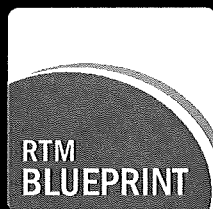


PERSONALIZED LEARNING

A BLUEPRINT FOR SUCCESS



IN COLLABORATION WITH
**The RTM National
K-12 Advisory Committee**

Introduction

The goal of personalized learning is to transform instruction through a focus on each student's unique differences, interests, abilities, and aspirations; essentially it must be learner-centric. As an added benefit, there is a greater potential for students to develop marketable skills (critical thinking, creativity, collaboration and communication¹) demanded by employers in the digital age workplace. In a personalized learning environment, teachers implement innovative, best practice strategies that contribute to student success and academic achievement. Effective pedagogical strategies, engaging content, and student choice are hallmarks of personalized instruction. With a quality teacher in every classroom, technology is the catalyst that makes personalized learning possible.

Personalized learning is a methodology that focuses on more than just standards or objectives. It necessitates that teachers facilitate instruction that caters to each individual child. It must be varied in pace, purpose, and content for each student and tailored to personal interests, passions, and preferences.

This approach is a departure from traditional models in a teacher-centric environment, where a teacher expounds facts upon students and where students memorize and subsequently regurgitate information in tests. In the personalized learning environment, teachers must empower students to assume ownership of their learning and to eventually become co-designers of their learning within appropriate structures. Student ownership of the learning is crucial.

District leaders, principals, parents, teachers, and other stakeholders need to agree upon a common language that supports student empowerment. Confusion about terms will result in delays and lack of accountability. A common vocabulary should be used with fidelity when designing a personalized learning plan for a district and should prioritize student voice and choice. For personalized learning to be successful, leaders must design and sustain a student-centered learning environment. This learning approach facilitates academic success through teaching styles, tools, or curriculum that fits each student's needs. In addition, a student-centered approach involves all areas of a school community for both teachers and students. When implemented correctly, personalized learning affects culture, curriculum and instruction, professional learning, leadership, and data analysis.

For true instructional transformation to occur, the focus must be on student learning. The teacher has to be an observer, learning how to address the multitude of cultural differences, learning styles, and academic strengths and weaknesses in the classroom; and then become a facilitator or counselor. This approach extends beyond academic differences. Identifying the uniqueness of each child helps the teacher to evolve instructionally and nurture that student's skills. A wide array of pedagogies,

¹ <http://www.nea.org/tools/52217.htm>



processes, and projects can be utilized once the teacher discovers what motivates each child.

The personalized learning model has to be flexible so that the teacher can modify it as necessary. As for curricular materials, the teacher may begin with district-provided “out-of-the-box” resources but then modify those materials through the use of online resources and customize them for the needs of their students. It is the responsibility of the school or district to provide teachers with equitable and sustainable instructional resources that all teachers and students can easily access and personalize. The learning resources should be granular and tagged with relevant metadata so that teachers can easily search for instructional materials for their students. In this way, teachers should be involved in the curriculum design process at the classroom level. Technology is the glue that holds all of this together, not the driver of the curriculum. With student progress, and technology connecting the roles of various individuals, these roles become more symbiotic. Personalized learning should be a balanced combination of new instructional approaches, tech tools and adjustments to curriculum.

Although personalized learning is always a work in progress as students, opportunities, and resources continue to change, this blueprint provides several powerful examples that illustrate the practical ways in which districts are implementing their plans. Greenville County Schools - South Carolina, Perris Union High School District - California, and Washoe County School District - Nevada are but a few of the exemplary districts in our country that are well on their way to creating an optimal personalized learning environment. (See Appendix A)

Personalized learning implementations parallel student learning shifts. As K-12 professionals strive to assess where a student is with his/her skills, it is important to remember that each district is at a different readiness level, so one “recipe” does not fit all. It is important for districts to “adapt” what is relevant from other initiatives and not fully “adopt” another district’s plan. In the same way that personalized learning takes students from where they are to where they aspire to be, administrators and technology influencers must share ideas that help school districts reach their goals. Collectively, all of these considerations provide the greatest opportunities to withstand the adversities that one might encounter when launching this initiative.