

What is Personalized Learning?

- Tailoring instruction to students’ specific academic needs, personal interests & learning styles
- Enabling students to learn at their own time, pace, place, and approach
- Empowering teachers to concentrate their time and energy on individual student needs
- Using technology in new and innovative ways to support learning

Introduction

We all know that students have different learning styles and learn at different paces – what works for one student does not necessarily work for the rest of the class. Despite advances in creating individualized approaches in healthcare, retail, and other sectors, our education system still teaches kids using a “one size fits all approach.” Personalized learning offers a new vision for education: one in which students become the center of the learning environment, using technology to support a more individualized learning experience both inside and outside the classroom. Personalized learning is gaining momentum in Delaware because it is forward-thinking and provides students across the spectrum the opportunity to access individualized, rigorous, and rich learning experiences. This approach will enable all students to be prepared for success in college and beyond.

Personalized learning rethinks the time, pace, place, and approach of how we educate our students.¹

Component	Traditional Instruction	Personalized Learning
Time	All students learn the same thing at the same time	Students learn different concepts based on their current needs
Pace	All students work at the same pace	Students work at their own pace, taking more time when needed and advancing more quickly when appropriate
Place	Student learning takes place from 8 a.m. – 3 p.m. within the confines of the classroom	Students are empowered to learn both inside and outside school
Approach	Teacher is at the front of the classroom, students face forward and listen attentively	Students learn using a variety of approaches, which may include large-group instruction, small-group instruction, small-group collaboration, virtual learning, online tutoring, or independent practice

The Role of Teachers

Personalized learning is particularly exciting for teachers because it allows them to work one-on-one with students without losing sight of the needs of the classroom as a whole. Teachers are able to incorporate multiple styles of instruction more seamlessly, which allows them to become facilitators of student learning. In addition, teachers can be more connected with their peers in order to collaborate and improve their practice. And because teachers can track individual student progress and communicate with students outside of the classroom, they can spot potential problems or areas for student development early on. These collective efforts not only enhance student academic achievement, but they also help to turn teachers into true instructional leaders.

¹Table adapted from SIIA, CCSSO, ASCD Report (2010). Innovate to Education: A System [Re]Design for Personalized Learning. Retrieved from <http://sii.net/pli/presentations/PerLearnPaper.pdf>.

What is the Role of Technology?

Educational technology is a critical component behind personalization, fueling new efforts to individualize learning, and allowing existing initiatives to get up to scale. Technology can transform the educational experience on three levels:

1. Providing Access to High-Quality, Student-Specific Educational Content

Technology devices (such as iPads, smartphones, and laptop computers) give students a new way to access educational content that is appropriate for their unique learning needs.

2. Facilitating Collaboration

Technology portals (such as social media, online digital libraries, simulations, and interactive features) allow students to collaborate with their peers and teachers in innovative ways.

3. Giving Teachers More Flexibility, Control

Technology allows teachers to chart a detailed, individualized path for each student using 21st century data management and communication tools.

In this way, technology becomes the facilitator of a personalized approach to education – one in which students are engaged and challenged, and also are exposed to the technology skills that they will need in college and the workforce. However, the effective use of technology in schools requires an investment both in the technology itself, as well as professional development to make sure that teachers are adequately prepared to put the technology to good use in their instructional practice.

Personalized Learning in Action

Personalized learning is a student-centered effort, so it will inevitably look different in each school. Some strategies may include (but are not limited to) changing the physical space of the classroom to allow for small group collaboration, encouraging students to use online portals to connect with their teachers beyond school hours for homework and project assignments, and/or using online digital content to enhance learning in the classroom during the school day.

Additionally, personalized learning encompasses a variety of different initiatives already found in K-12 education. Other strategies are aligned with the concept of personalized learning if they are part of a larger plan to create a high-quality, student-centered learning environment that can be scaled up to the school, district, or state levels. Examples include:

- Differentiated Instruction (modifying instructional techniques to meet specific student needs)
- Blended Learning (combining in-person instruction with computer-mediated instruction)
- “Bring Your Own Device” (using students’ own technology devices in the educational setting)
- One-to-One Laptop Initiatives (providing each student with a laptop or other device)
- Project-Based Learning (giving students a project to investigate either individually or in groups)

Efforts in Delaware

These efforts are already underway in Delaware. Teachers and administrators have created pockets of innovation throughout the state, from virtual field trips in the Cape Henlopen School District to specialized support for students with autism in Brandywine. On a broader scale, a consortium of several school districts (BRINC – **B**randywine, **I**ndian River, **N**ew Castle County Vo-tech, **C**olonial) is working together to share resources and best practices to increase personalized learning opportunities for their students, as well as training teachers and creating “model classrooms” where teachers can see this work being implemented in real-time. The challenge for our state moving forward will be to coalesce these efforts into a statewide transformation effort so that all students can benefit from these opportunities.