REIMAGINING THE CLASSROOM
An Introduction to Personalized Learning
A great education can enable students to discover their passions, grow as respectful peers, navigate the world, and prepare for a successful career in the 21st century. To deliver on this promise, we need to transform one-size-fits-all learning models and reimagine them to be personalized for every student, every day.

The traditional classroom model presents significant challenges to superintendents, principals, and teachers seeking to meet their students’ individual learning needs. The traditional model is ill-equipped to account for students’ prior knowledge or support the complex and nonlinear ways in which students learn.

As educators, we must meet all of these needs in order to develop the building blocks for successful learning, a postsecondary education, and in-demand jobs in tomorrow’s workforce.

The New Classrooms team has spent the past six years designing a personalized learning model—Teach to One: Math—to improve math achievement with leaders like you in mind. In this guide, we’ve prepared an introduction to the core ideas and philosophies that have driven the movement toward personalization. It is intended for school and district leaders who are considering a range of initiatives that may incorporate personalized learning. In the pages that follow, we’ll introduce the elements of a school-based personalized learning model, highlight best teaching practices, and provide a primer on how to assess your district’s readiness.

— The New Classrooms Team
Whether you’re planning a district-wide initiative or launching a small pilot, personalized learning is a field that encompasses a range of practices and funding strategies to consider. There is no single playbook for implementation. Identifying essential components and determining an approach that best fits your district’s needs is a good first step.

Below is a framework for personalized learning that combines a full range of attributes, tactics, and practices to offer a comprehensive view of what is possible.

“Personalized learning seeks to accelerate student learning by tailoring the instructional environment—what, when, how, and where students learn—to address the individual needs, skills, and interests of each student. Students can take ownership of their own learning, while also developing deep, personal connections with each other, their teachers, and other adults.”

- *A Working Definition of Personalized Learning*, 2014

**Learner Profiles**
An up-to-date record of students’ unique strengths, needs, motivations, and goals.

**Personalized Learning Paths**
Students learn through pathways that tailor instruction, curriculum, and modalities to their learner profile.

**Competency-Based Progression**
Through continual assessment, students progress toward defined goals and earn credit when they demonstrate mastery.

**Flexible Space**
Students learn in flexible environments that accommodate multiple modalities and support students’ daily activities.

“Personalized learning is like having an individualized education plan for every child, for every day, and in every class.”

Dr. Albert Sackey, Principal, Nathan Hale Middle School
UNDERSTANDING PERSONALIZED LEARNING TERMINOLOGY
A GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS

Learning Model
A framework for schools that combines an academic and instructional design that articulates what students learn, with a set of operating structures that shape where, when, how, and with whom students learn.

Modalities
Instructional approaches that allow students to encounter material in multiple ways and apply it to new scenarios and contexts, leading to more conceptual learning. Modalities range from teacher-led to group collaboration to independent learning.

Playlist
At the heart of the day-to-day learning experience is the playlist, which is an individualized set of skills, resources, and activities that supports each student’s learning goals.

Exit Slips
One of several formative assessments, many of which are technology-enabled, used in personalized learning to provide students and teachers with real-time, actionable feedback and data. Other assessments include diagnostic assessments and performance-based assessments.

Personalized Curriculum
Rather than following a traditional linear progression, a personalized curriculum is a yearly plan for learning that is created for each individual student.

Advisories
A teacher and a student or group of students who meet regularly over the course of the school year, often before and after personalized learning sessions, for goal setting and culture building.

Performance Tasks
Activities that require students to demonstrate skills through application in real-life scenarios. Tasks often take place over multiple days or weeks, utilize a project-based learning approach, and culminate in a performance-based assessment.

Flexible Space
Learning environments that accommodate a variety of different modalities in order to support each student’s daily activities. They range from large, open learning centers to more traditional classroom environments.

www.newclassrooms.org
Inside a school-based learning model

School-based models combine an academic and instructional design that articulates what students learn with a set of operating structures that shape where, when, how, and with whom students learn.

DID YOU KNOW?

50% The increase in skill variation among same-grade students between 4th and 8th grades.

16 The number of states that allow students to earn competency-based credits.

Thomas B. Fordham Institute

National Conference of State Legislatures
MULTIPLE INSTRUCTIONAL APPROACHES

Lecture-based teaching is one way for students to engage in learning, but it’s not the only way. In fact, students learn best when they encounter material through multiple instructional approaches. Personalized learning models should incorporate a range of these approaches to target deeper levels of conceptual understanding.

Teacher-Delivered
Teachers are essential to providing context so students understand how lessons connect back to their playlist skills and concepts. Often, teacher-delivered instruction is how students are introduced to the skills they’re learning next. Teachers also lead project-based activities that bring together the multiple skills that a student is working on.

Collaborative
From small groups to peer-to-peer, student collaboration gives students the opportunity to engage in problem-solving and discussions. In addition to giving students more ownership over their learning, collaboration helps them develop social skills that are critical in today’s workplace.

Independent
From computer-based digital lessons to more open-ended projects, independent learning enables differentiation and reinforces skill fluency. Perhaps most importantly, it allows for students to process new material at their own pace.

The number of states that incorporate personalized learning in their ESSA plans.

KnowledgeWorks

The percentage of district leaders who say they are investing in personalized learning.

Education Week Research Center
The Teacher’s Role

Getting personalized learning right isn’t just about the technology or the design of model. It’s also about adult collaboration and instructional practices that promote student-centered learning. Whether your district is engaged in a mini-pilot or multi-school initiative, it’s critical to know the nuances of the teacher’s role in personalized learning.

From Neighbors to Roommates
Collaborative teaching is key to student success

☑ Norms for planning meetings
☑ Clear division of labor
☑ Consistent behavioral management

Teacher as Director
Facilitate learning with skill and patience

☑ Setting the stage so students can take the lead
☑ Helping students get into character for group discussion
☑ Mastering the art and science of conversation

Performance-based Assessment
Demonstrate skills through real-world application

☑ Backwards planning from final assessment
☑ Hooks to activate knowledge on the first day
☑ Work exemplars so students know what’s satisfactory

Independent Learning
Reinforce skill fluency and promote student agency

☑ Checklists to prepare for upcoming sessions
☑ Using the first five minutes to reinforce routines
☑ Targeted check-ins and intervention

Read more at newclassrooms.org/teachers-role/
The Student’s Role

Meeting students where they are is a powerful part of personalized learning, but its promise can’t end there. To develop habits for lifelong success, students must be engaged, motivated, and connected to their teachers and peers.

ENGAGEMENT
Students need to understand where they are, where they’re headed, and what they need to do to get there. Online student portals provide this data to students in a clear and transparent way so that they can set goals and track progress.

MOTIVATION
Personalized learning motivates students by cultivating students’ appreciation for the learning process. Key tools include digital badges that recognize progress and a tailored goal-setting cycle that asks students to regularly reflect on their progress.

CONNECTION
Continual regrouping allows students to collaborate with different students and teachers throughout the school year. Shifting from teacher-led instruction creates a culture of shared accountability and helps students become more self-directed learners.
PLANNING FOR PERSONALIZED LEARNING

Considering a shift to personalized learning in your district? There are myriad ways to do it, so sitting down to map out a plan can help in several ways.

See the Big Picture
More and more states are supporting student-centered policies that promote personalized learning. Is your state one of them? Understanding your state’s policy landscape can help you leverage these policies when the time is right.

Plot Your Path
Personalized learning looks different in every district. Define what it means in your community and how it aligns to your district’s strategic plan to consider the right path for your district’s needs.

Identify Key Stakeholders
Having a strong leadership team and the flexibility to hire and assign staff that support the shift is instrumental. This team will work closely with staff and the community throughout this journey.

Develop Capacity
New learning models require schools to have technological capacity and operational flexibility. Knowing the status of your district’s capacity will give your team a good idea for where you have needs.

ARE YOU READY FOR PERSONALIZED LEARNING?

1. What systems and norms foster agency and joy of learning in your students?
   Students being active drivers in their own learning is critical to personalized learning.

2. Are there effective and empowered leaders in place at your schools?
   Schools need principals who surround themselves with a strong team and have authority to make staffing and budgeting decisions.
What practices support a robust professional learning community (PLC) at your schools?

A strong PLC enables accountability and growth for implementing new practices.

What is your district’s capacity for flexible operations with space and schedule design?

Schools should prepare for operational and logistical changes in order to accommodate a personalized environment.

What does instruction look like in your classrooms?

Teachers should embrace facilitator roles that allow students to take ownership of their learning.

REIMAGINING ACCOUNTABILITY

Imagine you’re a middle school math teacher who’s accountable for your students’ performance on their annual state tests. Now imagine that, like thousands of teachers across the country, you’re teaching students whose skill readiness ranges by three or more grades.

What do you do? Do you focus on preparing students for the state tests on which your evaluation is based? Or do you try to meet the unique needs of your students, even if it means that what they’re learning won’t show up on the test come springtime?

This is the unfortunate reality for most districts. Students are capable of amazing things when they are held to high expectations, but teaching the same thing to the same students will continue to leave many students behind and keep advanced students from accelerating further ahead.

Fortunately, school districts and states are reimagining what it means to assess how students learn, demonstrate mastery, and earn credits toward graduation.

The shift to personalization has led to a wide variety of implementation practices, but the larger trend is unmistakable: There is an increased commitment to focus on each individual student’s learning needs in a tailored and supportive way. (As KnowledgeWorks found, one-third of states’ Every Student Succeeds Act plans are putting personalization at the core of their vision statements for K–12 education.)

But there continues to be real tension between the need to give all students a competency-based path to achieve high standards and the current standardized testing regime. Many district leaders aren’t waiting. They’re retooling accountability systems so that teachers don’t have to choose between high expectations and meeting the unique needs of their students. In places like Chicago Public Schools and Norwalk Public Schools, districts are using a wide variety of ways to assess student performance, including assessments that measure growth, such as NWEA’s Measures of Academic Performance.

It starts with a long-term commitment from the district to support students’ growth.

— Susan Gross, Principal, William P. Gray Elementary School.
About New Classrooms and *Teach to One: Math*

Founded in 2011, New Classrooms is a national nonprofit on a mission to personalize education by redesigning how a classroom works—from the use of technology, time, and physical space to the instruction and content that engages each student. *Teach to One: Math* is a personalized learning model that ensures students are learning the right math lesson, at the right time, and in the right way that best meets their strengths and needs. To learn more, visit newclassrooms.org.

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