



Research Brief

Personalized Learning in the High School

Question:

- How can principals and teachers launch a school-wide effort to create a personalized learning environment at the high school level?
- How do Personalized Learning Plans (PLP) aid in creating a more student-centered learning environment?

Summary of Findings:

According to Jim Keefe and John Jenkins, personalized learning has been around, in some form or other, for some time. They identify its early antecedents as non-graded education, continuous progress education, individualized instruction, individually guided or prescribed education, and others. While each of these innovations address personalization in a very limited, specific way, they say, contemporary views of personalization are broader in scope, more systematic in organization, and more authentic in its goals and strategies. It is this view that shapes much of the current drive to make high schools more responsive to the individual needs and interests of the tremendously diverse population of students found in the nation's high schools.

In order for schools to be successful, Linda Darling-Hammond (1997) argues that we must put students first, and that all children have a right to learn. She cites four factors that are important for powerful teaching and learning:

- Structures for caring and structures for serious learning, structures that enable teachers to know students well and to work with them intensely.
- Shared exhibitions of student work that make it clear what the school values and how students are doing.
- Structures that support teacher collaboration focused on student learning, in particular, teacher teams.
- *Structures for shared decision making and dialogue about teaching and learning with other teachers, students and parents. (Darling-Hammond, 1996).

Keefe and Jenkins posit six basic elements as constituting the culture and context of personalized instruction. "The cultural components--teacher role, student learning characteristics, and collegial relationships-- establish the foundation of personalization and ensure that the school prizes a caring and collaborative environment, student diversity, and individual development. The contextual factors--interactivity, flexible scheduling, and authentic assessment--promote and support student engagement, thoughtful growth, and proficient performance.

1. A dual teacher role of coach and adviser.
2. The diagnosis of relevant student learning characteristics, including:
 - . Developmental level;



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- . Cognitive /learning style;
 - . Prior knowledge/ skills.
3. A culture of collegiality in the school, characterized by:
- . A constructivist environment;
 - . Collaborative learning arrangements.
4. An interactive learning environment characterized by:
- . Small school or small group (class) size;
 - . Thoughtful conversation;
 - . Active learning activities;
 - . Authentic student achievement.
5. Flexible scheduling and pacing, but with adequate structure.
6. Authentic assessment.”

Personalized learning for high school students begins with a commitment to create a student-centered learning experience focused on promoting success and achievement for everyone. Since the concept was advanced as a centerpiece for high school reform in NASSP and Carnegie Corporation's *Breaking Ranks* (1996), schools have begun to document the success of this stance in some of the most challenging school environments. The resources that follow provide a comprehensive collection of information about the research, theory, implementation and outcomes of personalized learning environments. It is designed to assist principals and their staff as they launch school-wide initiatives to make the high school experience more meaningful to all of the students they serve.

Online Resources:

Personalized Learning Plans

http://www.alliance.brown.edu/pubs/Grow_Sys_Change.pdf

Montpelier (VT) High School expanded personalized learning to include independent studies, individualized reading and writing courses, and off-campus community service and career explorations, creating a wide array of learning options for all students. This very comprehensive handbook published by the school shows how they planned and implemented this innovative approach.

Personal Learning Plans: Building Collaboration among Teachers, Students with Disabilities, and Their Parents.

http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3696/is_200002/ai_n8882612#continue

Adapted from the Montpelier model, this article describes how the PLP approach was applied in the case of special needs students.



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Personalized Learning: Preparing High School Students to Create their Futures.

Reviewed in *Horace*, the journal of Essential Schools.

http://www.essentialschools.org/cs/resources/view/ces_res/316

This excellent book from Scarecrow Press provides a very comprehensive overview of the research supporting PLP, strategies for implementing them in the high school, and needed structural changes that must take place for PLP to be effective. PDF Versions of the Introduction, chapter 1 and chapter 10 can be found at <http://knowledgeloop.org/redehs/perslearnpub.jsp>.

The book may be purchased from Scarecrow Press:

[http://www.scarecroweducation.com/Catalog/SingleBook.shtml?](http://www.scarecroweducation.com/Catalog/SingleBook.shtml?command=Search&db=^DB/CATALOG.db&eqSKUdata=081084530X)

[command=Search&db=^DB/CATALOG.db&eqSKUdata=081084530X](http://www.scarecroweducation.com/Catalog/SingleBook.shtml?command=Search&db=^DB/CATALOG.db&eqSKUdata=081084530X).

Two Schools: Two Approaches to Personalized Learning

<http://www.pdkintl.org/kappan/k0202jen.htm>

This excellent Kappan article describes two schools' approaches to personalized learning for their students. Although different, both are committed to a personalized form of instruction that includes self-pacing, project learning, coaching and mentoring, advisement, experiential learning, community-based learning, and many of these strategies in combination.

The Personal Learning Planner: Collaboration through Online Personal Learning by David Gibson

<http://carbon.cudenver.edu/~lsherry/pubs/plp.html>

This paper discusses the online Personal Learning Planner (PLP) project underway at the National Institute of Community Innovations (NICI). It presents some of the details of the theory, past experiences, and thinking that is guiding the development of the PLP. An interesting feature is the integration of technology into the planning process.

Implementing the No Child Left Behind Act: Strategies to Improve High Schools

<http://www.chse.org/qkey9/index.php>

This latest *Quick Key Action Guide* focuses on high school reform strategies that work, including planning for improvement, increasing the rigor and relevance of the curriculum, improving student relationships, using data, and improving student transitions to high school and then to either college or the workplace. It provides action steps, supporting research, and practical examples to help educators meet today's challenges. It also provides a list of national organizations focused on high school improvement.

High School Reform Organizations

<http://www.chse.org/policy/organizations.php>

The Center for High School Excellence provides a comprehensive set of links to organizations devoted to high school reform, including those using PLP approaches.



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Changing Systems to Personalize Learning

http://www.alliance.brown.edu/pubs/changing_systems/introduction/introduction.pdf

This monograph (PDF) offers a comprehensive overview of the organizational and systemic changes that must be made in a school in order to develop a personalized learning model. Most helpful is the list of schools and contacts that have implemented PLP approaches.

Perspectives on Policy and Practice: the Student Centered High School

<http://www.lab.brown.edu/topics/reform.shtml#item12619065a>

From the Education Alliance at Brown, this issue explores ways for schools to personalize the high school experience for adolescent learners.

PERSONALIZED INSTRUCTION By James W. Keefe and John M. Jenkins

http://www.lecforum.org/publications/Jenkins_Keefe_KAPPAN_Article_1.htm

From Phi Delta *Kappan*, this article gives a solid overview of the elements of personalized learning environments, including PLPs.

Critical Issue: Working Toward Student Self-Direction and Personal Efficacy as Educational Goals

<http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/students/learning/lr200.htm>

A touchstone of effective learning is that students are in charge of their own learning; essentially, they direct their own learning processes. One characteristic is a student's ability to shape and manage change, in other words, self-directed. This interactive, online resource from NCREL outlines comprehensive measures to promote personalization and student ownership of their learning.

Electronic Individual Learning Plans (e-ILP)

<http://www.learningpt.org/press/eilp/e-ILP.pdf>

The Electronic Individual Learning Plan is a web-based tool created in the State of Washington to facilitate the process of developing personalized learning plans for individual students. This tool is marketed by Learning Point, the organization formerly operating as the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, based in Illinois.

References

Darling-Hammond, L. (1997). *The right to learn: A blueprint for creating schools that work*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

See also, James Keefe and John Jenkins, *Personalized Instruction*, in the “Additional Resources” section of this Brief.



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