Introduction

To implement fluid and flexible education models based on student interests, competencies, and educator expertise, the learning experience should extend beyond the confines of a classroom, the hours of a traditional school day, and a single teacher.

As members of the Rodel Teacher Council, we’ve learned that a truly personalized learning environment depends on shifting the traditional roles of educators. Our working group focused on some strategies for making that happen—from creating teams of educators, to taking on new roles like “e-learning mentors,” instructional strategy coaches, evaluators, and more.

Not only would these roles help to organize learning, but this new career ladder would also help schools recruit and maintain teacher talent. By providing opportunities for talented teachers to advance and expand their reach, and to take on leadership roles without leaving the classrooms—they, as well as their schools and students—win.

What is Personalized Learning?

Great teachers already 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. Personalized learning offers a new vision for education—one in which students become the center of the learning environment, and where students and teachers work together toward students’ individual learning goals.

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From the Student’s Perspective

Maya is a 14-year-old student in Delaware in 2020. For the past two years, Maya has been enrolled at the Delaware Community School (DCS), a public school.

**Personalized Learning Plan:** At DCS, Maya and her family work with a team of adults to design learning experiences specifically for her based on the goals and interests she has identified as part of the planning process. They call this her personalized learning plan, and she checks it every week—and even every day—to plan her activities and find out her schedule.

**Educators as facilitators:** Maya's learning is facilitated by a variety of educators with Maya and her fellow students at the center of their own learning experiences. DCS has defined the roles they need educators to fill based on students' needs, and has developed their school model based on their mission of placing students at the center of their own learning.

**Extended Learning Opportunity:** Her personalized learning plan “lives” online, but today, Maya's schedule includes four internship hours at Dr. Rodriguez’s veterinary practice. This year, Maya will spend about 15 hours per month in Dr. Rodriguez's practice, earning biology credits based on the work that she does and what she learns there. Maya’s community experience advisor periodically meets with her and Dr. Rodriguez to check in on how things are going and help Maya make the most of her experience.

**Real-world learning:** In addition to her work at Dr. Rodriguez’s practice, Maya works with her classmates on in-depth projects related to her learning goals, facilitated by instructors.

**Leadership and support:** The team of educators who work to support Maya also receive support in the form of coaches, data analysts, and instructional leaders. These pieces are critical to ensuring that Maya’s team has the resources and support they need to support her learning and the learning of her peers.

**Individualized playlist:** Maya also spends some of her time each day—either in school or out of school—on individualized work to build skills and knowledge aligned with her personalized learning plan, and developed by educators at DCS.

**Supporting innovation:** At its beginning, DCS benefitted from grant support from a local innovation fund, which provided startup funding to the school's leadership team to develop the school model. As part of the grant process, DCS shares their results and progress more broadly.

Maya’s experience at DCS highlights how the school experience will evolve for students, and the recommendations outlined in the coming pages will show how educator roles and students’ learning environments will also change.
**Making it Possible: Role of Teachers**

*In a student-centered learning environment, the role of the educator shifts from one of directing learning to one of facilitating learning. This shift allows educators to specialize even further and allows school communities to define roles for educators specific to students’ needs. Potential roles that may be adopted are outlined below.*

**Spotlight**

In the 2016-17 school year, Delaware DOE began its Teacher Leader Pilot program, comprised of five teacher leader roles, and a step toward creating more career opportunities for teachers. While this is encouraging, the next step is to allow LEAs to work with teachers and families to rethink the design of the learning environment to be student-centered and determine the roles of educators within that new design, some of which are outlined here.

**Recommendation:**

DDOE should provide LEAs with opportunities to define and implement new educator roles to allow innovative, student-centered school models via waivers and/or pilot programs. Ensure that educators are eligible for new roles based on interests and skillsets.

**Local educational agency (LEA):** A local school system pursuant to local board of education control and management. May be a school district or public charter school.
The current “teacher of record” policy limits educators from taking on new roles and prevents schools from becoming more student centered—teachers must be full time and must have a primary responsibility for student learning in a class. This prevents schools from innovating with roles such as data analysts, instructional coaches, and lead teachers.

**Teacher of Record**

In Delaware, “teacher of record is defined as a full-time teacher who has been assigned the primary responsibility for a student's learning in a course/class, provided a student has been in attendance at least 85% of the time that class is in session.

**Recommendation:** DDOE can allow LEAs to apply for waivers to the teacher of record policy, providing oversight and support as needed as LEAs adopt innovative school models. Ultimately the state should consider eliminating the teacher of record policy, recognizing the need for additional educator roles in a personalized, student-centered learning environment.

Maya learns together and at the same pace with her fellow students who share her **readiness levels and interests.**

Maya receives **differentiated instruction** from her teacher through multi-modal activities.

Digital curriculum provides Maya with differentiated learning paths by adapting, providing choice, and scaffolding.

This model, in which educators are facilitators and guides, requires school communities to rethink the traditional role of educators as, “sage on the stage.”

Delaware must focus on building—either through redesign or the creation of new schools—innovative models that can serve as proof points of the value of personalized learning.

**Recommendation: Catalyzing Innovation:** Delaware needs an innovation fund (perhaps structured as a public-private partnership between the public sector and the business/nonprofit community) to seed innovation and provide start-up funds to schools planning to innovate with student-centered methodology and practices.

**Recommendation: Developing New School Models:** Communities should be empowered, through local leadership and authentic stakeholder engagement, to develop student-centered models, either as redesign or development of new schools. These schools would act as laboratory settings, sharing their results statewide and beyond.

Communities all over the country have worked together to design innovative, student-centered school models, including:

- Adams 50 School District (Colorado)
- Design Tech High School
- KIDS RSU2
- School District (Maine)
- Lindsay Unified School District (California)
- Summit Public Schools

**Public-private partnership:** Long term contract between the public sector (government) and the private sector (business and/or non-profit groups) to provide a public service or benefit.

**Stakeholder engagement:** For any new school model to be successful, open lines of communication are critical. Luckily for Maya and her family, DCS ensures that educators, staff, students, parents, and other community members are actively involved at every phase and every level of the school design and implementation process.
As the roles of educators shift, it will be critical for new educators entering the profession to be equipped for their new roles and school models.

1. Maya’s teacher receives instruction in how to personalize learning during his pre-service training.

2. Maya learns in a co-teaching model while her teacher-in-training develops his skills in real time with support from a lead or mentor teacher.

3. Now, Maya’s teacher is ready to teach her and her classmates in a true personalized environment.

**Recommendation:** Teachers, LEAs, and college and university leaders should collaborate to prepare student educators with the knowledge and skills necessary to teach in a student-centered environment. All new educators need training in blended and personalized learning and co-teaching experience with cooperating educators practicing blended and personalized learning. Ultimately, all new educators entering the field need a working knowledge of best practices when they enter the profession.

- Promoting policy changes that can have a huge impact statewide, such as raising academic standards, using timely data to make decisions, and investing in our youngest learners.
- Provide seed funding to innovative, potentially high-impact initiatives. Whether our ideas come from Seaford or Singapore, our strategy is simple: Do more of what works.
- Creating and leading diverse statewide partnerships that catalyze action, such as the Rodel Teacher Council.

The RODEL TEACHER COUNCIL was convened by the Rodel Foundation of Delaware in 2013 to elevate the voices of teachers, represent the diversity of the teaching force in Delaware schools, provide a venue for teachers to weigh in on important issues affecting their work, and help set the course for education improvement in Delaware. The council is a group of teacher leaders dedicated to finding solutions, improving their craft, and leveraging their voices for the benefit of their students.

In October 2014, the Rodel Teacher Council published the Blueprint for Personalized Learning in Delaware, which identifies state and local policy improvements that would enable personalized learning. The document is one of the first examples of educators developing policy recommendations for personalized learning in the nation.

To read the Blueprint, and to learn more about the RTC, visit: www.rodelfoundationde.org/who-we-are/teachercouncil/