

Overview: Personalized Learning November 2015

Introduction

Over the past several decades, society has experienced rapid technological change, but for the most part our nation's school systems have remained the same, a "one size fits most" model that is not yet working for every student. **Personalized learning places each student at the center of his or her learning environment, with students and teachers working together to meet students' individual learning goals.**

Personalized learning systems:

- Tailor instruction to students' specific academic needs and interests
- Enable students to learn at their own time, place, pace, and approach
- Give students and teachers access to real-time feedback and performance data
- Empower teachers to concentrate their time and energy on individual student needs
- Use technology in innovative ways to support student learning

Personalized learning goes beyond the simple use of technology to deliver traditional instruction. It could allow Delaware's students to take classes across the state and around the world. Students would have the ability to earn credit for activities and achievements in extracurricular activities, internships, and other experiences. In a truly personalized system, all students, including students with disabilities and special needs, could get the personalized attention they need to be successful. At the end of the day, a personalized and student-centered system will result in increased student engagement, which in turn has the potential to drive increased student achievement—when students work on things they care about, they are more invested in their work and more likely to be successful.

Current Personalized Learning Landscape

There are several key terms and concepts to understand related to personalized, student-centered learning and what is currently happening in Delaware:

Common Terms and Definitions Used in Discussion of Personalized Learning Systems

Term	Definition
Blended Learning	Teachers use a mix of in-person and online instruction to deliver content to students. There are a variety of formats and types of blended learning, but all involve the seamless incorporation of technology into the student experience.
Competency-Based Learning	Competency-based learning happens through the demonstration of knowledge and skills, with students only able to move on to new content when results and evidence indicate they have mastered the content. ⁱ
Deeper Learning	Deeper learning implies the mastery of academic content and other key competencies, including critical thinking and problem solving, effective communication, and collaboration. ⁱⁱ
Extended Learning Opportunities (ELO)	An ELO allows students to receive credit for instruction or study outside the traditional classroom, including but not limited to: • Apprenticeships • Community service • Independent study • Online courses • Internships • Performing groups • Private instruction ⁱⁱⁱ



The elements in the above chart are components of a more personalized, student centered learning environment. In recent years, Delaware has seen some encouraging pockets of innovation as LEAs have begun transitioning to a more personalized system. These initiatives have included:

- **The BRINC Consortium**, a group of seven districts (Brandywine, Red Clay, Indian River, New Castle County Vocational Technical, Colonial, Caesar Rodney, and Appoquinimink) that started working together in 2012 to transform the way students learn and teachers teach using 21st century tools and approaches, with a focus on curriculum, online learning platforms, data systems, and developing teachers and leaders. The group was awarded a \$600,000 state innovation grant to start its work.
- In March 2015, the Delaware Department of Education (DDOE) announced a statewide contract with **Schoology**, a learning management system (LMS) that LEAs could opt to roll out starting in the 2015-16 school year. Using Schoology, teachers can publish their course materials online, providing anytime, anywhere access to students, parents, and other teachers. In the first year of implementation, up to 75,000 students will be served by LEAs using the platform.
- During October 2014-March 2015, the Delaware DOE convened a **Competency-Based Learning Guiding Coalition**, comprised of parents, teachers, district leaders, and others to study competency-based learning and provide recommendations for Delaware's transition to competency-based learning. Regulations based upon the Guiding Coalition's work were approved by the State Board of Education in September 2015, and allow local school boards to permit the awarding of high school credit based upon mastery.
- Ten LEAs are currently working on developing **standards-based report cards** to reframe reporting of student grades around standards so students and parents know exactly where students are in their learning.
- In 2014, the Rodel Teacher Council published its *Blueprint for Personalized Learning in Delaware*, which outlines several important policy shifts needed to facilitate the transition to personalized learning. The Council hosts an annual Personalized Learning Workshop for Teachers in February.
- SCR 22 established a task force to present recommendations for **updating Delaware's education technology infrastructure**, with recommendations due by March 30, 2016.

How the Delaware System Compares

While there are exciting **pockets of innovation** in Delaware's personalized learning landscape, several other states have taken more substantial action to **encourage statewide innovation**:

- States like Ohio^{iv} and Rhode Island^v have developed statewide **blended learning strategies**, complete with statewide offices of innovation, to propel innovation forward at the state level.
- When it comes to **competency-based learning**, several states have taken proactive steps to encourage LEAs to make the transition. For example, Maine and New Hampshire have provided incentives and phased-in timelines for LEAs to implement competency-based learning.^{vi}
- Delaware's **education technology infrastructure** needs an upgrade to keep pace with the ever-evolving landscape. It has been almost 20 years since Delaware last made a significant investment in its schools' technology infrastructure.^{vii} Based on the usage of early adopters, it is estimated that upgrades would need to provide up to 10 times the speed that is currently available.

Potential Action Steps

Delaware can take action over the coming years to encourage innovation in the education sector and transition toward a more personalized, student-centered learning environment by building

supply of and demand for personalized models, and by removing barriers that stand in the way of innovation.

Category	Potential Action Steps	Progress Underway	Supporters
Building supply of quality models	Consider pilot programs to assist LEAs in making the transition to personalized learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing BRINC expansion • Competency-Based Learning Guiding Coalition • Rodel Teacher Council 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Competency-Based Learning Guiding Coalition • Rodel Teacher Council • Vision Coalition of Delaware
Building demand for quality models	Engage with parents, teachers, and other stakeholders to explain personalized learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rodel Teacher Council • BRINC Districts • Competency-Based Learning Guiding Coalition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BRINC Districts • Competency-Based Learning Guiding Coalition
	Provide statewide innovation grants to help fund associated one-time startup costs	BRINC Consortium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BRINC Districts • Rodel Teacher Council
Removing barriers to personalized learning	Use federal funding and state investments to make substantial upgrades to Delaware's education technology infrastructure	SCR 22 Education Technology Task Force	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SCR 22 Task Force • Vision Coalition of Delaware
	Allow LEAs to apply for waivers around current policies such as teacher of record, seat time, and graduation requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Competency-Based Learning Guiding Coalition • Rodel Teacher Council 	Vision Coalition of Delaware

Additional Resources

- Blueprint for Personalized Learning in Delaware: www.rodelfoundationde.org/blueprint
- CompetencyWorks: www.competencyworks.org/
- Clayton Christensen Institute: www.christenseninstitute.org/education/
- Bellwether Policy Playbook for Personalized Learning: http://bellwethereducation.org/sites/default/files/PolicyPlays_Final.pdf

Sources:

ⁱ Rodel Teacher Council. (2014). *Blueprint for Personalized Learning in Delaware*. www.rodelfoundationde.org/blueprint.

ⁱⁱ National Association of State Boards of Education. (2014). *State Education Standard*. http://www.nasbe.org/wp-content/uploads/Standard_Mar2014_full_online.pdf.

ⁱⁱⁱ New Hampshire Department of Education. *Innovations, Extended Learning Opportunities*. <http://education.nh.gov/innovations/elo/>.

^{iv} Clayton Christensen Institute. (2014). *Could local innovation networks be a key to adopting blended learning?* <http://www.christenseninstitute.org/could-local-innovation-networks-be-a-key-to-adopting-blended-learning/>.

^v Rhode Island Department of Education. (2014). The Learning Accelerator and the RI Department of Education Announce Innovation Partnership. <http://www.ride.ri.gov/InsideRIDE/AdditionalInformation/News/ViewArticle/tabid/408/ArticleId/164/The-Learning-Accelerator-and-the-RI-Department-of-Education-Announce-Innovation-Partnership.aspx>.

^{vi} Patrick, S. and Sturgis, C. (2013). Building Mastery of World-Class Skills. A CompetencyWorks Issue Brief, International Association for K-12 Online Learning. http://www.competencyworks.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/inacol_cw_issuebrief_building_mastery_final.pdf.

^{vii} All public K-12 schools in Delaware were wired to allow access to the internet via one state network at state expense of \$30 million over a three-year period, ending in 1999. This is the most recent, large-scale statewide investment in networking infrastructure in Delaware. Source: University of Delaware Library.