


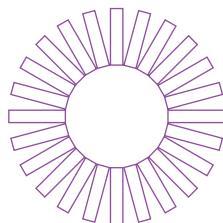
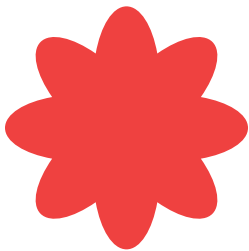


remake learning.
**Personalized
Learning**
WORKING GROUP

Pennsylvania Innovation Guide



This is not a legal document and should not be relied on as one. The policy context included in this guide, including descriptions of statute and regulation, is not exhaustive. The information included also should not be considered a complete overview of Pennsylvania's requirements, or what a district is obligated to do under them. The statutory areas included in this section originate from official state websites and were reviewed in late 2024. Please consult the full and official version of these documents for context.

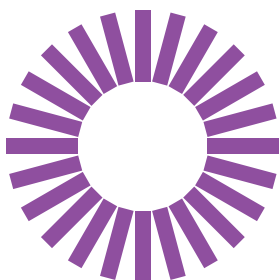


Introduction

Communities across the commonwealth and throughout the country are taking steps to rethink K-12 school experiences in response to a continually changing world. Parents, learners and other stakeholders [collectively feel](#) that schools need to do a better job ensuring learners attain the durable skills necessary to respond to rapid changes in their communities and the economy. Fortunately, nearly every state has established policies and structures to facilitate this transformation, and Pennsylvania is no different. Schools and districts are presented with a remarkable opportunity to consider how best to personalize learning for all.

Personalized learning is about empowering learners and providing experiences to help them find relevance and meaning in their educational journey. Personalized learning creates opportunities for learners to explore their interests and passions through experiences that are meaningful to them. This guide uses the [definition of personalized learning](#) created by local leaders across southwestern Pennsylvania as a part of the Remake Learning [Personalized Learning Working Group](#). This particular definition is well suited to Pennsylvania's context as it was developed through the collaboration of Pennsylvania-based communities and is flexible enough to be adapted by districts regardless of their size or needs. While the definition was collaboratively created by educators in the greater Pittsburgh region, it was informed by national examples and therefore is valuable for use by any and all schools and districts in Pennsylvania:

Personalized Learning creates authentic, equitable learning opportunities centered around each learner's readiness, needs, and interests to ensure success in future-ready knowledge, skills, and dispositions.



This definition centers six key elements needed to operationalize the vision and make it a reality. These aspects were informed by both the practical experience of those involved and broader community input. These are:

- **Empowered learners** understand their goals and play an active role in determining the pace and path of their learning. They are self-directed and resilient with the tenacity and critical thinking skills to overcome adversity.
- **Flexible learning environments** leverage innovative uses of time, space and place that respond and adapt to the unique needs of each learner. Supportive communities cultivate creative and engaging opportunities for learning to happen anytime, anywhere.
- **Learner relationships** flourish in a safe and inclusive environment that values individual strengths and cultural identities. Building and maintaining authentic connections grounded in trust, supports the personal growth and aspirations of all members of the learning community.
- **Relevant learning experiences** are academically rigorous, culturally relevant and well-aligned to competencies needed to thrive in an ever changing world. Educators help learners understand how these experiences fit within a personalized roadmap that connects today's learning to current and future aspirations.
- **Equitable learner supports** are embedded in a collaborative system designed to meet the needs and amplify the strengths unique to each learner. Intentional strategies to nurture self-direction cultivate learners with strong advocacy skills.
- **Demonstration of learning** is an integral part of the learning cycle, providing feedback on readiness and growth, as well as guiding instructional strategies. Learners have multiple opportunities and a variety of relevant ways to showcase evidence of deep thinking and progress.

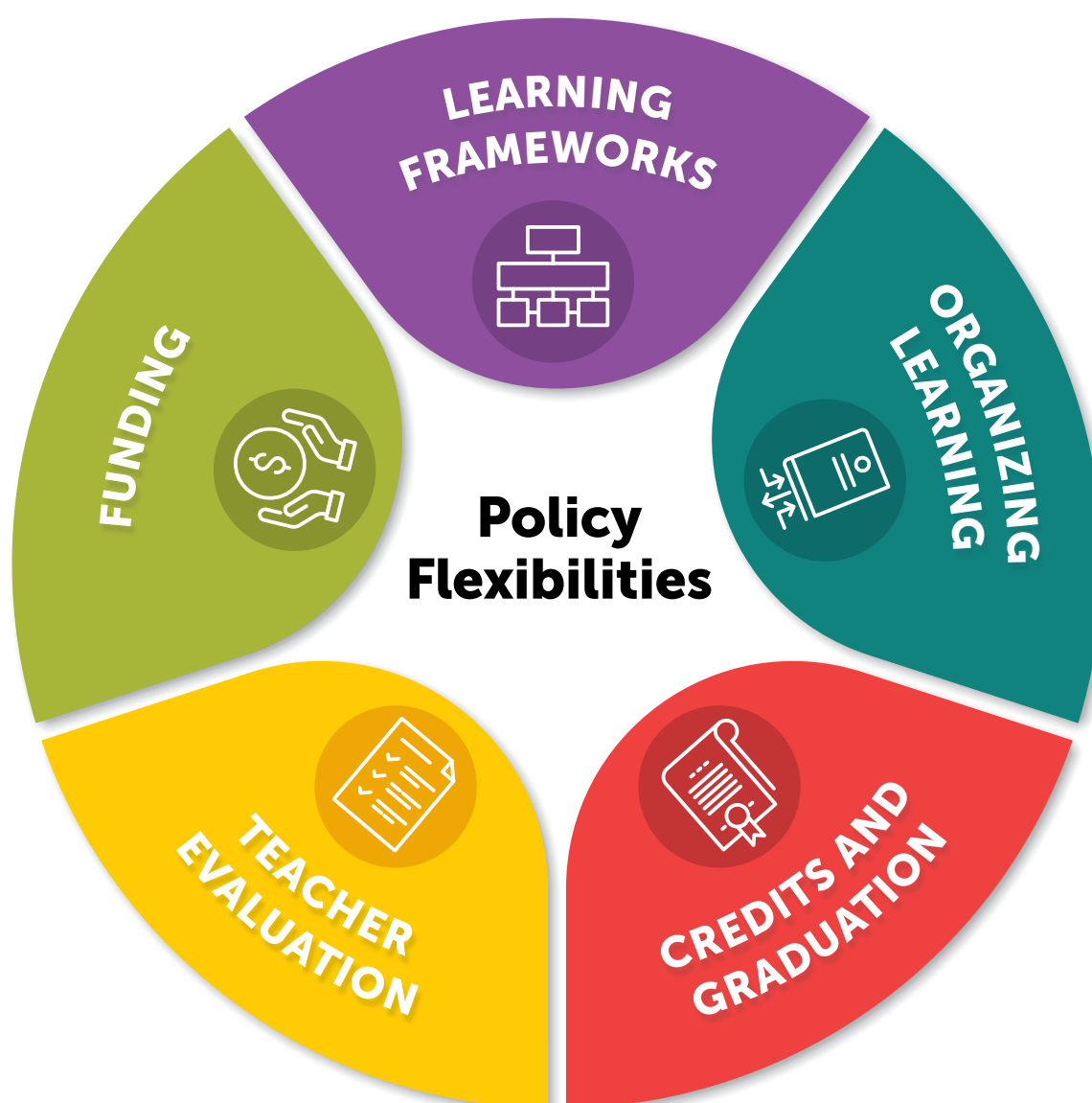
Interest in personalized learning continues to grow across the commonwealth. In southwestern Pennsylvania, a significant number of schools and districts have participated in Remake Learning's Personalized Learning Working Group and are continuing to grow and develop their approaches to personalized learning. The work is spreading across the state, most notably through the support of the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) and a statewide network of education service agencies called the intermediate units. Schools and districts are able to take advantage of significant policy flexibilities within state statute and regulation as they exercise their authority to craft meaningful educational experiences alongside their learners.

As schools and districts consider shifting their practices, it is important for them to consider the [learning ecosystem](#) that exists in all communities which makes education transformation possible. This ecosystem includes schools, other public institutions, community-based organizations, parks, businesses, institutions of higher education, museums and more. Readers will see examples throughout this guide of how some districts are working to engage in and grow their own local learning ecosystems as they advance personalized learning. Remake Learning offers several resources, including a set of [principles](#) and a [comprehensive playbook](#) grounded in their experience in the Pittsburgh region, that will be useful to communities as they consider how to transform their educational experiences.

We hope that this guide, along with the stories and resources it includes, will serve as another valuable component of this work by helping schools and districts visualize what it looks like to implement personalized learning throughout the commonwealth.

Pennsylvania Policy Landscape

Pennsylvania schools and districts have considerable flexibility within state policy to create personalized learning environments that meet learners' needs. Throughout conversations with schools and districts, a recurring theme is that few, if any, of the state's policy structures were stopping them from pursuing personalized learning and that many areas of state policy are supportive of efforts aimed at personalization. The graphic below highlights a few of the relevant policy flexibilities that readers should have at the front of their minds as they read the guide and the following page explores each of these in more detail.



Learning Frameworks

While Pennsylvania does not require schools or districts to use a specific learning framework, such frameworks form a solid foundation for personalized learning. To create this, leaders could look to:

- Leverage [state academic standards](#) to guide the creation
- Adopt or adapt the [PA Career Ready Skills](#) as the framework
- Use these or other sources to create a Portrait or Profile of a Learner

Organizing Learning

Pennsylvania provides schools and districts with a number of opportunities to build school structures that support personalized learning. These apply to how learning is physically organized as well as when and where learning takes place.

- Districts can meet either the minimum number of days (180) or hours of instruction (900 at the elementary level, 990 at the secondary level) when [structuring learning](#); additional [guidance](#) is available on this opportunity
- Pennsylvania [code](#) establishes district freedom to organize educational programs in a way that works best for them
- Pennsylvania [code](#) allows learners engaged in part-time and out-of-school programs to count as if they are in “regular school attendance” as long as they meet certain criteria
- Pennsylvania [code](#) gives districts the authority to determine how to operate their high school programs

Credits and Graduation

[Career-connected learning](#) experiences, which are being advanced in Pennsylvania through the state’s [Career Ready PA initiative](#), are essential pieces of a personalized learning system, and Pennsylvania gives schools and districts a number of flexibilities that districts can use to create these types of experiences:

- While state [code](#) specifies that high school instruction must be aligned with academic standards, the state leaves the decision about the specific number of credits learners must earn to graduate to local districts
- Pennsylvania [statute](#) creates a number of alternative pathways for learners to show mastery of graduation requirements and provides detailed [information](#) and a [toolkit](#) to help districts take advantage of them
- State [code](#) gives learners a variety of opportunities to demonstrate content mastery, including passing Keystone exams before taking the course or completing locally approved assessments that meet certain criteria
- [Code](#) allows chief school administrators in a district to waive high school graduation requirements for learners if necessary

Teacher Evaluation

Pennsylvania’s requirements around teacher evaluation provide an opportunity to acknowledge educator performance in areas related to personalization. School districts can use the evaluation system [created by the state or create their own](#) local rating system with approval from the department. Districts creating their own might find [state guidance](#) helpful.

Funding

Schools and districts can think creatively about how to leverage funds and access new funds to support the development and implementation of personalized learning. In addition to leveraging funds provided by the state funding formula, districts may find grants like the state’s [Ready to Learn Block Grant](#) helpful to fund a [range of activities](#) that directly connect to personalized learning structures.

How to Use This Guide

The Pennsylvania Innovation Guide can be used by anyone who wants to learn more about how to support the development of personalized educational experiences in their communities.

Practitioners reading this guide will find practical examples of how other schools and districts are taking steps to accomplish personalization within existing policy structures. Learners, educators, school and district leaders and parents will find ideas for which they could advocate within their districts. And community members, including business, industry and higher education, will see many examples of how districts are partnering with their communities to create meaningful learning experiences both inside and outside of the classroom.

While all stakeholders will find value in this guide, it is primarily designed as a starting place for school or district teams as they consider how they might personalize learning. The guide's structure seeks to accomplish three things:

- **Concrete approaches**, called "action areas," describe how teachers and leaders can begin to reimagine school structures to increase personalization.
- **Raise awareness** of and provide background information for select aspects of state policy that might influence school and district practice as they seek to personalize learning.
- **Provide examples** of how local schools and districts in Pennsylvania are undertaking these approaches within existing state policy structures through an "imagine if" scenario, including one practical example from an exemplary district in North Dakota, for how schools and districts might leverage the state's policy structures to create personalized learning structures.

This guide was created through a collaboration between Remake Learning and KnowledgeWorks, a national nonprofit. The guide draws on Remake Learning's experiences in southwestern Pennsylvania and KnowledgeWorks' expertise in personalized, competency-based learning.

Action Areas and Examples

The opportunities and examples throughout the guide are organized into "action areas" that represent broad approaches that schools or districts seeking to personalize learning might want to pursue. These action areas are not exhaustive and there are many approaches that Pennsylvania districts can use to personalize learning. The action areas were identified through conversations with Pennsylvania stakeholders, including educators, district leaders and intermediate unit staff. The areas are:

1. [Profile of a Learner Creation](#)
2. [Resources and Partnerships](#)
3. [School Structure](#)
4. [Career-connected Learning](#)
5. [Professional Learning](#)

Each action area includes two sections:

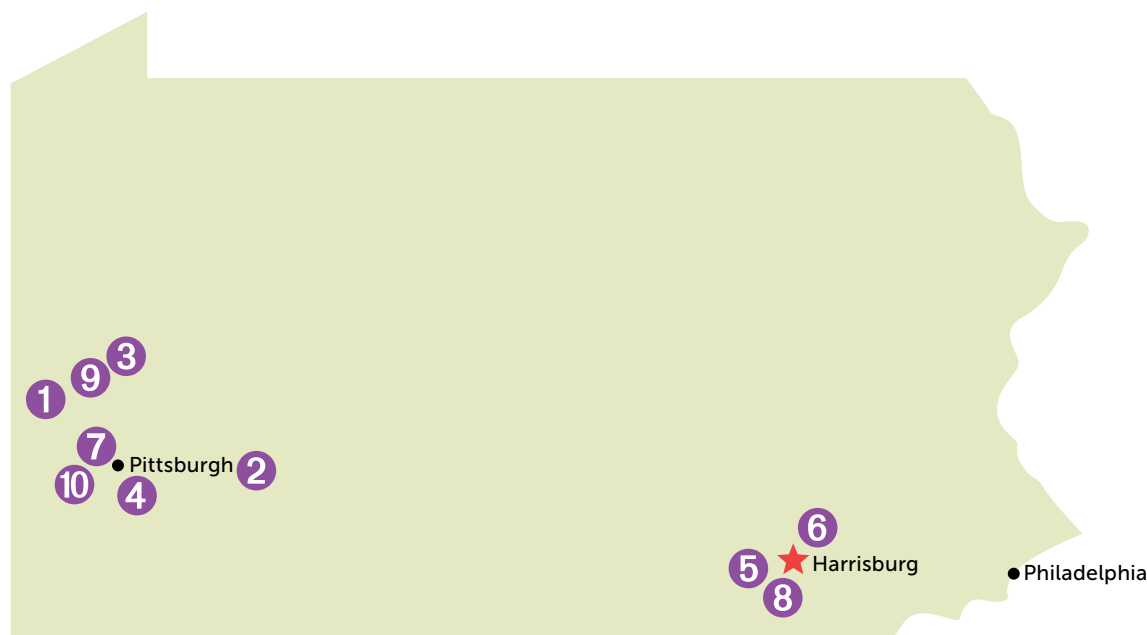
- What it is and possible ways to do it, including any key considerations for schools/districts considering taking that particular approach
- Pennsylvania "spotlights," which include examples and advice from the local schools and districts that were interviewed

Readers can jump into the guide at any point. However, it may be helpful to begin with the first action area, Profile of a Learner Creation. Remake Learning and KnowledgeWorks' experience, supported through the interviews conducted for this guide, suggests that setting a vision for a district's personalized learning work in this way is crucial as a foundation for all that comes after.



District Spotlights

District spotlights were selected based on recommendations from stakeholders interviewed at the beginning of this guide's creation, as well as KnowledgeWorks' experience working in the state to support Remake Learning's Personalized Learning Working Group. Additionally, participants often expressed the value in bringing in out-of-state spotlights that are undertaking advanced work to illustrate what is possible. You'll notice one spotlight in the first action area from North Dakota, which was selected for this reason.



In alphabetical order, spotlights include:

- | | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| 1 Beaver Area School District | 6 Ephrata Area School District |
| 2 Burrell School District | 7 Northgate School District |
| 3 Butler Area School District | 8 Pequea Valley School District |
| 4 Duquesne City School District | 9 Seneca Valley School District |
| 5 Eastern York School District | 10 South Fayette Township School District |

ACTION AREA 1

Profile of a Learner Creation

Imagine If...

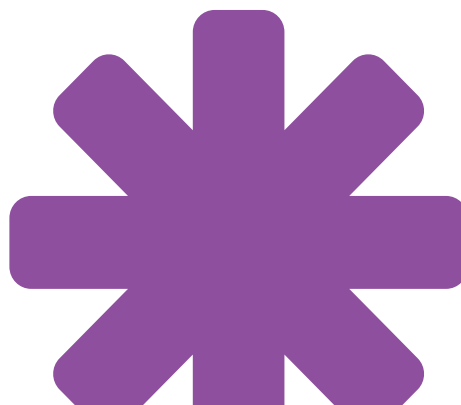
A district wants to create a document that articulates the knowledge, skills and dispositions they want learners to have for graduation and promotion. With finite time and resources, the district thinks this will be a powerful tool to help them navigate hard decision points.

They know that high-quality academic content is one measure of learner success that they want to include, so they review the [state academic standards](#) as part of this work. The district also knows that career readiness skills are crucial for learners, so they review the state's [PA Career Ready Skills](#) for additional ideas. As they're gathering other resources that help them think through skills and dispositions necessary for learner success, they realize that the broader community members may also have thoughts and considerations integral to developing a comprehensive learning framework.

As educator leaders and administrators meet with community stakeholders, they start to form a learning framework, taking ideas from multiple sources that resonate most with the members of the broader community. As part of this process, they reflect on individual and collective beliefs, values and assumptions. Equity is an important consideration in these conversations, and they use data to identify existing inequitable outcomes. The

district doesn't rush this process but instead ensures there are multiple opportunities for engagement. At the end of the process, they have created a Profile of a Learner.

The district then begins to think through detailed performance indicators for learners and specific practices and teaching strategies needed to make the knowledge and skills a reality. District administrators, educators, families and learners have had opportunities to engage in the process, and there is general excitement around the development and implementation of the profile. Stakeholders will use the profile to guide learners to success through the development of competencies and learning standards. The profile and accompanying competencies provide guidance as educators adjust their practices to provide more personalization and help learners meet their goals.



1

What It Is and Ways to Approach It

Developing a [vision](#) that outlines what learners should know or be able to do to ensure future readiness is essential to advance personalized learning. This vision is often articulated in what districts call either a Profile or Portrait of a Learner/Graduate.

While the name of this visioning document can vary, the purpose is the same. The document outlines skills and dispositions, including mastery of high-quality academic content, that learners should have upon graduation and/or promotion. Profiles are vital components to cultivating a personalized and competency-based education system.

Pennsylvania does not have a formal state profile or portrait, though its [PA's Career Ready Skills](#) serves a similar purpose. However, districts may choose to create and implement their own vision for learners.

The creation of a shared vision is often the first step for any learning community. This allows learning communities to consider this vision as the “north star” when designing education systems and structures. A strong Profile of a Learner is community-designed and incorporates the attributes that educators, learners, families and broader community members believe are essential for learners to master by high school graduation. Learning communities typically include six to 12 attributes they strive for learners to achieve. These attributes often speak to the in-demand careers and educational opportunities available to learners both locally and nationally. Communities typically develop these documents through an inclusive, community-driven process with a broad range of stakeholders. This inclusion helps to ensure diverse initial support as well as long-term sustainability.

Using the Profile of a Learner as a guiding document, learning communities may consider how this can be implemented at a school and classroom level. To accomplish this, learning communities often develop [competencies](#) that provide the steps and

structures for learners to achieve the vision. Competencies can be used to [support the implementation](#) of personalized learning and help contextualize the learning community's shared vision. In 2014, Remake Learning led a broad and inclusive process to develop shared [competencies](#) that can be used by learning communities in the process of creating their own. A model competency progression can be used to articulate learning expectations across content areas and grade bands to help support the implementation of the profile.

Competencies can be used to support the implementation of personalized learning and help contextualize the learning community's shared vision.

Competencies and profiles go hand in hand. While the Profile of a Learner articulates the vision for learning, competencies help educators, learners and families unpack the attributes of the profile. Competencies can be used to help evaluate progress toward the vision articulated in the profile. Competencies also help learners understand how their learning experiences help them master the skills needed to reach the knowledge, skills and dispositions outlined in the profile. Similarly, competencies without an overarching vision lack a connection to community goals and aspirations for learners, which are critical to obtaining buy-in and support. For these reasons, schools and districts may want to pursue competencies and profiles as a package deal. Additionally, these profiles and competencies are backbones of high-quality approaches to personalized learning.

1

District Spotlights

Eastern York

[Eastern York School District](#), a small school district in rural, central Pennsylvania, has transformed the way they educate their learners. Given their size, location and learner characteristics, the district has gotten creative with their learning opportunities. Superintendent Dr. Joseph Mancuso says, “We punch above our weight!” Mancuso said that to start their personalized learning journey, they focused on a vision and created alignment in the system.

Utilizing [Modern Teacher](#) framework, Eastern York began their personalized learning journey by creating their [Portrait of a Graduate](#). They created a strategic planning committee that included parents, teachers, learners and businesses to begin exploring the idea of the Portrait of a Graduate. The group identified four skills for the Portrait of a Graduate: collaboration, communication, creative innovation and critical thinking. They also identified three dispositions: citizenship, integrity and growth mindset. Learner voice was an integral part of the process. Learners were even responsible for the creation of the final graphic used in the Portrait of a Graduate. Of course, the next step became aligning these skills and dispositions with the classroom lessons.

Eastern York classrooms make sure there’s a “why” behind the learning. Teachers start by engaging learners in a discussion that helps them understand the importance of the subject they’re learning. In one example, a local bicycle maker came to a classroom to help connect math to the work he does in a bike shop, demonstrating the relevancy of math in a real-world context. Learners are further able to engage with lessons through personalized approaches to learning. This includes offering flexible physical spaces as well as digital spaces, options to work as

Key Takeaways

- Get learners involved. Learners have an incredibly valuable perspective when creating your Profile of a Learner.
- Use your Profile of a Learner as a north star. Your profile can guide learning and help learners connect education experiences to clear learning goals.

individuals or in groups and the ability to demonstrate competency in a variety of ways. Schools in the district leverage personalized learning plans to help learners connect their learning experiences to the competencies and standards they’re aiming to master. Importantly, learners have voice and agency in their learning process while moving toward the skills and dispositions outlined in the portrait.

Their focus continues to be learners and helping them maintain a growth mindset.

Eastern York School District is still in the process of building out a personalized learning system that fully aligns standards, competencies and the skills and dispositions

outlined in the district's Portrait of a Graduate. Superintendent Mancuso says they have frequent conversations about how learners should interact with the Portrait of a Graduate, and there are ongoing discussions around rubrics for learners to demonstrate these skills and dispositions at certain grade levels. They use standards-based grading in K-5 and are in the process of developing [standards-based grading](#) for six through 12. Educators will unpack the standards with learners so they understand what they should be able to do or know in order to demonstrate mastery. Their focus continues to be learners and helping them maintain a growth mindset.

To accomplish this, classes often use scales of competency, allowing a personalized approach that utilizes individualized pacing in practice.

Originally, Eastern York thought that once they had the Portrait of a Graduate, their work would be done. However, throughout their journey to scale and deepen personalized learning, they discovered that what they really needed to do was create a learning system that helped their learners progress toward the skills and dispositions outlined in the Portrait. Eastern York has embraced the journey and looks forward to continuing to develop its systems to personalize learning.

Northern Cass, North Dakota

Developing a strong Profile of a Learner is a key step in strengthening personalized learning in your school and district. In this section, we highlight a district in North Dakota that has done an exceptional job developing and implementing a Profile of a Learner. While not located in Pennsylvania, Northern Cass offers an exemplar in profile development and implementation.

[Northern Cass School District](#) is a consolidated school district in rural North Dakota that has been working for years to put its vision for personalized learning into practice. Surrounded by cornfields, about 95 percent of learners are bused into school and about 35 percent come from outside of the district. The district prides itself on providing what it calls "big school opportunities in a small school environment," with a focus on graduating kids who have the skills and experiences to pursue their passions following elementary and secondary school. A key component to doing this work has been their [Portrait of a Graduate](#).

Superintendent Dr. Cory Steiner recognized that the way they were educating learners needed to change if they wanted to ensure that every learner had a post-graduation plan they could be proud of. Steiner knew that shifting educational practices to be personalized and competency-based would take community buy-in and would require a shift away from traditional classroom

Key Takeaways

- Develop your Profile of a Learner with the members of your community. This group can include diverse representation from parents, educators, learners and the broader community.
- Find your "why." Use the development or update of your Profile of a Learner to help your learning community determine and understand the goals behind personalized learning. You can use these goals to help direct change in your classroom, school or district.

experiences and post-secondary goals. They started by asking the community what skills they wanted their children to have by the time they graduated. They also asked what their hopes and dreams were for their children. Parents and educators began generating lists of skills, and then the group moved on to creating

competencies. Steiner learned an important lesson through this process: learners also needed to be included.

In every class, educators link the Portrait of a Graduate competencies and attributes to the standard being taught.

When the district brought learners into the conversation, they began to make adjustments based on feedback. The group continued to seek feedback from learners, educators, parents and colleges. Steiner shared that the process required him to push colleges to think past simply listing academic skills. While those academic skills are incorporated into the portrait, Steiner also wanted colleges to consider the “life-ready skills” learners need to be successful in courses and programs. The development of the Portrait of a Graduate wasn’t just a mindset shift for learners and educators but for the broader community as well.

The skills and competencies outlined in Northern Cass’ Portrait of a Graduate are deeply intertwined with learners’ experiences. For example, when a community member came to speak with learners about entrepreneurship, learners, the educator and the guest speaker

all knew which Portrait skills the guest lesson was targeting to support. Learners demonstrate mastery of the Portrait skills at various learning stages. In every class, educators link the Portrait of a Graduate competencies and attributes to the standard being taught. In grades three through 12, learners are given feedback on what Portrait of a Graduate skills and competencies they think were taught in the classes, and educators can adjust their practices based on that feedback. In grades three, five and eight, learners do a community presentation and are given feedback on the development of their Portrait of a Graduate skills. To graduate, seniors have a capstone requirement where they demonstrate mastery of these skills.

Northern Cass’ development and use of their Portrait of a Graduate has not only changed the way learners learn but it has changed the mindset of the community. Superintendent Steiner says their new culture helps ensure that every learner has postsecondary plans. Additionally, learners and the community now understand that there are a variety of postsecondary options and that postsecondary success doesn’t only look like attending a four-year college. Superintendent Steiner shared that parents now also embrace the idea that kids should drive their educational experiences and that it results in better learning outcomes for all learners.



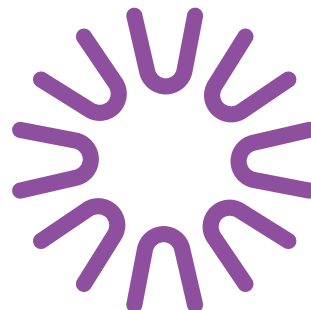
Resources and Partnerships

Imagine If...

After visiting a nearby school district that implements personalized learning practices at a large scale, a teacher wants to implement one of the ideas she saw on the visit.

After giving it some thought, she realizes that it might make sense to connect with one of the district administrators about leveraging community partnerships to support her efforts. Before implementing the idea, the teacher and the district administrator talk about the “why” behind the idea and also discuss what success might look like. To gauge success, they decide to ask learners about the experience and also connect it to the competencies from their Profile of a Learner. The teacher is able to test the idea in her classroom.

The personalized learning experience is an overwhelming success among her learners. Following the activity, she holds a discussion with her class about what they learned from the experience. After hearing how impactful the experience was for learners, the teacher shares the success with her district administrator. The teacher and the district administrator want to start to scale this activity to other classes in the district. The teacher and district administrator chat with their community partner to discuss what it might look like to make this experience accessible to learners throughout the district and how best to scale these efforts.



2

What It Is and Ways to Approach It

Personalized approaches to education aim to provide a unique set of resources and experiences. To obtain the variety of resources that make personalized learning a success.

Pennsylvania schools and school districts can form partnerships with local businesses or other educational entities who may have resources and opportunities that can be shared. In Pennsylvania, we've seen school districts think outside the box to obtain resources and build partnerships that help make personalized learning a success.

When deciding how best to target partnerships and resources, schools and districts can individualize holistic support and well-rounded learner experiences. This means that learners receive support to fulfill their whole-child needs including access to food services, technology and/or other learning materials as well as a safe learning environment. The next priority then becomes providing the personalized approaches to learning that help them become more engaged in their learning experiences. This could look like experiences outside of the classroom that provide hands-on learning, guest speakers and unique learning modules.

Partnerships are key to many of the district spotlights in this guide. By building strong partnerships with businesses and other educational entities in their community, schools and districts can provide learners unique learning experiences without necessarily spending additional dollars. For example, a school district may partner with a local business that needs additional labor and can provide learners with training in a field of interest. Other education organizations, like local colleges, may want to provide some of the same services as a school district, and by working together the two can provide services for a lower cost. Nonprofits may also have additional resources or programs to support schools looking to innovate and provide more personalized learning options. In Pennsylvania, school districts may find it useful to team up with their local [intermediate unit](#) to help leverage their resources and support this work.



District Spotlights

Pequea Valley

[Pequea Valley School District](#) has been working to personalize K-12 learning for over a decade and has leveraged a diverse array of partnerships to do so. The district, located between Harrisburg and Philadelphia, serves approximately 1,600 learners, 60 percent of which are economically disadvantaged.

During the past 13 years under Superintendent Dr. Erik Orndorff, Pequea Valley has reimagined how learning takes place in their district.

This reimagining started with the district's realization that not all learners were graduating prepared for what comes next. They found that only about 35 percent of Pequea Valley learners were going into postsecondary education, and the district realized too many of the remaining 65 percent weren't graduating with a plan for what to do after high school. Leaders like Superintendent Orndorff decided that the district needed to break down the many industrial-era structures that form the basis of today's education system and reinvent its K-12 experience.

Pequea Valley first began what the district calls [mass customized learning](#) by grounding it in their Portrait of a Graduate. A next step was to shift the district's organizational structures, such as grounding learning in location and time rather than mastery, and introducing a one-to-one technology policy. The district also asked teachers to provide more autonomy for learners in their lesson plans, create more opportunities for learners to demonstrate mastery and shift to proficiency-based grading. These shifts have enabled the district to expand career opportunities for all learners such as through partnering with community businesses where learners have opportunities to earn credit for experiences outside of the traditional classroom.

Key Takeaways

- Pequea Valley's partnerships with state education partners, its local community and its educators have been key for developing their portrait-aligned work
- Pequea Valley has achieved large scale internship participation by creating a dedicated staff position to support those opportunities
- Pequea Valley modified their graduation requirements to allow for more freedom of choice and introduced personalized learning plans to support learners

Pequea Valley also strives to help learners develop the human capital to have a successful career. The district helps learners identify what they want to do following graduation and plan for how to get there. To facilitate this, learners have personalized learning plans that grow and evolve as they learn and have new experiences. The district has also reduced their graduation requirements from thirty-two credits to twenty-four to give learners flexibility to have authentic learning experiences. This work has been informed through partnerships with regional groups like Pequea's local intermediate unit, the Pennsylvania Superintendents Association and the state department of education. The intermediate unit in particular was helpful as a partner in unpacking and crosswalking

academic standards as they thought about what it truly meant to demonstrate proficiency in each of them.

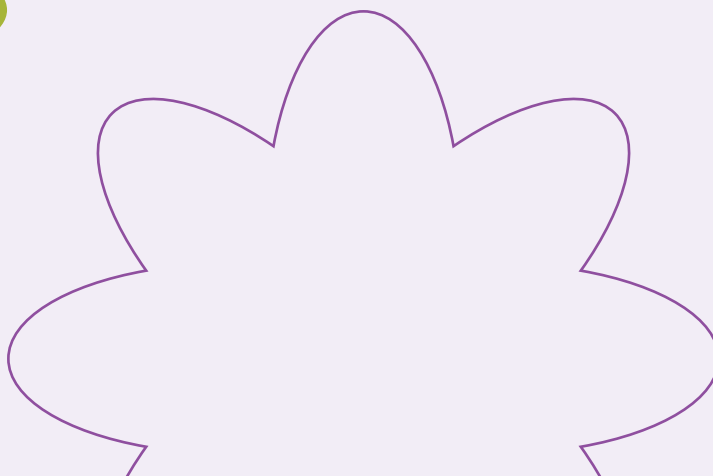
Pequea Valley also engages employers in co-designing learning experiences. Increased access to internships has been a key outcome of this work. The district created a dedicated staff position who acts as the teacher of record for learners participating in internships. Learners are able to use these internships to earn credit toward graduation by showing their mastery of academic standards through these experiences. The district is also building a new shop space in their career tech center, which starts in 11th grade, so the district can bring employers into schools to help learners earn credentials. As a result of these actions, about half of all seniors in Pequea Valley now participate in an internship program.

The partnerships developed through community engagement have been key to Pequea Valley's success at personalizing learning experiences. Orndorff shared how instrumental the support of their local school board has been, as well as initiatives like [Pequea Valley Together](#), which strives to help the community break the cycle of poverty and help learners make progress toward achieving their postsecondary plans. The district also brings employers into Pequea Valley's career

readiness work, which has been key to creating opportunities for learners. As an example, Orndorf highlighted how Tyson, which runs a manufacturing center, devised a training program to help kids prepare for a good paying job right out of high school.

The district helps learners identify what they want to do following graduation and plan for how to get there.

Orndorf has some words of wisdom for districts looking to follow a path similar to Pequea Valley's. He emphasizes that trust among adults is crucial. If adults don't trust each other and treat each other with respect then, in his experience, there won't be much they can do for kids. He also emphasizes that you can't do this work alone. You need teachers, leaders, administrators and the broader community to truly create opportunities for learners. This also extends to partners outside of the community, like intermediate units or the state department of education, which can help districts understand how to exercise creativity within existing state policy structures. In sum, personalizing learning isn't possible without setting a clear vision that is supported by adults throughout the community.



Northgate

[Northgate](#) is a small school district located just outside of Pittsburgh. With just under 1,100 learners in the K-12 school district and a little under two miles of campus, their smaller size allows them to provide targeted personalized supports for learners.

The district's size also means they have limited resources to work with. When Northgate School District's community was struggling, the close knit community came together and began to think outside the box about how it could use its small size and flexibility to expand what was possible for students.

Dr. Jeffrey Evancho is the director of partnerships and equity in the district. Evancho was brought to Northgate School District to help them grow development and innovation in the district. Evancho's primary focus was building a relationship with the local hospital. The school district saw this as an opportunity to leverage community ties and build a symbiotic relationship between the school district and the hospital. The physical space and need for additional labor created an opportunity for Northgate to grow its campus and offer learners unique learning experiences.

Evancho teamed up with the hospital to create space for the school district in the building. Since the school occupies a floor in the hospital, they can easily send learners to the various businesses that occupy some of the free space as well as the hospital itself. Evancho says "when you bring people into the same space, things happen." Businesses that have space in the hospital include [AlphaLab](#), an organization that provides funding to medical technology start-up firms and [Inglis House](#), whose branch at the hospital focuses on retrofitting homes for children who are differently abled.

Northgate School District leveraged flexibility so that learners that engage in career exploration opportunities at the hospital or adjoining businesses can receive credit. At the district level, they developed an internship

Key Takeaways

- Leverage the flexibility in the [state instructional time policy](#) to provide learners with experiences outside of the classroom. At Northgate, learners access career exploration opportunities. This same area of flexibility allows districts to create schedules that enable personalized learning. At Northgate, the district creates block schedules that allow learners to spend more time at internships and other personalized learning opportunities outside of the school.
- Invest in relationships in your community and find common goals. Think creatively about how the needs of local entities might complement the needs and interests of your learners.

opportunity to ensure that these learning experiences count as school credit as long as they last for at least 120 hours. This means that learners not only get valuable educational experiences but they also get school credit and pay. Northgate has leveraged block scheduling to make this work. While experiences in the medical field are abundant, learners can also join the business side of the work, the kitchen for culinary experience and more. Everything in the building is in the intersection of education, medicine and workforce development.

Northgate School District is an exemplar of what can happen when you get innovative people thinking creatively about what it means to educate learners. By investing in people and their community, Northgate has created an incredibly personalized learning environment for learners.

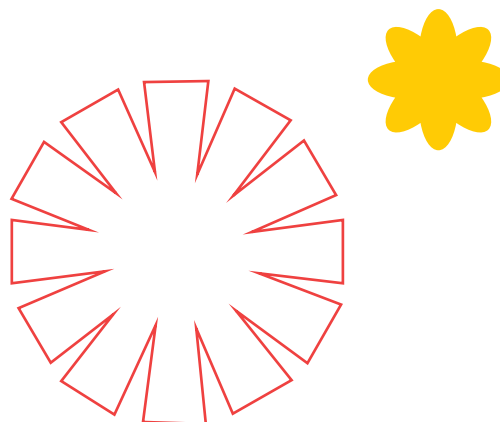
Imagine If...

A district wants to move beyond traditional bell schedules and school calendars as well as age-defined grade structures. District leaders know that they have [opportunities in Pennsylvania code](#) to creatively organize learning by meeting either the 180 days of instruction or the hours of instruction requirement. Leaders also know that they have freedom under [code](#) to organize educational programs in a way that works best for them, especially in how they operate their [high school programs](#).

The district starts by holding discussions with the broader community about the need for rethinking where, when and how learning takes place to ensure that it is responsive to the needs of both learners and the broader community. They collectively explore what learning spaces could look like in a more innovative system and discuss how to reimagine the way that time is utilized so learners have greater voice and choice in their learning.

After discussions, the district decides to stick with its 180-day schedule but to think creatively about when and where learning takes place within those 180 days. District leaders start with a handful of pilots in some of their schools to explore different modes of organizing learning experiences. As these pilots are implemented, school level staff learn from them and make adjustments. The pilots that are successful are then expanded and scaled across the entire district.

This work results in learners having access to a variety of learning experiences that give them flexibility in where they learn and how they demonstrate mastery of the traits in the district's Portrait of a Learner as well as state academic standards. The district ultimately creates customized spaces for learning groups of different sizes, both in traditional classroom settings as well as student-created spaces for learning throughout the school. Learner groupings are no longer based primarily on age and are adjusted based on learner interest and needs. The instructional day now also includes dedicated time for the regular teacher collaboration and professional development needed to support these new systems and structures.



3

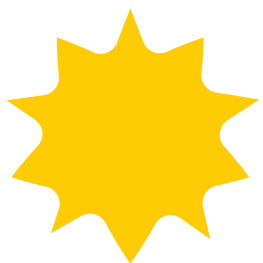
What It Is and Ways to Approach It

Schools and districts should approach personalizing learning by rethinking both the physical and organizational structure of school. Innovative schools do this by pushing the boundaries of when and where learning can occur.

As opposed to traditional school structures that are governed by learning grounded in a classroom and bell schedules, schools that embrace personalization utilize more flexible organizational structures, both in terms of the timing and pace of learning throughout the school day. For example, school schedules might create more time for learners to choose what they will work on at any particular moment. Innovative school structures create flexibility for when, how and where standards and competencies can be mastered and graduation requirements met. Sometimes this will be in a classroom environment through content-level courses, but it could also as easily take place in cross-curricular learning opportunities facilitated through relevant learning experiences such as project- or problem-based opportunities.

Districts that adopt innovative structures also consider the passions and interests of their learners and think about how to best design learning experiences that meet their needs.

As schools and districts redesign their experiences, they could consider how to ensure that all learners are required to master both rigorous academic content as well as the durable skills necessary for success in life. Rethinking how schools are structured cannot come at the expense of ensuring learners continue to advance in their learning



3

District Spotlights

Seneca Valley

Seneca Valley School District is rethinking many of its school structures in its quest to personalize student learning. Located in Butler County in western Pennsylvania, Seneca Valley serves [approximately 7,400 learners](#). Seneca Valley grounds its [vision](#) for personalizing learning in a focus on the whole child as a means of preparing learners to become productive members of society, as articulated in its [Profile of a Learner](#) (to be launched in early 2025). One of Seneca Valley's key structural mechanisms for achieving this is its cyber program.

Dr. Denise Manganello, Principal of Seneca Valley's Academy of Choice, shares that Seneca Valley's [cyber program](#) began in 2007 with a handful of learners taking online courses. The program has since grown by leaps and bounds, and is now used by an estimated 2 out of every 7 learners in the district. The cyber program allows learners from kindergarten through twelfth grade to pursue their academic studies both synchronously and asynchronously. The district employs 24 full time cyber teachers who teach fully online. These teachers provide live sessions during the week as well as pre-recorded lessons that learners can access at different times throughout the day. This structure allows learners to personalize their learning by moving beyond the bounds of the traditional class periods. For example, a high school learner could choose to take electives or participate in sports or performing arts during the day and core content classes via the cyber program in the evening. Learners participating in the cyber program are also able to move at a pace that makes sense for them while gaining needed support along the way.

Seneca Valley has taken other steps to transform how their schools are structured. For example, the district offers a molecular biology lab with rigorous experiences in research and laboratory skills. Learners receive credit for the

Key Takeaways

- Seneca Valley's cyber program offerings allow for learners to engage in learning at a time and place of their choosing, allowing in turn for increased personalization
- The district has robustly staffed the cyber program to ensure it is accessible to all learners
- Seneca Valley's cyber program started small and took time and care to grow, which is typical of similar transformative initiatives

biotech lab and participate in it because of their strong interest in this area. They also provide learners with what they refer to as "advanced experiences," which allow learners to undergo independent studies overseen by an educator in areas about which they are passionate. Learners and educators collaborate to develop a plan, timeline and intended outcomes for the experience. The district also holds community learning days where members of the community come to schools and use their expertise to help learners explore topics of special interest to them. In the past, learners have participated in activities like gardening or leaf collecting.

A high school learner could choose to take electives or participate in sports or performing arts during the day and core content classes via the cyber program in the evening

Advancing personalized learning takes a village, and Seneca Valley has embraced this reality. Manganello shares how one assistant superintendent was key to jumpstarting the cyber program and drove the work initially. Seneca Valley's village also extends beyond the school building by leveraging community learning days and engaging local

businesses to create opportunities for learners. Important regional and state level actors like [Remake Learning](#) and the [Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators](#) engage with Seneca Valley as valuable partners for learning and for helping share best practices. Manganello also shared that Pennsylvania's department of education and their regional intermediate unit have been valuable resources in helping clarify the state's policy environment when questions arise.

Manganello has some important words of advice for other districts: big things like their cyber program often come from small starts. She encourages districts to start something small, because, in her words, you never know where it will go!

Duquesne City

[Duquesne City School District](#) is a small K-8 school district located in the east hills of Allegheny County. Located in one smaller building, the district enrolls just under 500 learners. Until recently it only served elementary students, and has now expanded to include middle school learners. Educators at Duquesne City have prioritized personalized approaches to learning to give their learner population a well-rounded learning experience. Using learning pathways and creative scheduling, the district helps make sure that these learners have a high quality learning experience.

One of the unique things about Duquesne City School District is that their learner population is a relatively transient group, with learners moving into and out of the district fairly frequently. This can present a challenge for developing culture. To help grow a strong school culture, the district has an intentional homeroom class structure. The district developed a house system using the [Ron Clark Academy](#) method. Seventh and eighth grade learners are sorted into a house as a means of creating smaller communities in the school with shared values. The school uses the Courage, Friendship, Givers and Dreamers houses in their model. Learners learn about

Key Takeaways

- In Pennsylvania, school districts are required to submit a professional education plan every three years. To get creative about how to find the time to enable collaboration as part of professional learning, Duquesne City invites community members to guest teach.
- Use creative scheduling and activities to build culture. At Duquesne City, the district has created a strong community by using homeroom assignments with fun themes and activities.

their house values and begin developing strong bonds with one another during the process. The house becomes their homeroom for the year and they participate in competitions at the end of the month.

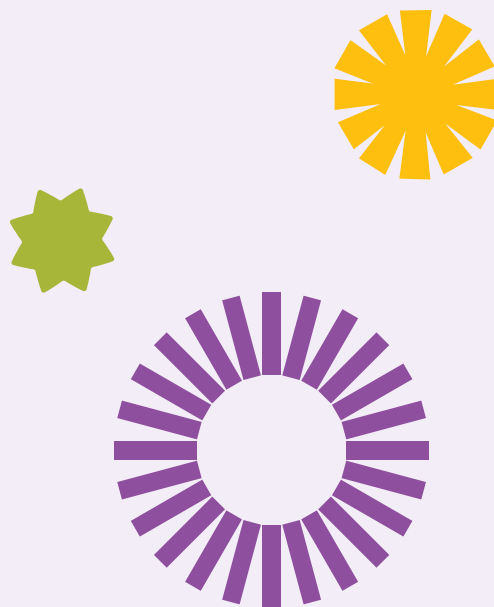
In the classroom, the district also uses personalized structures to make sure learners get the support they need to succeed academically. With learning paths, learners get a basic breakdown of the lesson for the day and are then separated into levels based on pre-assessments. This allows learners to work with peers who are at similar readiness levels. While learners are working, the teacher provides targeted small group and one-on-one support. This allows learners to practice relevant skills based on their level of readiness while still working toward achieving competency in the same standards and skills as their classmates.

The district initially pursued personalized learning as part of school improvement efforts, but they quickly realized that it also had a strong positive impact on learners.

Duquesne City School District has created structures to help support learners and leverage funding and partnership opportunities in their small district. Superintendent Dr. Sue Mariani shared that one of the biggest barriers to supporting teachers is limited time. As a way of creating time to help teachers develop personalized learning plans, the district partners with organizations to come in once a month for a couple hours and provide learners with unique learning experiences. For example, [The Union Project](#) and [Arts Education Collaborative](#) have come to campus to provide art education to learners in the district. Dr. Jamie Schmidt, chief academic officer/federal programs coordinator says that not only do the learners really look forward to these days, but it also gives teachers more time for professional development and prep while learners have experiences with outside organizations.

Duquesne City School District is an exemplar in creating a “big school” experience, with lots of options for learners, in a small school environment. The district has leveraged programs like the [World of Work](#) to help learners “explore careers that match their interests through classroom projects, hands-on experiences, and visits from real-world professionals.” The [district has also teamed up](#) with the Boys & Girls Clubs of Western Pennsylvania to offer out-of-school-time learning experiences.

Duquesne City has worked with the state department of education to help roll out some of this work as part of their improvement plan efforts. Mariani shared that the department has provided them with technical assistance and when they want to try something new “it was never a ‘no,’ it was just ‘tell us more.’” The district initially pursued personalized learning as part of school improvement efforts, but they quickly realized that it also had a strong positive impact on learners. Learners felt like they belonged in the community and the district’s attendance rates increased as a result. Duquesne City plans to continue growing their personalized learning approaches.



ACTION AREA 4

Career-Connected Learning

Imagine If...

A school district pursuing personalization decides to dramatically expand the variety of career connected learning experiences it offers. It knows that this is key to giving learners the opportunity to explore their passions and to graduate better prepared for their lives after graduation.

District leaders know that while state [code](#) describes what must be provided in a high school program and through planned instruction, they have freedom to determine the specific number of credits that learners will need to graduate. The district also decides to explore the range of [statutorily established](#) pathways that learners can use to meet graduation requirements. After consulting the Pennsylvania Department of Education's pathways [background information](#) and [toolkit](#), they also engage directly with department staff to help them understand what is possible within these flexibilities.

The district starts this work by centering it in their Portrait of a Graduate, which creates the vision for what they want their learners to accomplish. They hold extensive conversations with their entire community, including business and industry, so that everyone is engaged in creating these career-connected opportunities. The district begins to identify members of their community through these conversations that can help co-create these new opportunities. This includes but is not limited to nonprofits, local businesses, government entities and other community-based groups.

The district next decides to focus on creating a variety of smaller programs, with the intention of identifying the ones that are most successful

and scaling them up. As these opportunities are created, the district makes space for additional relationship development necessary to sustain existing partnerships and create new ones over time. The district also recognizes the importance of providing structures to help learners take advantage of these pathways and builds career exposure, college guidance and opportunities for networking into its technology platforms and guidance and counseling opportunities. The district engages regularly with its local intermediate units as well as the state department of education to identify the right statutory pathways that learners can use throughout these experiences to demonstrate their progress toward academic standards in a way that is meaningful to them.

After several years, the district has a wide range of on- and off-campus career-connected learning opportunities. Because they grounded their initial conversations in their portrait, these experiences allow learners to explore their interests and passions while also demonstrating mastery of the knowledge, skills and dispositions that they need to graduate from high school. The district has also developed a robust set of supports to empower all learners to take advantage of these opportunities. These supports are embedded in district structures such as technology platforms, counseling and guidance systems and transportation.

4

What It Is and Ways to Approach It

Career-connected learning experiences are a crucial component in any efforts to personalize learning. They give learners an opportunity to move beyond traditional coursework and engage in learning experiences that prepare them for future success and help them explore their passions and interests.

One possible first step is for schools and districts to consider how to advance these opportunities to ensure they align to a vision for learner success that prepares learners for readiness in future careers. Many schools and districts achieve this through a Portrait or Profile of a Graduate. Districts who haven't yet taken this step could use [Pennsylvania's Career Ready Skills](#) as an alternative framework, or could draw on the frameworks included by districts throughout this guide to inform their own.

Districts could also consider how to optimize state and federal funding streams to advance access to career-connected learning. Schools and districts can consider how best to take steps that ensure all learners have access to these learning opportunities by supporting learners through means such as creative scheduling and providing learner supports so that all learners can access these experiences.

Schools and districts could also consider offering a broad range of opportunities that meet all learners' needs. In high school, career-connected learning experiences could include coursework offered through career and technical education courses or dual credit opportunities, as well as formal apprenticeships. Schools and districts can also go beyond formal coursework and develop opportunities such as work-based learning or less formal community engagement or career exploration experiences. Career-connected learning can be made available at the elementary and middle school level by allowing learners to explore interesting careers at an early age. The Beaver Area and South Fayette's examples show what this could look like.

Finally, schools and districts should ideally consider how to engage the broader community in creating these experiences. As a best practice, career-connected learning is grounded in the community. This requires building relationships to co-develop opportunities based on community needs that also give learners meaningful opportunities to explore their interests. You'll see examples throughout this guide, including this section, of how schools and districts have built strategic partnerships within their communities to create meaningful opportunities for their learners.



4

District Spotlights

Beaver Area

[Beaver Area School District](#) is a mid-sized district with two elementary schools, a middle school and a high school north of Pittsburgh. Beaver Area has worked hard to create a system of education that provides a range of experiences to its learners.

Superintendent Dr. Sean Aiken says that their culture and their people are what makes the district such a great place. The community places a high value on education, collaboration and community engagement. The district and the community have collaborated to push education beyond the status quo and reimagine what is possible for learners. Personalized learning and preparing learners for postsecondary career readiness is at the core of their work.

To get started, the district focused on adopting a new mission and vision that put personalized learning at the forefront of everyone's minds, including community members. To make the mission and vision statements more than just words on paper, the district prioritized innovative approaches to personalized learning to help achieve these goals. Aiken says that "change isn't easy, but there are so many teachers in this district that have embraced the changes." His goal as superintendent is to have his office serve as a guardrail, supporting the staff to try new things and encouraging them to move forward and seek opportunities for innovation.

The district has a clear vision:

The Beaver Area School District engages all learners in an exemplary and comprehensive educational program that enables all learners to achieve individual success through personalized learning opportunities, rigorous and relevant academics, future-driven practices and career exploration.

Key Takeaways

- Prioritize career exploration. Beaver Area School District embraces learning experiences that happen outside of textbooks and helps learners explore different types of career opportunities. The district has a plethora of options for learners to try and offers learners the opportunity to get certifications in some areas.
- Leverage funding opportunities like [Remake Learning Moonshot Grants](#) and [Tugboat Grants](#), and other local funding opportunities to fund career-connected learning experiences.

To make this vision a reality, the district has created a wide range of learning opportunities to help learners get the experiences they need to be college and career ready. The district refers to these as learning empowerment programs and they have an entire [website page](#) dedicated to them.

Learners at Beaver Area School District can choose from a variety of relevant learning experiences including [Esports](#), [Fly like a Girl Drone Academy](#) and [Robotics](#). To fund these learning experiences, the district has leveraged [Remake Learning Moonshot Grants](#) and [Tugboat Grants](#) as well as grants from the [Beaver Education Foundation](#). Learners can also get involved in career exploration opportunities at their schools. For example, [STAP \(Student Technology Assistance Program\)](#) gives learners the opportunity to

take an independent study course to learn about information technology and support the Information Technology (IT) department at their schools. By the time learners are in eighth grade they can independently run their own technology-based projects, like podcasts. Learners can even choose to get certified in different areas of IT and select specific departments like hardware or website creation that align best with their interests.

Access to a variety of career-connected educational experiences has been incredibly impactful on learners. Assistant Superintendent Emily Sanders shared the importance of

having less traditional learning experiences, stating that these experiences help engage a population of learners who might otherwise be disinterested in school. She also shared that when new learners come to the district, counselors can help them find a program that interests them. By creating these small learning environments that speak to a learner's passions and interests, learners are more easily able to find community in the district. Learners can use these experiences to gain valuable insights into their own interests while building important social connections, leading to an incredibly powerful and well-rounded learning experience.

South Fayette Township

[South Fayette Township School District](#), has been working for years to advance personalization and career-connected learning experiences, and is considered a leader in their region. The district is located in southwestern Pennsylvania and serves approximately 3,500 learners. District Superintendent of Schools Dr. Michelle Miller shares that the district has had a long history of advancing personalization, but that the work really took off post-COVID. At that point, the district knew they had to rebuild and recalibrate to ensure that they were providing learners with enriching opportunities to prepare them for their future.

South Fayette's approach to personalization focuses on their learner-centered commitment to ensure that all learners have a "future-focused, student-centered and innovation-driven education." The district looks at personalization in a comprehensive and holistic way that includes a focus on supporting the well-being of the whole learner. Miller says that this work is grounded in the district's [strategic plan](#) and its Portrait of a Lion Learner, which articulates the key skills and dispositions learners need to be future-ready.

One of South Fayette's key strategic goals is to increase future-focused, high quality learning opportunities for all learners.

Key Takeaways

- South Fayette Township approaches personalization by making little bets on small programs that serve as entry points to large scale change
- The district's forensic science program is an example of a little bet that has paid off with increased offerings due to high learner interest
- The district encourages learners to stack a variety of engaging learning experiences together to make their education journey meaningful to them

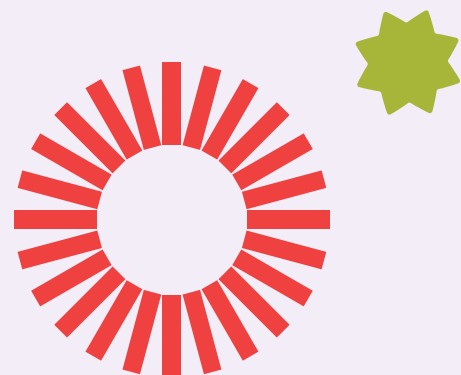
Director of Innovation and Strategic Partnerships Dr. Matthew Callison says that their goal is to present personalized opportunities to learners and allow them to chart their own path. Practically, the district likes to make “little bets” on programs that might start small, but are entry points to potentially larger scale change. Miller and Callison cite their forensic science program as an example. The forensic science program started off as a single small scale opportunity after school. Because of increasing demand, the district converted it to a regular course that counts for science credit, and now they have trouble providing enough access because of the high level of learner interest. Callison says that the important aspect of the little bets is not to expect that each one will succeed. People have to approach them knowing that some little bets will fail, that it’s okay for that to happen and the end goal is to fail forward.

Stacking focuses on bringing together enrichment opportunities from courses, electives, extracurriculars and learner engagement opportunities to ensure learners are prepared for the future they want.

South Fayette has also worked to develop a broad range of career connected opportunities for their learners. Their goal is to ensure that all learners have opportunities to apply their skills and knowledge, providing enrichment for all learners, not just those who might be traditionally tagged as gifted. Critically, this enrichment gives learners opportunities to engage directly with career experiences across all grade levels, not just in high school. Miller and Callison gave the examples of 2nd graders who took on a client from the community to help them design a miniature golf course and 3rd grade learners who created enrichment opportunities for birds in a national aviary.

At the high school level, learners are able to pursue enrichment through more diverse course selection, participation in extracurriculars, and project-based learning. The district is pursuing a strategy that they call “stacking.” Stacking focuses on bringing together enrichment opportunities from courses, electives, extracurriculars and learner engagement opportunities to ensure learners are prepared for the future they want. Learners have agency in how they choose what goes into their stack. Some learners might engage in experiences in the medical field, some might create phone apps and others might decide to submit their writing to national publications. The district also offers a wide range of district-sponsored activities from esports to computer science pathways to ensure learners are able to find opportunities and create a stack that is meaningful to them.

Miller and Callison emphasize that partners have been key to this work. Callison goes so far as to say that the most important thing when building new opportunities and placing little bets is the partner. These partners can provide access to new opportunities, crucial support resources and help teachers and learners expand their thinking. This connects to a key piece of advice they have for other districts, which is to engage with others across your region. This could be other school districts but should in their eyes also include higher education, teacher preparation programs, companies, intermediate units and others who can help build out career-connected opportunities for learners of all ages. If the goal is to begin placing little bets similar to South Fayette, both Miller and Callison advise that these partnerships are the most important place to start.



ACTION AREA 5

Professional Learning

Imagine If...

A school district has begun implementing personalized learning strategies across all schools in the district. To support educators as they adjust their teaching practices, the district superintendent wants to offer professional learning opportunities. The first thing the superintendent does is survey educators to get a sense of the type of professional learning educators want to participate in.

To do this, the superintendent visits schools to see how implementation is going and to have empathetic conversations with educators about what they need. The superintendent also offers anonymous surveys to educators across the district. Using the feedback from educators and the superintendent's own observations, a range of new professional learning opportunities are made available. Educators choose which learning opportunities interest them the most. After professional learning opportunities, educators meet to collaborate and share what they learned. In some cases, schools have teachers meet in groups based on the grade level(s) or subject areas in which they teach.

In recognition of this cultural shift, the district superintendent thinks it's important that teacher evaluations contain components to measure educator growth and success in implementing personalized learning practices. The superintendent knows that in Pennsylvania, the district can design their own [educator evaluation system](#) rather than using the state's. The superintendent works with educator leaders to help think through what this will look like. The group's proposed evaluation plan includes educator competencies that feel vital for successful implementation of personalized learning. Once they have a sense of what the new evaluation framework will look like, the group begins working with the Pennsylvania Department of Education to get the evaluation system approved. As part of that, they must compare how their proposed evaluation plan aligns with the [Danielson Framework](#).



What It Is and Ways to Approach It

Teachers and education support staff are critical to learner engagement and learning in a personalized learning setting. In a personalized learning setting, educators are responsible for partnering with learners in designing and delivering instruction and allowing learners to learn in a way that empowers and engages them.

For example, some learners may prefer individual study time while others may prefer group settings. While learning experiences can direct learners toward mastery of the same competencies, educators would ideally have a variety of tools in their toolboxes to help learners get there. Because most educators have training in more traditional methods of instruction, they will often require support and training to do this successfully.

Teacher preparation and professional learning tailored to help educators provide personalized learning can also reflect those same practices. For example, professional learning opportunities can include a variety of options and allow educators to gain a broad range of skills to support teaching as well as the opportunity to deepen their knowledge of specific teaching and learning practices. Doing so creates a system of education that embodies and actualizes these values. While schools and districts don't directly provide teacher preparation, they do have an opportunity to work with preparation programs to advocate that personalized learning strategies be incorporated into their curriculum.

As personalized learning practices continue to grow, continued professional learning to support educators is important. Incorporating personalized learning practices into your classroom involves multiple steps of implementation. As educators add greater depth and scope to their personalized learning practices, they benefit from professional learning opportunities that support these goals. In some cases, this may look like offering varying opportunities for educators, while in other cases a network for peer-to-peer learning may be preferable. While it can be challenging to find time to invest in professional learning, this investment is crucial for the success of personalized learning and the retention of educators. Education leaders and administrators can think creatively about how to ensure this time is prioritized, which we've already seen from many Pennsylvania school districts.

A final component to supporting professional learning through this process is creating a system of evaluation that is based on clearly articulated competencies that speak to the values of personalized learning. Instruction in a personalized learning environment looks different than in a traditional classroom. Teacher evaluation systems in school districts with personalized learning values and practices can recognize that, like learners, teachers may move at varying paces toward implementation. In Pennsylvania, districts are taking advantage of [local ratings tools](#) and personalized evaluation criteria.



District Spotlights

Butler Area

[Butler Area School District](#) is located in southwestern Pennsylvania and covers 150 square miles. The district serves about 6,000 learners, about 46 percent of which are economically disadvantaged. In recent years the town of Butler has experienced a decline in the population, with the school system changing in response. To help make sure that learners are prepared for the ever changing demands of the workforce, the district developed their [Portrait of the Graduate](#) as the foundation of their work.

The creation of their Portrait of a Graduate required a lot of workshopping. Superintendent Dr. Brian White shared that he worked closely with the community to re-envision how personalized instruction could look within the schools and how it could benefit learners. Using grant money, educators from the district were able to go visit schools that were further along in their personalization journey. Once educators got a sense of what a new era of learning could entail, the district got to work developing their Portrait of the Graduate.

While most districts in the state use the state's teacher evaluation system, Butler Area School District wanted to personalize this as well. To accomplish this, they got approval from the Pennsylvania Department of Education to develop a teacher evaluation system that more directly incorporated personalized learning values. Butler Area School District wanted to create a system based on Remake Learning's [Personalized Learning Framework](#). To get approval, the district had to provide a crosswalk between the proposed evaluation and framework with the state's evaluation and the [Danielson framework](#). The district's new teacher evaluation tool allows them to evaluate educators with the elements of personalized learning at the center.

Key Takeaways

- Leverage Pennsylvania's policy flexibility that enables districts to create a personalized [educator evaluation system](#). Butler Area School District obtained approval from the state department of education to use an evaluation system that incorporates personalized learning values.
- Provide educators with time and support to develop skills and competencies. Butler Area School District's evaluation system evaluates teachers on the basis of proficiency and includes both numerical values and descriptions.

Most recently, Butler Area School District has started to focus on how they can provide support to educators to help ensure that learners are getting a personalized approach to education. Using the Portrait of a Graduate as a guide, the district developed educator competencies. The educator competencies are listed as progressions. The evaluation allows educators to be scored by both numerical values as well as through descriptions. This setup allows educators to develop these skills in the same way they expect learners to move toward proficiency of standards.

The evaluation allows educators to be scored by both numerical values as well as through descriptions. This setup allows educators to develop these skills in the same way they expect learners to move towards proficiency of standards.

This movement toward personalized learning has led to mindset shifts among both learners and the broader community. White shared that these changes to engender personalized learning in the district have already improved learner outcomes. He's seen greater engagement and agency among learners.

There's less conflict among learners and over time he believes he'll see increases in other important areas like graduation rates. White says that the entire culture and tone of the buildings has changed. Each school developed its own area of culture to focus on, bringing educators, parents and community members on to advisory boards to help accomplish this.

Butler Area School District has been highlighted in recent stories by both [KnowledgeWorks](#) and [Remake Learning](#) because of their innovative approaches to personalized learning. When asked if he had any advice for Pennsylvania school districts interested in pursuing this kind of work, White said, "Let the stakeholders drive where the work is going to go." Butler Area School district has been extremely intentional about bringing the community onboard with cultural changes, which is likely a reason they've had such success.

Burrell

[Burrell School District](#) is working to personalize student learning and professional learning in a number of ways. Located northeast of Pittsburgh in Westmorland County, Burrell serves approximately [1,750 learners](#). The district began its personalized learning work in 2018 and has centered its high school work around its learner profiles with the possibility of extending it to all grades.

Burrell's learner profiles are intended to create a whole picture of each child so their teachers can help them connect their passions to meaningful learning experiences. They include both academic elements and durable skills, which are centered around [Pennsylvania's Career Ready Skills](#). Learners complete a series of questionnaires to identify strengths, challenges and passions. The resulting profiles are digitized and provided to teachers to help them better understand how to meet the needs of each individual learner. The district has also put a number of structures in place to help operationalize its learning profiles.

Key Takeaways

- Burrell leveraged Pennsylvania's Career Ready skills to help them emphasize both academics and higher order durable skills
- The district has built out a variety of professional learning opportunities for educators and tied professional learning to its vision for personalization
- Educators have taken steps to align their curriculum with the district's vision for personalization

Learners participate in a social-emotional learning period as well as a senior seminar in high school. Learners also work with staff called future-ready coaches to think about how to connect their learner profiles to their aspirations for what they want to do post high school. This directly leads to learner experiences that take place outside of the classroom, such as on the job learning, networking and other career experiences. A user guide is provided to parents on the learner profile to help facilitate conversations.

Changes don't need to result in blowing up the whole system; creating individual opportunities for students who are not being served well under the existing system can mean all the difference in the world.

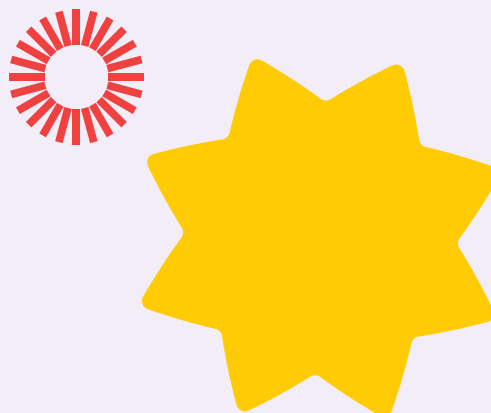
None of this work would be possible without Burrell's efforts to rethink how it trains and supports educators. Dr. Autumn Turk, Stewart School Principal and Director of Curriculum and Development, shares that while the district previously had a lot of great professional development, it wasn't resulting in the types of shifts to instruction that they needed as they centered their learner profiles. The district started with cohort-based professional development in 2016 in the DuFour model of Professional Learning Communities.

The district built on this work by using Elementary and Secondary School Relief Fund dollars and then district dollars to hire personalized learning coaches for every building to support implementation. Each department went through an extensive professional learning process focused around personalized learning strategies. This resulted in [a curriculum](#) that aligns with that process. The district has also tied adult learning to higher level competencies aligned with the district's vision around personalization.

Additionally, Burrell has focused on prioritizing habits of mind aligned to their vision when bringing new teachers into the district.

As well as learner profiles and teacher development, Burrell has taken steps to align other district-level structures to their vision for personalization. For example, they've gone to standards-based grading from K through 8, and grades K-3 are completely competency-based. They're also working toward a competency-based high school report card, acknowledging that traditional grades don't motivate kids. They've also created a senior seminar course in high school that combines English language arts with social studies and career readiness, providing opportunities for internships and broader career experiences.

Burrell staff have some valuable advice for other districts looking to undertake similar transformations. Turk shared that they know the road can be tough, and there will likely be some pushback from faculty who have been successful under existing systems or who are wedded to tradition. She emphasizes it's important to find ways to create opportunities for personalization that engages these adults. She says the changes don't need to result in blowing up the whole system; creating individual opportunities for students who are not being served well under the existing system can mean all the difference in the world.



Ephrata

Ephrata Area School District began its personalized learning journey in 2015 and has thoughtfully transformed its professional learning structures to support this work. Located between Harrisburg and Philadelphia, Ephrata services approximately 4,000 learners. Superintendent Dr. Brian Troop shares that the district chose to reshape the way they educate students because they could see that the existing mode of whole class instruction in age-defined batches wasn't designed to prepare students for their futures.

One of Ephrata's first steps was crafting the district's [Profile of a Life Ready Graduate](#). Troop says that the portrait guides everything about the district's work. It connects to the district's fundamental sense of purpose, which is to prepare learners for future success. The district acts on this by working to ensure that learners leave their classrooms having achieved success in various elements of the profile, which in turn prepares them for their personalized pathway through life.

One of Ephrata's most impactful innovations has been in rethinking how it prepares educators to operate in personalized learning environments. The realization of the need to shift instructional practices was a direct result of positioning the Life Ready Graduate framework as their new targets for educators. The district recognized very early that while most teachers knew how to function in a traditional system, they could benefit from additional assistance with how to do so in what it calls a more student-centered [instructional model](#) that allows for increased learner voice and choice. Teachers needed training and experience in this new mode of teaching if the district's vision was going to be successful.

Ephrata has made changes to its teacher development structures in several places. One of the district's key actions has been to rethink how to best coach educators in this new environment. Prior to Ephrata's move toward personalization, the district had zero instructional coaches. Today the district has six, with two in each grade band. The district rethought how to organize professional learning to support educators. For example,

Key Takeaways

- The district has centered professional learning around its Profile of a Life Ready Graduate
- Ephrata has deliberately created structures such as coaches and dedicated development time to support its educators
- The district has a cohort of educators tasked with trying out new strategies and sharing the results with their peers to inform instruction more broadly

Ephrata uses half days to give teachers additional time for dedicated professional development aligned to its profile. Teachers are able to pick from several options during professional learning days. Often, these options are also recorded and available virtually to allow everyone to view the training.

Additionally, Ephrata has built structures to help educators shift their practice. The district established what they call their Instructional Leadership Coalition of sixteen teachers who meet regularly and lead implementation strategies to increase learner engagement and elevate the level of belonging for learners. These teachers act as frontline innovators by taking calculated instructional risks and reflecting on the outcomes while sharing their experiences with others. The district includes all teachers in a Reflective Planning Team where each team works to implement a strategy or instructional objective and meets regularly to reflect and apply insights to the practice.

Ephrata uses half days to give teachers additional time for dedicated professional development aligned to its profile. Teachers are able to pick from several options during professional learning days.

Ephrata has also incorporated this focus on personalization into its educator evaluation system. [Pennsylvania policy](#) allows districts to craft their own rating tool for part of the formula used for evaluating educators. The district took this flexibility and currently requires teachers to provide numerous pieces of evidence that they are incorporating its profile's traits into their classroom, which meets the requirements for evidence required under the state system.

Ephrata would not have been able to accomplish all of these transformations without broad stakeholder participation from educators and district policymakers. The district ensured that faculty were included in the process of redesigning their school structures. For

example, they helped design a process for recognizing learner work that goes above and beyond the requirements for a diploma. Troop also shared that Ephrata has consistently had a supportive school board, which enables them to effectively rethink policies and practices such as financial allocations and local assessments.

Troop spoke about the impacts they've seen from this work on students and teachers. He says teachers regularly see students experiencing a stronger sense of ownership as they work toward transparent targets in a way that is best for them. Students find value in being able to choose how they will make progress and in determining the pace and place of the work. And as a result of the redesigned support systems, Ephrata's educators function more collaboratively with their colleagues and have gotten much better at facilitating learning rather than acting as the sage on the stage.

Troop's advice for districts looking to have similar outcomes is to acknowledge that change requires listening to everyone that will be impacted. This is especially true for teachers. He emphasizes that it's important to be responsive to the needs of adults as well as learners, since their success leads to learner success. Doing so might mean that it takes more time to achieve meaningful change, but in the long run that change will be more lasting.



What Comes Next

If you've been inspired by this guide, the next step is to take action in your school, district and community to make personalized learning a reality. Drawing on the advice given by leaders throughout this guide, here are some potential next steps.

1. **Set a vision.**

Every district highlighted in this guide began their work by crafting a shared vision for what they believe and value about learning. If you haven't taken this step yet, this is an excellent place to start.

2. **Create the conditions for collaboration.**

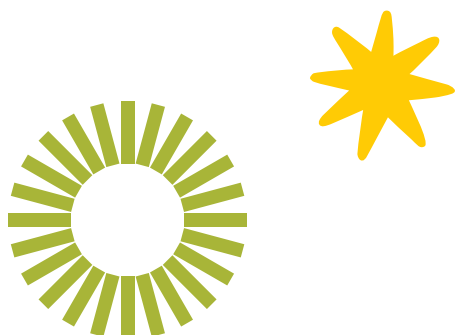
This guide emphasizes throughout that every community has a thriving learning ecosystem. Depending on your past level of engagement, you could consider how best to engage them in your work going forward. If you've already crafted a vision in the form of a portrait, you may want to take that resource out into your community and begin building the relationships necessary to make it a reality. If creating this type of resource is a starting point, you could consider how to build and maintain the relationships and trust needed to craft a portrait that captures the vision of the entire learning community. These relationships would ideally also include those most impacted by the work, including those communities that have been historically underrepresented or marginalized when it comes to education. Key activities could include workshops, town hall meetings or focus groups to involve diverse voices in shaping the Portrait of a Learner.

3. **Build a broad base by engaging leaders.**

Once you've built relationships, it is important to identify the district and community leaders that will help drive your work. This guide offers many examples of transformative leaders who have driven their district's transformation efforts. Find leaders to help build the types of expansive learning experiences your learners will need. You'll also need to work with your local school board to ensure you have their support.

4. **Emphasize feedback loops.**

Collaboration around a vision can't be a one-time-only activity. Communities need to establish feedback mechanisms among schools, the district and engaged stakeholders to ensure the work of reimagining schools evolves in alignment with the needs and aspirations of the entire community. These feedback loops are also crucial for ensuring that the needs of underrepresented or marginalized groups within the community have their voices included in shaping outcomes.



5. **Rethink how resources are used.**

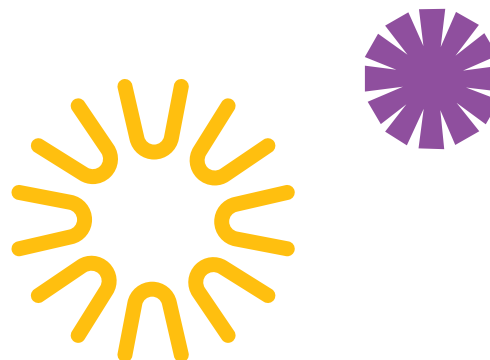
This guide highlights many ways that districts have gotten creative in personalizing learning opportunities. Regardless of what happens, each of these experiences have significant implications for how dollars are used to provide education. Some districts have been able to do their work within existing local, state and federal funding sources. Others have sought philanthropic dollars to help catalyze their work. Agreements could also include non-budgetary actions such as creating shared resource agreements with community partners, like leveraging local venues for extracurricular learning experiences. Your community will be best positioned to identify what is needed and from where it can come.

6. **Tell your story.**

As you gear up to transform learning in your community, it is crucial to communicate both why this is needed and what it means for learners. Storytelling doesn't just capture facts—it embraces and communicates the feeling that comes from learners being able to pursue their passions and dreams through their school experience. These stories could also be about celebrating milestones and sharing successes to continually build community buy-in and public will-building to keep stakeholders motivated. This will help others in your community see the value in your work and what it means for their children's future, ensuring it is sustainable over time.

7. **Embrace the challenge.**

Transforming an education model that is centuries old isn't easy. Schools and districts like those highlighted here don't just flip a switch and make this change overnight. You'll experience difficulties and failures along the way and have to occasionally take steps back. But as the advice in this guide suggests, this is a feature, not a bug of innovation. Accept that to transform learning means to try new things. Also accept that not everything will work the first time, and that you will need to adjust course over time. Districts and communities that are successful in this work don't get put off by challenges. They embrace it and find ways to use the challenge as an opportunity to learn, grow and move forward.



Additional Resources

Remake Learning – Definition of Personalized Learning <https://remakelearning.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Personalized-Learning-Framework-SWPA.pdf>

Remake Learning – Ecosystem Resources <https://remakelearning.org/ecosystem/>

Remake learning – The Pittsburgh Principles https://remakelearning.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/The-Pittsburgh-Principles_hybrid-layout.pdf

Remake learning – Shift: How Cultivating an Ecosystem Remade Pittsburgh’s Learning Landscape <https://remakelearning.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/shift-20240418.pdf>

KnowledgeWorks – Finding Your Path <https://knowledgeworks.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/finding-your-path-navigation-tool.pdf>

KnowledgeWorks – District Conditions for Scale <https://knowledgeworks.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/district-conditions-scale.pdf.pdf>

PA Smart’s Student-Centered Learning Blueprint <https://oercommons.org/courseware/lesson/121836/overview>

State Policy References

Statutory References

- [24 Pa. Stat. Ann. § 1-121](#) (Keystone Exams and Graduation Requirements)
- [24 Pa. Stat. Ann. § 25-2599.6](#) (Ready-to-Learn Block Grant)
- [2020 Act 13](#) (Rating System, Revised Rating System)

Code

- [22 Pa. Code Chapter 339](#) (Vocational Education)
- [22 Pa. Code § 4.23](#) (High School Education)
- [22 Pa. Code § 4.24](#) (High School Graduation Requirements)
- [22 Pa. Code § 4.42](#) (Grade Structure)
- [22 Pa. Code § 4.51d](#) (Waivers, High School Graduation Requirements)
- [22 Pa. Code § 51.61](#) (Student Attendance)

Related Resources

- [2024-25 Ready to Learn Block Grant Information & FAQs, Pennsylvania Department of Education](#)
- [Educator Effectiveness Webpage, Pennsylvania Department of Education](#)
- [Basic Education Circulars, Instructional Time, Pennsylvania Department of Education](#)
- [PA Career Ready Skills Toolkit, Pennsylvania Department of Education](#)
- [State Academic Standards, Pennsylvania Department of Education](#)
- [Pennsylvania High School Graduate Requirements, Pennsylvania Department of Education](#)
- [Act 158 Toolkit, Pennsylvania Department of Education](#)

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