize as appropriate)	$	$	$	$	$

www.learningforward.org

CHALLENGE **What problem are you solving?**	SOLUTION **How did you address the problem through professional learning?**

IMPACT

| CONTACT INFORMATION |
| --- |
| |

UPDATES

WHAT'S NEW AT LEARNING FORWARD

We've got lots of new resources and opportunities to share this month. We have a redesigned website for *The Learning Professional,* a new set of themes and submission deadlines for next year's issues, and a new online career center for Learning Forward members.

UPDATES

Participants in the 2019 Summer Institutes engage in learning about high-quality instructional materials, becoming a learning team, and meeting professional learning goals.
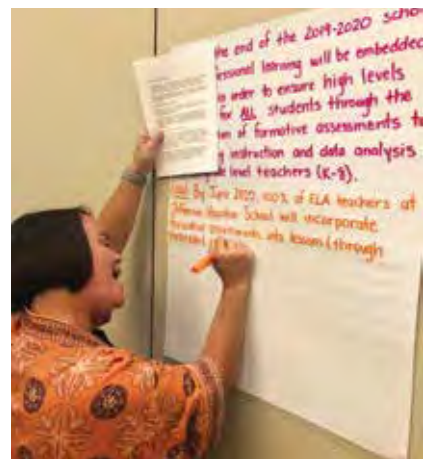
2019 SUMMER INSTITUTES

At Learning Forward's 2019 Summer Institutes, held last month in Boston, Massachusetts, participants engaged in four days of intensive learning about selecting and implementing high-quality instructional materials, supporting curriculum-anchored professional learning cycles, and establishing leader capacity and learning systems to ensure all students graduate career- and college-ready.

With colleagues, peers, and field experts, they engaged in the learning team cycle and ongoing analysis of problems of practice to ensure alignment between professional learning and curriculum materials. Sessions allowed participants to go into depth about math, English language arts, science, and other content areas, as well as creating overarching strategies.

Learning Forward hosted the institutes in partnership with Student Achievement Partners and with support from the Carnegie Corporation.

Several concurrent meetings were held as well among the new Learning Forward Academy cohort, Learning Forward Affiliate leaders, and teachers and leaders participating in a research study of the My Teaching Partner coaching model underway through a partnership among Teachstone, American Institutes for Research, and Learning Forward.

THEMES FOR 2020 ISSUES OF *THE LEARNING PROFESSIONAL*

Here are the themes and submission deadlines for the first four issues of *The Learning Professional* in 2020:

- **February 2020:** Listening to student voice. Deadline: Nov. 1, 2019. We welcome submissions written by or in collaboration with young people.
- **April 2020:** Beyond the basics of professional learning. Deadline: Jan. 15, 2020.
- **June 2020:** Strengthening the teacher pipeline. Deadline: Feb. 1, 2020.
- **August 2020:** Technology that teaches. Deadline: May 1, 2020.

For more details about the themes and submission guidelines, visit **learningforward.org/the-learning-professional/write-for-us.**

NEW WEBSITE FOR *THE LEARNING PROFESSIONAL*

Have you visited our new website? We have updated the look and functionality so the site is easier to use, whether you are on a computer or a mobile device. Articles are available in both online and downloadable formats, and we have added a search function to help you explore the rich archive of past issues of *The Learning Professional* and its predecessor, *JSD*. Be sure to update your bookmarks with the new url: **learningforward. org/the-learning-professional** and let us know what you think.

LEARNING FORWARD OPENS CAREER CENTER FOR MEMBERS

The Learning Forward Career Center is a new benefit to our members.

As you expand your networks, knowledge, and skill sets through your affiliation with Learning Forward, you will find your career growing in new and exciting directions. The Learning Forward Career Center is one of the many ways that we are committed to supporting you in your professional journey.

Our goal is to make the career center the premier resource to connect highly qualified educators with relevant career opportunities.

You can access the career center at **careers.learningforward.org.**

FEATURED SOCIAL MEDIA POST

Follow us on social media. Share your insights and feedback about *The Learning Professional* by using **#LearnFwdTLP.**

CAPITOL HILL BRIEFING

Learning Forward will host a special briefing on Capitol Hill from noon to 1:30 p.m. Eastern time on Thursday, Oct. 10. Learning Forward community members are invited to attend in person or via live stream.

The briefing will provide information for Congress, the administration, and K-12 education stakeholders about how states and school districts are using their funding from Title II-A of the Every Student Succeeds Act. Specifically, the briefing will provide data and evidence about the impact of high-quality professional learning as well as hearing from educators how Title II-A-supported initiatives in instructional coaching, mentoring, and collaborative teaching are making a difference in teacher practice and student outcomes.

DAY OF LEARNING IN PENNSYLVANIA

Learning Forward PA will host a Day of Learning on Oct. 29, 2019, in Manheim, Pennsylvania. The affiliate is partnering with Jon Norlin from Character Strong to focus on creating safe and positive schools.

Participants will learn how to infuse character and social and emotional learning into the daily fabric of their organizational setting. Research indicates that when a school takes the time to cultivate a culture of character and develop social and emotional skills, students perform better, develop a desire to attend school, and reduce disruptive behavior.

Topics will include a framework, resources, and a step-by-step process to weave character, relationship building, and social and emotional learning into what is already occurring in one's site.
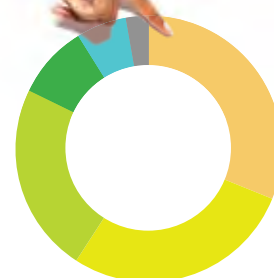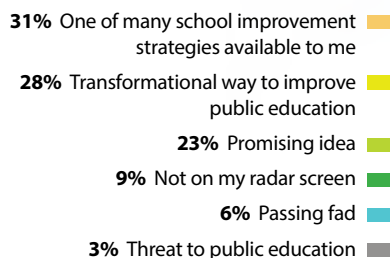
Participants will be able to return to their role and immediately apply what they've learned so they can create a community of staff and students who care about their work and each other. For more details, go to **www.learningforwardpa.org.**
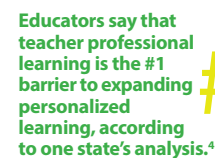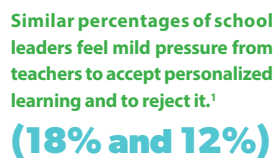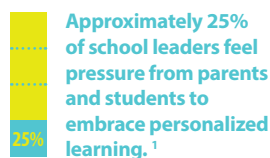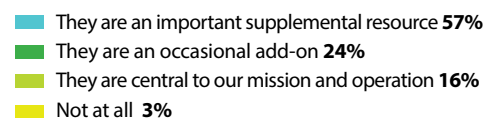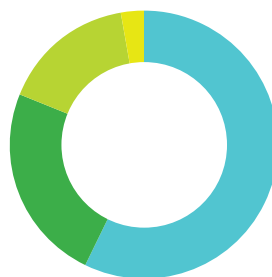
What do educators think about personalized learning?

Research on educators' opinions about personalized learning is relatively new and growing. While opinions likely vary depending on experience, training, location, and other factors, here is a snapshot of what national data show so far.

School leaders have varied views on personalized learning.[1]

- **31%** One of many school improvement strategies available to me
- **28%** Transformational way to improve public education
- **23%** Promising idea
- **9%** Not on my radar screen
- **6%** Passing fad
- **3%** Threat to public education

Most school leaders say that digital technologies play a role in personalizing the learning experience to students' needs, strengths, and interests.[1]

- They are an important supplemental resource **57%**
- They are an occasional add-on **24%**
- They are central to our mission and operation **16%**
- Not at all **3%**

25% Approximately 25% of school leaders feel pressure from parents and students to embrace personalized learning.[1]

Similar percentages of school leaders feel mild pressure from teachers to accept personalized learning and to reject it.[1] **(18% and 12%)**

61% of teachers report that educational technology innovations have improved their ability to differentiate instruction.[2]

Educators say that teacher professional learning is the **#1** barrier to expanding personalized learning, according to one state's analysis.[4]

Teachers believe they are making real-world connections and engaging students' interests, but students aren't convinced.[3]

TEACHERS' REPORTED USE OF STUDENT INTERESTS AND CONNECTIONS TO BROADER WORLD (MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL)
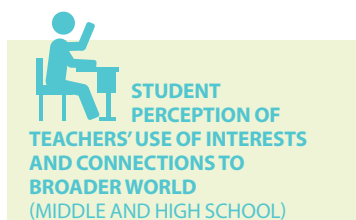
I help students connect learning and life outside of the classroom.

I incorporate student learning interests into lessons.

Legend: Never | Rarely | Sometimes | Half the time | Every time

Scale: 0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100

STUDENT PERCEPTION OF TEACHERS' USE OF INTERESTS AND CONNECTIONS TO BROADER WORLD (MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL)

My teacher connected what we were learning to the world outside the classroom.

I learned about things I am interested in.

Legend: Don't agree | Agree a little | Mostly agree | Agree a lot

---

Sources

[1] www.edweek.org/media/school-leaders-and-technology-education-week-research.pdf
[2] fs24.formsite.com/edweek/images/Spotlight-TC-Survey-2019-Sponsored.pdf
[3] www.inacol.org/resource/a-national-landscape-scan-of-personalized-learning-in-k-12-education-in-the-united-states
[4] learnlaunch.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/MAPLE-2017-PL-Landscape-Analysis-Executive-Summary.pdf

50 YEARS

learningforward
THE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING ASSOCIATION

www.learningforward.org

THROUGH THE LENS

OF LEARNING FORWARD'S STANDARDS FOR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

LEARNING FORWARD'S **STANDARDS FOR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING**

Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students ...

Learning Communities

… occurs within learning communities committed to continuous improvement, collective responsibility, and goal alignment.

Leadership

… requires skillful leaders who develop capacity, advocate, and create support systems for professional learning.

Resources

… requires prioritizing, monitoring, and coordinating resources for educator learning.

Data

… uses a variety of sources and types of student, educator, and system data to plan, assess, and evaluate professional learning.

Learning Designs

… integrates theories, research, and models of human learning to achieve its intended outcomes.

Implementation

… applies research on change and sustains support for implementation of professional learning for long-term change.

Outcomes

… aligns its outcomes with educator performance and student curriculum standards.

Many of the articles in this issue of *The Learning Professional* demonstrate Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning in action. Use this tool to deepen your understanding of the standards and strategies for implementing them.

Ways you might use this tool include:
- Discuss the questions in a professional learning community;
- Share one or more articles from the issue with your staff and facilitate a conversation; and
- Do a self-assessment of what you have learned from this issue.

STANDARD: RESOURCES

IN ACTION

The resources required for effective professional learning include more than money and staffing. Articles in this issue show how other kinds of resources can help educators personalize learning for teachers, leaders, and students.

TO CONSIDER

- How can you leverage technology as a resource to personalize professional learning? How do you ensure that it is supporting your goals, rather than driving them or supplanting them?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

- To what extent do you view teacher knowledge and expertise as resources for professional learning? How do you use them?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

STANDARD: LEARNING DESIGNS

IN ACTION

Educators have much to gain from professional learning that is tailored to their needs, as authors in this issue demonstrate. But such approaches need to be thoughtfully informed by research and best practice.

TO CONSIDER

- How well do your professional learning approaches embody and model the learning principles you expect teachers to apply with students?

_____
_____
_____
_____

- How can you balance personalization of professional learning with collective goals and a coherent strategy for your school, district, or state?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Learn more about Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning at
www.learningforward.org/standards-for-professional-learning.

![50 YEARS — learningforward — THE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING ASSOCIATION](logo)

504 S. Locust Street
Oxford, OH 45056

Save up to $100 if you register by Oct 31

The Gateway to Success:
Our Learning. Their Future.

DEC. 7-11, 2019 • ST. LOUIS, MO
AMERICA'S CENTER CONVENTION COMPLEX

Featured Keynote Speakers

SONJA SANTELISES   **MICHAEL PETRILLI**   **TAYLOR MALI**

When it comes to advancing educator professional learning, this is THE conference. Join thousands of practitioners and thought leaders to gain valuable connections, tools, learning opportunities, and strategies.

conference.learningforward.org

ST. LOUIS
learningforward
2019 ANNUAL
CONFERENCE
DEC. 7-11, 2019

#learnfwd19 | 800-727-7288