

A State Policy Framework for Scaling Personalized Learning

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Introduction

Over the past several years there have been numerous publications, reports, and briefs released that focus on the elements of an innovative school from a programmatic and a policy standpoint. These have helped to shape what practitioners and policymakers expect to see in innovative, student-centered, or personalized learning environments. Personalized learning, broadly speaking, is stuck in the school pilot phase. We have all seen that great school or model and the world of possibilities it offers for the students who attend the school. But how are the other students in that district being educated? How do we reach a level of scale for personalized learning? How do we build an education system, a learning system, with personalized learning at the core? By giving districts the flexibility they need to implement the conditions necessary for scaling personalized learning.

What are the conditions that a district leadership team and local school board should put in place to scale personalized learning? Grounded in extensive primary and secondary research, KnowledgeWorks has identified the following district conditions for scaling personalized learning¹ as essential:

1. Curriculum

Curriculum must be aligned to the district's vision for teaching and learning and should be reviewed regularly to ensure alignment. The standards and learning targets contained in the curriculum should be consistent and easily understood for every student, although the ways in which students meet those standards may differ in order to provide a personalized learning experience for each student. These multiple pathways to meeting standards should be informed by real-time data on student performance and engagement,

students' learning styles and interests, and the goals of the student and parents.

2. Instruction

Instructional practices must be aligned with the district's vision for teaching and learning. Instruction should be focused on teaching students how to learn, shifting from a teacher-led to student-led model incorporating differentiated instruction (direct instruction, mastery learning, blended and project-based learning, flipped models, etc.). Finally, instruction should be rigorous and relevant to students' needs and interests, and progression should be based on mastery, avoiding the "mile-wide, inch-deep" phenomenon.

3. Comprehensive Assessment System

Each district should implement a comprehensive assessment system that is aligned with the district's vision for teaching and learning. Assessments should include formative, interim, and summative assessments. Instant feedback from ongoing embedded assessments — including, but not limited to, portfolios, capstone projects, performance-based assessments, and curriculum-embedded assessments — should be used to monitor student progress and adjust day-to-day learning activities. Summative assessments should be offered multiple times a year, when students are ready to take the exam, and students should have multiple opportunities to show mastery on the assessment.

4. Learning Environments

Districts should cultivate learning environments, both inside and outside the school walls, that support high expectations for all students while fostering a culture of trust, support, equity, and inclusiveness. Continuous improvement should be

embedded in the culture of the district and driven by student achievement data and other success indicators. Lastly, real efforts should be made to celebrate district and school successes.

5. Student Supports

Students should get the supports and interventions they need to be successful when they need them, not after they've taken a summative assessment at the end of the year. These supports should be informed by instant feedback based on frequent formative assessments and, to the extent possible, be embedded in learning. Schools should be given the flexibility to use the time in the school day/year as they see fit in order to provide these supports.

6. Professional Development

Each district should offer a job-embedded professional development program that aligns with the district's vision for teaching and learning and with student needs. The professional development program should foster a culture of collaboration and continuous improvement while leveraging technology that creates a customized experience for each teacher that is available at any place and time.

7. Leadership Development

A district should have a leadership development program that identifies and trains leaders at the classroom, school, and district level. This includes involving educators and other staff members in the visioning process, strategic planning, partnership cultivation, and curriculum review.

8. Technology Policy

Districts must have a technology policy that allows for ubiquitous, safe access to the internet at all times of the school day. Districts should also address deficiencies in infrastructure in order to support a more connected student population at scale.

9. Comprehensive Data Systems

Districts should maintain a comprehensive data system consisting of learning management, assessment, and student information systems. These systems should be able to track student achievement history, teacher comments, supports and interventions, and other indicators while protecting student-level privacy.

10. Partnerships

Each district should cultivate partnerships with business, community, and higher education constituents in their communities (including local and county government, recreation, juvenile justice, faith-based, etc.). These entities should be involved in creating a district vision and strategic plan that is aligned with a broader economic and workforce development plan for the community. All aspects of teaching and learning within the district (curriculum, instruction, assessment, professional development, etc.) should be aligned to this vision. In addition, these partners should assist with creating various learning opportunities (internships, mentor programs, work-based experiences, service learning, etc.) and publish a list of these opportunities for all learners.

In addition to the conditions listed above, research revealed several meta themes.

These themes are important as, together, they serve as the connective tissue of the conditions and are the reason that a district must implement each of the ten conditions in order to successfully scale practices to improve teaching, learning, and student achievement. The meta themes are as follows:

Vision

Each district should have a vision for personalized learning that guides all decision making. All parts of a district should be aligned to the vision, including professional development, the selection of curriculum and instructional practices, and the process of innovation. In order to ensure each person in the district understands their role in achieving the vision, it should be shared between all involved in the education community, from board members to educators to community partners.

Culture

The shared vision of a district clearly informs the system culture that a district will establish. A key element of culture is expectations around innovation at all levels of the system, especially at the school level. Along with the culture of risk-taking is the understanding that mistakes will happen and are not things to be feared.

Transparency

Resulting from the notion that members of the education community must feel safe to make mistakes, transparency was another overarching theme revealed through research. Districts need to be transparent to the board, unions, parents, partners, and the public.

The remainder of the document is dedicated to the policies states should consider adopting in order to help district leaders and school boards implement the conditions for scaling personalized learning. These include a definition of personalized learning, a description of the waiver process, areas of flexibility states can provide to districts, assurances states should expect from districts, ways states can support districts in implementing these conditions, and indicators used for evaluation.

Defining Personalized Learning

In order to ensure high quality implementation of personalized learning at scale, states should align all enabling policies and resources behind a definition that includes the core elements of effective, sustainable personalized learning environments. KnowledgeWorks recommends that states define personalized learning as a teaching and learning framework in which:

- **Instruction is aligned** to rigorous college- and career-ready standards and the social and emotional skills students need to be successful in college and career;
- **Instruction is customized**, allowing each student to design learning experiences aligned to his or her interests;
- **The pace of instruction is varied** based on individual student needs, allowing students to accelerate or take additional time based on their level of mastery;
- **Educators use data** from formative assessments and student feedback in real-time to differentiate instruction and provide robust supports and interventions so that every student remains on track to graduation; and
- **Students and parents have access** to clear, transferable learning objectives and assessment results so they understand what is expected for mastery and advancement.

Applying For Flexibility

States have an important role to play in providing districts with the policy flexibility to scale personalized learning environments. States may approach this in different ways, depending on the context in each state and the resources available. Potential policy structures could include a state grant program, a state waiver process, or a state flexibility program. Districts should have the opportunity to apply for increased flexibility in order to implement the conditions required to scale personalized learning. Areas of flexibility, detailed below, include curriculum and instruction, assessment and student supports, professional and leadership development, technology and data, and learning environments and partnerships. Districts should align each of these areas to the district's vision for teaching and learning to ensure high-quality implementation of personalized learning

Districts should have the opportunity to apply for increased flexibility in order to implement the conditions required to scale personalized learning.

models. Simultaneously, districts should work to create a culture that promotes transparency and innovation in order to promote understanding and acceptance of personalized learning.

States should provide districts with five years to implement their vision but allow districts to apply for a one-year conditional approval in order to begin the planning process. Districts that receive conditional approval should use Year One for planning and development purposes. Once the planning process is complete, districts should submit their comprehensive plan for scaling personalized learning, including the areas in which districts are requesting flexibility, to the state for final approval. Districts granted final approval should use Years Two, Three, Four, and Five for implementation. In addition, districts should build a sustainability plan in Year Five for ongoing implementation that is

aligned to the required continuous improvement process. States and districts should monitor progress throughout the flexibility period using indicators outlined below in the evaluation section.

In return for policy flexibility, districts should be required in Year One to complete a visioning and planning process; create a new, or amend an existing, implementation plan aligned to that vision; and align federal funding, including Title I and Title II funds, to scale personalized learning in their districts.

Year 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• One-year conditional approval granted by the state.• Planning and development activities conducted by the district.
Year 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Comprehensive implementation plan submitted by the district.• Final approval of comprehensive implementation plan by the state.• Implementation begins by the district.
Years 3 and 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• District-level implementation continues.• Monitor evaluation criteria.
Year 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Continued implementation and evaluation.• Creation of a long-term sustainability plan by the district.

Defining Areas of Flexibility

Districts should have the opportunity to seek policy flexibility from state requirements in the areas outlined below. Each area of flexibility is accompanied by a policy example from a state that is working to remove barriers to districts implementing personalized learning.

Curriculum and Instruction

Flexibility to redefine the role of an educator in a personalized learning system. In this new system, an educator is anyone who contributes to a student’s learning either inside or outside of traditional school, which could lead to districts redefining their credentialing process.

Flexibility in the way instruction is delivered, specifically related to the increase in online and/or blended instruction. Freeing districts from any state imposed seat time requirements would allow districts to deliver instruction in a way that best meets each learner’s needs.

Assessment and Student Supports

Flexibility to offer statewide summative assessments, required for accountability determinations, during multiple testing windows per year, allowing students to be assessed on academic content and skills at the time of mastery. Further, students should be allowed to take statewide summative assessments multiple times, if necessary, to show mastery.

Flexibility in the use of time, both during the school day and school year, in order to provide the student supports necessary to meet each student’s needs. Greater flexibility in how the district calculates daily instructional hours to satisfy the requirements of an instructional day would empower districts to provide data-driven supports in an as-needed manner.

Learning Environments and Partnerships

Flexibility from all seat-time requirements to leverage different learning environments, especially learning experiences taking place outside of the building made available through district partnerships, to let students pursue experiences that best meet their learning goals.

Flexibility to award credits for learning that takes place outside of the school building and school day in order to let students personalize their learning experiences to best meet their needs and interests.

In Ohio, a Contributing Professional is any professional who works with a student. This designation allows for the professional to have access to the Instruction Improvement System and permits numerous educators to be linked to a student.²

In New Hampshire, schools must award credit based on mastery rather than seat time.³

In Oregon, students are afforded multiple opportunities to demonstrate mastery of academic content standards through sufficient and appropriate assessment evidence.⁴

In Massachusetts, the Tiered System of Supports allows students to receive the individualized academic and social-emotional supports they need.⁵

In Rhode Island, the 21st Century Community Learning Centers provide high-quality after-school and summer programs. These programs combine federal grant money and community resources and are overseen by the Rhode Island Department of Education.¹⁰

In New Hampshire, Extended Learning Opportunities (ELOs) give students the chance to learn and earn credit outside of the traditional classroom setting. If a district chooses to offer ELOs, the local school boards must create policies and procedures to define how that district will operate ELOs.¹¹

Professional and Leadership Development

Flexibility in the way state funding is used for professional and leadership development activities. By providing funding flexibility for such things as acquiring an online professional and leadership development platform to better personalize development activities, districts are better able to align their professional and leadership development programs behind their vision for teaching and learning.

Flexibility in the activities included as part of professional and leadership development programs in order to personalize professional learning experiences while aligning these programs to the district's vision for teaching and learning.

Technology and Data

Flexibility relating to the procurement process, specifically as it involves improving technology infrastructure and data systems.

Flexibility to use data systems that meet the needs of the district and the students and teachers in that district — while protecting student privacy.

In Hawaii, the state treasury holds the incentive and innovation grant fund which is available to qualified schools. The grant funds experimental and innovative programs, including innovative in-service training.⁶

In Michigan, teachers can create Individual Development Plans in order to meet students' particular needs, and they have flexibility in how they earn professional development credits.⁷

In Tennessee, the State Collaborative on Reforming Education (SCORE) is completely separate from Tennessee Department of Education, but it supports in advancing state-level work by serving as a fiscal agent for private grants designed to work with the State Education Agency (SEA). SCORE's flexibility in areas such as procurement allow for it to adjust course more easily than the SEA.⁸

In Georgia, a single state data system — The Georgia Tunnel — links directly to district-level student information systems. It allows access to state data through the district's existing platform.⁹

Defining Areas of Assurance

In exchange for the policy flexibility outlined above, districts should commit to certain assurances to ensure effective planning and quality implementation. States should monitor districts throughout the implementation process using the evaluation criteria found later in this document to ensure districts adhere to the assurances below.

Planning Process

Districts agree to undertake a comprehensive visioning and planning process to articulate how they will implement high-quality personalized learning across the district through the lens of the district conditions for scaling personalized learning. This process should involve all district stakeholders including, but not limited to, district and building leaders, teachers and teacher leaders, students and parents, community and business leaders, and institutions of higher education where appropriate.

Implementation Plan

As a result of the planning process, districts should submit a plan detailing how they will implement personalized learning at scale. This plan should closely align to the district's vision for teaching and learning and how the district conditions will enable the district to attain that vision. The implementation plan should include goals and objectives, timelines for completion, and parties responsible for completion.

Continuous Improvement

Districts commit to implementing a continuous improvement process in order to prevent repeat failures, capitalize on accomplishments, and make sure that the district conditions are moving the district towards realizing its vision. The design of this system should allow for the ability to translate continuous data feedback into results for students by ensuring students are receiving the instruction and supports they need, when they need them.

Funding Alignment

Districts should identify ways to align local, state, and federal funding — in particular Title I and Title II — behind their implementation goals and objectives. In addition to state flexibility, this could include modifications to funding structures, local requirements, and agreements.

Supporting District Implementation

To assist districts with implementing personalized learning at scale, states should undertake the following state-level capacity building activities:

Provider Evaluation Criteria

States should provide assistance to districts in identifying outside providers to assist with implementation. Evaluation criteria for choosing these technical assistance providers might include experience with models of change, performance management methodologies, sustainability plans, stakeholder engagement, and implementation of personalized learning systems.

Mechanism to Obtain Additional Flexibility as Identified

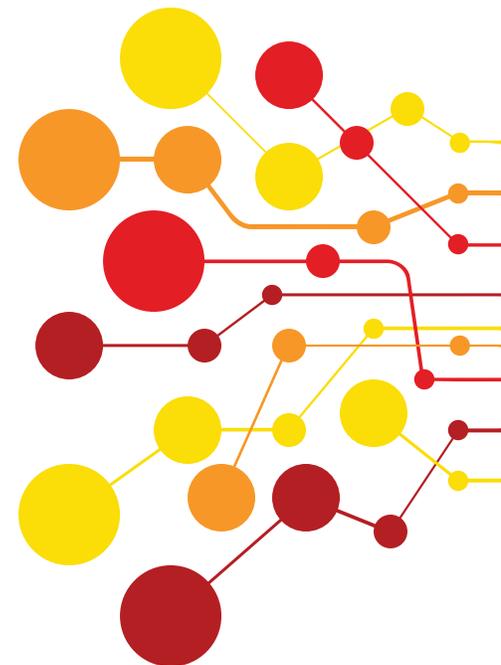
Oftentimes, it is difficult to identify the need for policy flexibility prior to program implementation. The state should provide a mechanism for districts to obtain additional flexibility as needed.

Funding Alignment

The federal government allows states to set aside 4% of Title I-A funding and 5% of SIG funding to support districts and schools in the implementation of school improvement activities. States should align and leverage these dollars through partnerships with external entities that have the added capacity to address statewide areas of need. This includes partnerships with organizations that can help the state build new infrastructure to implement personalized learning at scale.

Continuous Improvement

While districts should commit to a system of continuous improvement in order to best support students and educators, states should assist districts with cultivating continuous improvement practices at the district and building level to ensure districts collect the data and feedback necessary — particularly as it relates to the ten district conditions — to constantly optimize implementation structures and processes.



Evaluation

Just as data from assessment drives instruction and student supports in a personalized learning classroom, through a system of continuous improvement, data should be used to guide implementation at the district level. During Year One and Year Two of implementation, evaluation should include school climate measures such as attendance, disciplinary incidents, student engagement and voice, survey data, and evidence of improved instructional practices. This data should also be disaggregated by subgroups of students including by ethnicity, economic disadvantage, students with disabilities, and English language learners.

The ultimate goal of a personalized learning system is college and career readiness for all students as measured by improved student performance including academic content, skills, and dispositions. Districts should incorporate both proficiency and growth measures into the evaluation criteria during Year Three, Year Four, and Year Five. School-level performance criteria should be disaggregated by subgroups listed in the previous paragraph.

In addition, by the end of Year Five, districts should have a sustainability plan to ensure the work of the previous five years continues into the future.

Years 1 and 2

- Improvement on cultural measures such as:
 - Attendance
 - Disciplinary incidents
 - Student engagement
 - Student voice
 - Student and parent survey data
 - Evidence of improved instruction practices

Years 3, 4, and 5

- Improved student performance including academic content, skills, and dispositions
- Proficiency and growth measure should be included

Year 5

- Evidence of a plan for sustainability

All data should be disaggregated by subgroups of students including by ethnicity, economic disadvantage, students with disabilities, and English language learners.

State and District Roles

It is important for the state and districts to maintain clearly defined roles to ensure successful implementation of personalized learning systems. The table below outlines distinct roles for the district and state as well as roles that the two levels of the system should share.

State	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Create provider criteria for districts to use to select professional development and strategic assistance providers.• Monitor district evaluation criteria to ensure high-quality implementation of personalized learning.
District	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Set a vision aligned to personalized learning.• Create a culture of innovation.• Form and execute a plan for implementing personalized learning.• Implement a system of continuous improvement to inform continued implementation of plan.
Shared	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identify ways to align federal, state, and district funding behind implementing personalized learning through the District Conditions for Scale.• Create a mechanism for identifying additional areas of flexibility, including from federal law.• Identify critical indicators and data to inform the continuous improvement process.

Areas of Federal Flexibility

The areas of flexibility outlined in this document are allowable under federal law and, therefore, do not require states or districts to seek waivers from the U.S. Department of Education. If districts and states wish to seek policy flexibility beyond the ideas shared in this document, stakeholders should conduct a thorough examination of federal accountability, assessment, and student support policies to identify the barriers that impede state and district visions for personalized learning. Stakeholders should then work collaboratively to explore options for additional flexibility with the U.S. Department of Education and elected leaders in Congress.

Conclusion

Most, if not all, education stakeholders agree that the key to preparing all learners for college and career is a personalized education that is tailored to meet the needs of every student. In order to scale personalized learning, states and districts must work together to overcome the barriers of a system that was designed for a time that has long since passed. Research supports that the only way for districts to scale personalized learning is by implementing the district conditions for scale. Adopting KnowledgeWorks' state policy framework will empower states to remove antiquated policy barriers so districts can ensure every student experiences meaningful personalized learning that enables him or her to thrive in college, career, and civic life.

Endnotes

¹ <http://knowledgeworks.org/sites/default/files/district-conditions-scaling-personalized-learning.pdf>

² http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/finding_common_ground/2013/04/why_do_we_need_teacher_of_record.html also http://education.ohio.gov/getattachment/Topics/Teaching/Educator-Evaluation-System/Ohio-s-Teacher-Evaluation-System/Student-Growth-Measures/2015-01-27-Business-rules-for-SGM_FINAL-2.pdf.aspx

³ http://cdn.carnegiefoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/CUP_Policy_MayUpdate1.pdf

⁴ <https://sites.google.com/site/competencybasedpathways/home/policy-frameworks/state-policy/oregon-state-policy/or-assessment-grading-and-reporting-policy>

⁵ <http://www.doe.mass.edu/sped/mtss.html>

⁶ <http://law.justia.com/codes/hawaii/2011/division1/title18/chapter302a/302a-301>

⁷ http://www.michigan.gov/mde/0,4615,7-140-5683_5703--,00.html

⁸ <http://edex.s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/publication/pdfs/State-Education-Agency-Helm-Not-Oar-FINAL.pdf>

⁹ <http://www.dataqualitycampaign.org/success-stories/state-stories/georgia-information-tunnel-linking-district-ingenuity-with-state-resources-to-make-data-matter/>

¹⁰ <http://www.ride.ri.gov/StudentsFamilies/EducationPrograms/After-School21stCenturyCLCs.aspx#12121-21st-century-cclcs>

¹¹ <http://education.nh.gov/innovations/elo/>

About KnowledgeWorks

KnowledgeWorks is a social enterprise focused on ensuring that every student experiences meaningful personalized learning that allows him or her to thrive in college, career and civic life. By offering a portfolio of innovative education approaches and advancing aligned policies, KnowledgeWorks seeks to activate and develop the capacity of communities and educators to build and sustain vibrant learning ecosystems that allow each student to thrive. Our portfolio includes EDWorks and StriveTogether. Learn more at www.knowledgeworks.org.

