

Transforming Systems for High Levels of Learning for All Students: Personalized Learning in Wisconsin

The Work

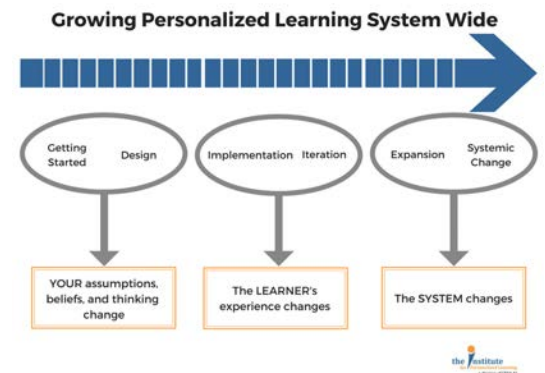
Since 2010, the Institute for Personalized Learning (I4PL), a division of Cooperative Educational Service Agency (CESA) 1, has been collaborating with the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction to inform the state's work with the Innovation Lab Network (ILN) managed by the Council of Chief State School Officers. ILN is a network of states that pilots and scales student-centered approaches, including personalized and competency-based learning. I4PL has played a critical role in helping implement personalized learning approaches in Wisconsin schools and districts.

I4PL supports schools and districts as they move through six stages of transformation on their journey toward growing personalized learning systemwide (Figure 1). Using their [honeycomb model](#), I4PL helps schools and districts develop and implement a strategic plan for personalized learning. This model enables schools and districts to focus on change by emphasizing the three foundational components of a personalized learning ecosystem. The model then proceeds to focus on change in learning and teaching, relationships and roles, and structures and policies. Schools and districts receive the resources they need to create a path that is unique to their needs, because the possibilities of the honeycomb model are limitless. I4PL then guides schools and districts to implement and revise their plans as they move toward systemic change.

One goal of Wisconsin's personalized learning effort has been to tell the story of how personalized learning has unfolded in Wisconsin. To achieve this goal, the Midwest Comprehensive Center conducted



Figure 1.



six interviews with education leaders from six different districts that have been collaborating with I4PL to implement personalized learning initiatives in their schools. Each interview focused on one of the six stages of transformation used by I4PL and was aligned with each district's stage of transformation. This document provides a snapshot of each district's journey and shares one approach to achieving each stage in the transformation process. This work illustrates how districts are making a systemic shift to personalized learning.

Stage 1: Getting Started

UNDERSTANDING MORE ABOUT PERSONALIZED LEARNING, READINESS FOR CHANGE, AND INNOVATIVE APPROACHES

Interviewed: Dave Vitale, Watertown Unified School District

Getting to know your students' interests and how they learn is one of the first steps toward personalization. In undertaking its personalized learning initiative, the Watertown Unified School District is focusing on the foundational components of learner profiles, proficiency-based progress, and customized learning paths. To inform development of the learner profiles in a way that generates purposeful learning, they selected customized responsive instruction, learner choice, and cultural and life relevance from the honeycomb model. From there, Watertown further informed the learner profiles by asking students questions to gain a better sense of who they are as individuals, what their learning drivers are, and what they are passionate about.

Another major step in this stage is innovation. For Watertown, innovation came in the form of innovation zones, learning environments in which students are encouraged to take intellectual risks and failure is seen as part of the learning process. Watertown's innovation zones include the Riverside STEM Academy and a project-based elementary school, Lincoln Elementary STEM. To make sure these innovation zones were successful, Watertown set up a curriculum, designed learning pathways, and offered mentorships. Several classrooms throughout the district are also embracing aspects of personalized learning, from Universal Design for Learning to adaptive technologies in mathematics and literacy that leverage advances in artificial intelligence. Watertown also recognized that communicating with parents is essential to getting personalized learning off the ground. Strategic communication is detailed and deliberate, and it addresses how personalized learning can enrich their children's education.

Approach to Stage 1:

- Collect information on what drives your students to learn and their passions in life (e.g. learner profiles).
- Create innovative learning environments in which students are encouraged to take risks and in which failure is part of learning (e.g., innovation zones).
- Be deliberate in your communication with parents about the aims and goals of personalized learning.

Personalized learning builds on the notion that students ultimately own their own learning and that students and families are part of that vision.
—Dave Vitale

Stage 2: Design

PLANNING AND ACHIEVING THE ASPECTS NECESSARY FOR TEAMS AS THEY DESIGN AND EXECUTE A VISION FOR PERSONALIZED LEARNING

Interviewed: Donna Held, Richmond School District

To move forward, it is important to gather the information necessary to make a directional decision about personalized learning and use it to design the approach. The Richmond School District began by looking at what they felt was the why for bringing personalized learning into their classrooms, which involved discussions with their educators. Including educators in the conversation is an important step in the design process to reinforce that personalized learning is a collaborative effort and to let the work be informed by insights and expertise from the classroom.

Another key step in the process is to be thoughtful about what components of personalized learning work best for your district. To this end, Richmond selected eight components from the I4PL honeycomb model that they felt best suited students' needs. After choosing these eight components, they asked their educators for feedback on whether these elements reflected their schools, classrooms, and students. To keep teachers from feeling overwhelmed, Richmond decided to take a scaffolded or gradual approach to executing their plan. They started with Grades 2 and 3, and they have plans for next year to extend personalized learning into Grades 1 and 5. They also started with one subject—math—and will soon be adding personalized learning in other areas.

Stage 3: Implementation

BEGINNING PERSONALIZED LEARNING IN A CLASSROOM/SCHOOL/DISTRICT

Interviewed: Lynn LeRoy, Whitnall School District

To implement personalized learning effectively, it is important to offer schools proper guidance and support. The Whitnall School District spent the last year discussing personalized learning goals that could be achieved districtwide to support the effective implementation of personalized learning. This led to their decision to be methodical in their approach and to start with a goal focused on one component from the I4PL honeycomb model: *learning profiles*.

Approach to Stage 2:

- Ask yourself, your team, and your educators: Why personalized learning?
- Be thoughtful and strategic about the personalized components you select, and get feedback from educators.
- If necessary, let your vision unfold gradually to reduce feeling overwhelmed.

Personalized learning has really helped us think about teaching and learning as something focused on the individual learner. Our job is to help them set their own goals and let them choose their own paths.

—Donna Held

Approach to Stage 3:

- When creating implementation goals, make sure they are attainable for everyone. This might mean taking a methodical approach.
- Do not assume that every school will automatically know how to implement elements of personalized learning.
- Be ready to offer guidance when it is needed.

This fall, all students in the Whitnall district will have a digital learning profile that will travel with them year after year. Students will be able to review their learning profiles on a quarterly basis; they will be able to check in with teachers, make updates, and review goals. As the school year unfolds and teachers become familiar with these profiles, Whitnall will look at how teachers are providing students with timely feedback and offer support to improve that feedback, if necessary. Learner profiles give Whitnall educators and staff a common goal in working toward the implementation of personalized learning.

Stage 4: Iteration

USING RAPID PROTOTYPING AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT WHILE REFLECTING ON CHANGES

Interviewed: Tony Spence, Muskego-Norway School District

To engage in continuous improvement, the Muskego-Norway School District created alignment among the personalized learning options in their district. Muskego-Norway educators and administrators reflected on their broad vision for personalized learning as well as the steps needed to achieve that vision. This included discussing how the different formats of personalized learning occur within their system as well as the best ways to measure its success. In addition, it is important to have confidence in the mission and goals of personalized learning because this reinforces the leap from innovation to application and the move toward long-term achievement. Processes that integrate personalized learning in highly effective instruction are needed. In Muskego-Norway, teachers who have completed the cohort make personalized learning strategies part of their personal development plans. Muskego-Norway principals spoke openly to parents on the rationale behind personalized learning. Muskego-Norway also uses personalized learning networks, bringing staff together to discuss best practices. This supports a consistent message to parents. Muskego-Norway integrated an additional element into personalized learning: opportunities for students to take ownership of their education as early as kindergarten. This reinforces that ownership is not something that has to wait.

Personalized learning has given us a new mindset. It is about facilitating student learning and bringing out the best in them rather than forcing it upon them.
—Lynn LeRoy

Approach to Stage 4:

- Work to create alignment among all your personalized learning options. This may require reflecting on your broad vision and action steps.
- Have confidence in your mission; this is necessary to make the improvements needed for long-term success.
- Create processes for highly effective instruction.
- Reach out to parents and make sure they know what personalized learning is about.
- Get students to take ownership of their education as early as possible.

Personalized learning has given us confidence in taking the necessary steps toward implementation.
—Tony Spence

Stage 5: Expansion

EXPANDING THE MODEL FROM A CLASSROOM TO A SCHOOL, FROM A SCHOOL TO MULTIPLE SCHOOLS, FROM ONE GRADE LEVEL TO MULTIPLE, ETC.; BRINGING PERSONALIZED LEARNING TO SCALE IN A DISTRICT

Interviewed: Amy Arbogash, Verona-Area School District

To expand the model of personalized learning and bring it to scale, the Verona-Area School District has made personalized learning a central part of professional development for teachers. This has helped teachers across the district integrate personalized learning into their instruction in a way that meets the needs of the entire classroom.

Verona also is developing coaching models to support teachers and their classrooms. For expansion to happen, teachers need a clear set of expectations. To this end, Verona has created practice profiles for teachers to help them understand the expectations related to personalized learning for the entire district. Teachers can personalize these expectations based on their learners. Gaining parents' buy-in is another important element of expanding personalized learning. Verona is creating online personalized learning plans for every student. These plans will capture learning preferences, skills, and student goals. Parents will have access to these plans, giving them the opportunity to be involved in the process. Verona also held a televised community kickoff event for parents to help them learn more about the benefits of personalized learning.

Stage 6: Systemic Change

MOVING TO A TRANSFORMED SYSTEM

Interviewed: Theresa Ewald, Kettle Moraine School District

To move to a transformed system in which personalized learning is the way education happens, all educators need to be committed to the district's vision of personalized learning. The Kettle Moraine School District recognized that it can be difficult for some teachers to switch from traditional models of teaching to something new. Kettle Moraine reached out to other personalized learning districts in Wisconsin to help hesitant teachers realize how personalized learning affects student progress. Helping these teachers understand that personalized learning

Approach to Stage 5:

- Invest in professional development with a focus on personalized learning.
- Make sure teachers have the tools they need to be effective in the classroom (e.g., coaching models, practice profiles).
- Create opportunities for parents to learn more about personalized learning.

Personalization has shown us that learning doesn't begin and end behind classroom doors; our goal is really to help our students become lifetime learners.
—Amy Arbogash

Approach to Stage 6:

- Moving to a transformed system of personalization requires a full commitment from staff, educators, and parents; this might mean finding ways to inspire hesitant stakeholders that personalization is the right choice.
- Transformational change is achieved through multifaceted collaboration and by having a system and structure in place that support collaboration.

is a shared commitment to transforming education gave them the impetus join the movement.

The work of personalized learning can be challenging, and the system cannot be transformed by any one individual. Instead, transformational change is achieved through collaboration with peers and—more importantly—with a support system and structure. It also involves teachers learning alongside administrators, which includes bottom-up innovation. One way Kettle Moraine fostered a collaborative mindset was through teachers merging their classrooms. Teachers have unique strengths, and by combining classrooms, teachers were able to cover gaps in one another's pedagogy.

Intentional Transformation

Although districts may have different approaches to personalized learning based on the unique needs of their students, commonalities must be considered in the transformation toward personalization. Educators and staff need support to achieve personalization in their classrooms. This support can take the form of professional development, coaching modules, opportunities for collaboration, and more. Educators need to be part of the transformation process. Educators and staff should be part of the discussion when creating a district's vision for personalized learning.

For the transformational process to succeed, it also needs support from parents. Districts should reach out to parents and be deliberate about the aims and goals of personalized learning. Finally, personalized learning should always strive to get students to take ownership of their education, so they can become lifelong learners. Through the Department of Public Instruction's partnership with I4PL and their participation in ILN, Wisconsin is learning how classrooms, schools, and districts can make one small change that can lead to transformation.

Visit <https://dpi.wi.gov/personalized-learning> to learn more about Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction Personalized Learning.

Visit <http://institute4pl.org> to learn more about the Institute for Personalized Learning.

Personalized learning has shown us that it's not just about our district. All kids deserve this opportunity no matter their background or where they live.
—Theresa Ewald

