

Embracing the Opportunity

Recommendations for Scaling Personalized Learning Under a New Presidential Administration

Introduction

The new Presidential Administration has a critical opportunity to leverage the vast amount of innovation occurring across the country to help States and school districts build an education system that provides all learners with access to a personalized education that enables them to master the knowledge and skills critical to success in college and career. States, districts, colleges, employers and even community organizations are taking bold steps to create personalized pathways in which every learner is challenged, and every learner succeeds. The Administration should seize the opportunity to partner with these local leaders by establishing flexible policy environments and the necessary resources to enable state and local leaders to create an education system where all learners benefit from high-quality, customized experiences as they advance along the education continuum.

These recommendations provide a set of strategies that will help the Administration capitalize on this national momentum to build a system of personalized learning for all learners.

Federal Recommendations for Enabling Personalized Learning at Scale

- (1) Incentivize effective transitions between K-12 and higher education to increase college enrollment and persistence.**
 - (2) Help states and districts scale K-12 personalized learning systems.**
 - (3) Support personalized learning pathways toward a postsecondary credential by making the federal financial aid system more flexible.**
 - (4) Establish a cross-cutting priority for federal grants focused on personalized learning.**
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The following document provides detailed strategies to help the Administration operationalize each of these recommendations into a robust policy platform to improve educational outcomes for all learners.

Who We Are

KnowledgeWorks is a nonprofit organization dedicated to advancing personalized learning that empowers every child to take ownership of their success. With nearly 20 years of experience exploring the future of learning, growing educator impact and working with state and federal policymakers, our passionate team partners with schools and communities to grow a system-wide approach to sustain student-centered practices so that every child graduates ready for what's next.



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1 Incentivize effective transitions between K–12 and higher education to increase college enrollment and persistence.

With only 40% of 18- to 24-year-olds enrolling in college, and one-third of those learners placing into remedial coursework, the new Administration must improve the transition between the nation’s K–12 and higher education systems. A federal strategy must remove barriers to college access and create seamless pathways to attainment of a postsecondary credential and meaningful employment. This strategy should leverage high-impact public-private partnerships through the following three initiatives:

- **Launch a Postsecondary Transition Innovation Fund**—This initiative, which would be administered jointly by all Department offices with a stake in K–12 and postsecondary policy, would invest in partnerships of institutions of higher education (IHEs), employers, school districts, and intermediaries¹ to implement programs that will strengthen the transition between secondary and postsecondary education and the workforce. This fund should emphasize the following strategies:
 - a) Strategies that disrupt traditional uses of time, such as those that enable students to advance through competency-based pathways while pursuing high school and college credit or industry certifications simultaneously.
 - b) Strategies that meaningfully reengage at-risk students and out-of-school youth.
 - c) Strategies that enable students to master the skills essential to college and career readiness and persistence.
- **Establish an Employment Pathway Program**—Under this program, the federal government would support employers partnering with IHEs or alternative credentialing programs to provide no cost credentials that result in full-time employment. The federal government and the employer would equally share the cost of tuition; however, the federal government would reimburse the employer if it employs an individual for two years after obtaining a credential. This initiative would provide learners with a pathway to meaningful employment, employers with a pipeline of skilled workers, IHEs or alternative credentialing programs with the opportunity to attract more learners, and the federal government with a high-impact strategy for increasing college completion with little long-term financial risk. This program would be particularly impactful for individuals seeking to acquire short-term credentials not currently covered by the federal Pell Grant program.
- **Further State Investment in Early College High School and Dual Enrollment Programs**—This initiative would provide matching funds and other assistance for states to invest in the creation or expansion of early college high school or dual enrollment partnerships between K–12 school districts and IHEs. States should prioritize economically disadvantaged students for participation in these programs, creating high-quality pathways in which students can earn a high school diploma and up to two years of college credit, including an associate’s degree, at no cost to the student.

¹These are entities that help states and districts build capacity for implementation of postsecondary transition programs through technical assistance, educator and leadership training, and identification of best practices.

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Help States and Districts Scale K–12 Personalized Learning Systems

The new Administration should partner with the increasing number of State and district leaders who have adopted a vision for personalized learning and have begun the hard work to build student-centered education systems. These leaders can benefit from the flexibility to innovate, the resources to build something new, and national leadership to help them replicate effective strategies at scale.

A federal strategy to scale K–12 personalized learning systems should address all of these components:

Assessment	Accountability	School Improvement
<p>Establish a pathway for interested states to participate in the Every Student Succeeds Act’s (ESSA) Innovative Assessment and Accountability Demonstration Authority.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Issue an intent to apply to prioritize states for technical assistance and funding. • Issue planning and capacity grants to interested states. • Open the application. 	<p>Provide states with the flexibility to pilot accountability systems that enable personalized learning. While ESSA provides states with more flexibility in accountability design, barriers still exist to implementation of personalized learning systems.</p>	<p>Support states in recalibrating their school improvement systems to shift from a system that relies on end-of-year, non-actionable data to one that provides real-time data and diagnostic support to personalize learning for all students.</p>
Educator Workforce	Expanded Learning Opportunities	Research and Development
<p>Build a workforce of educators ready to teach in personalized learning environments by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launching a national initiative to recruit or retrain educators for new teaching roles including positions within the traditional K–12 education system as well as community educators. • Helping states build personalized professional development pathways for educators. 	<p>Modernize the State Longitudinal Data Systems Program by creating an absolute priority for states to create a digital registry of credit-bearing learning opportunities available to students in the state including those disseminated by community organizations or employers.</p>	<p>Expand research and development of tools, programs, or practices that support personalized learning. Areas of emphasis should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New technologies to enhance efficiency and effectiveness of the teaching and learning system. • Measurement of social and emotional competencies. • Data ownership and use.

ESSA Implementation: Helping States Maximize Flexibility to Support Personalized Learning

As states develop their plans for implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), the new Administration should help states identify and leverage the significant flexibility across the law to further their vision for personalized learning. In particular, the Administration should issue non-regulatory guidance on the following topics.

- **Cross-cutting Guidance on Building Personalized Learning Systems.** States and districts can benefit from guidance on how to leverage flexibility in ESSA around accountability, assessment, teacher credentials, and title funding to build personalized learning systems.
- **Strategies for Leveraging the Direct Student Services Opportunity to Support At-Risk Students.** States can benefit from guidance on how to use the optional direct student services reservation to expand access to rigorous, personalized learning experiences for at-risk students.
- **Guidance on Early College High School and Dual and Concurrent Enrollment Provisions.** States and districts can benefit from guidance on how to leverage flexibility across ESSA to increase student access to high quality early college high school and dual and concurrent enrollment programs including through accountability and reporting, access to federal funding, and professional development.

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Support personalized learning pathways toward a postsecondary credential by making the federal financial aid system more flexible.

A new Administration should modernize the federal financial aid system to reflect the realities of today's postsecondary learner. The current system distributes aid to students based on the number of hours they attend class or the number of credit hours in which they are enrolled. Traditional 12 credit-a-semester, full-time enrollment in postsecondary education is no longer the norm as individuals increasingly seek access to postsecondary opportunities as early as middle or high school, while working and raising a family, or later in life as part of a career change. We recommend an overhaul of the Federal financial aid system to ensure it is more flexible, better able to address changing career requirements, and reflective of the nation's increasing interest in personalized education. KnowledgeWorks would like to partner with the Administration to identify strategies that will make the federal financial aid system more flexible while ensuring necessary protections against mismanagement and abuse.

A federal strategy to modernize the federal financial aid system should begin with an effort to scale the following concepts through implementation of the Higher Education Act. We look forward to working with the Administration to identify the right policy approach for bringing these to scale to ensure that students, institutions, and providers get the best result from the federal investment.

- **Dual Enrollment**—Low-income high school students enrolled in postsecondary coursework through a dual enrollment or early college high school program should be able to earn Federal Pell Grants upon completion of postsecondary credit.
- **Competency Education**—Students should be able to access Title IV financial aid for enrollment in IHEs with a self-paced competency education program.
- **Innovative Education Model**—Students should be able to access Title IV financial aid for enrollment in postsecondary institutions that are partnering with non-traditional providers to deliver an innovative educational program.

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Establish a cross-cutting priority for federal grants focused on personalized learning.

A new Administration can help states, districts, and other education stakeholders invest in and expand high-quality personalized learning initiatives by establishing a priority for discretionary grant programs focused on personalized learning. An emphasis on personalized learning will ensure federal resources support high-impact strategies with the potential to close achievement gaps and ensure all students succeed.

This priority should incorporate the following definition for personalized learning.

Personalized learning requires:

- Instruction that is aligned to rigorous college-and career-ready standards and the social and emotional skills students need to be successful in college and career.
- Instruction that is individualized, allowing each student to design learning experiences aligned to his or her interests.
- The pace of instruction to vary based on individual student needs allowing students to accelerate or take additional time based on their level of mastery.
- Educators to use data from formative assessments and student feedback in real time to differentiate instruction and provide robust supports and interventions so every student remains on track to graduation.
- Students to have access to clear, transferrable learning objectives so they understand what is expected for mastery and advancement.

Additional Information

KnowledgeWorks welcomes the opportunity to engage in conversations with the new Administration to explore these opportunities in depth and help craft policies to expand personalized learning opportunities for learners across the education continuum. You may access additional policy resources from KnowledgeWorks at www.knowledgeworks.org/policy including extensive resources on competency education, ESSA and personalized learning, and innovative assessments.

