

TOOLKIT



Laying the Groundwork for a Community-Wide Vision for Personalized Learning

A district's vision is central to everything they do and everything they hope to accomplish. If you really want to **change the system**, a vision must be created by and lived throughout your community. District leaders can't do this work alone, and neither can teachers. The **entire community** needs to lift up learning, support teachers and **encourage students** to learn both in and outside of school. Because this work is bigger than just your district – it belongs to the entire learning community.

Based on our experiences in schools and the research we've done around the conditions necessary for scaling personalized learning, KnowledgeWorks believes an essential first step to this work is to craft, develop and sustain a community-wide vision for personalized, competency-based learning. But just what is personalized learning?

Personalized learning empowers students through clear learning targets that they work toward at their own pace. It's made possible by a student-centered culture that encourages risk-taking and growth mindset, where teachers, learners and community members set a shared vision and build innovative and transparent learning environments where all students grow.

Your vision for personalized learning will be your district's and your community's vision for the knowledge, skills and characteristics you hope your graduates will possess, what outcomes you hope to improve and what makes your district and your community unique. Not every school or classroom is the same, but elevating a common vision will ground everyone in the importance of the work. In this toolkit you'll find the following resources to help you begin and sustain the work of implementing personalized learning:

1. Guidance on **crafting a system-wide vision** for personalized learning, incorporating diverse stakeholder voices
2. Questions and considerations for **finding the right people** to champion the work of personalizing learning
3. Direction on how to **identify factors** that may impact implementation
4. Help with **creating messages** to introduce your vision with key audiences and sustaining enthusiasm for personalized learning

The work to communicate your vision begins as soon as you begin. The sooner individuals within your community – whether they're parents, students, business or community members – can begin to learn and engage with you in this work, the more successful it will be.

Your community has questions, **BE READY WITH ANSWERS**

Transparency and open lines of communication are essential to a successful implementation of personalized learning. Consider how you'll answer the following questions:

- Why personalized learning? Why now?
- What will the process of implementation look like?
- Who will be involved?
- How long will it take?
- How will we communicate and involve the community?
- What can I do to get involved?
- Where can I get more information?
- How might our learners be a part of the implementation process?



Have your own questions? Download
**Dispelling the Myths: Frequently
Asked Questions about Personalized,
Competency-Based Education**

Vision

Crafting a Vision for Personalized Learning, Together

Chances are, you've encountered some resistance to personalized learning. Does this sound familiar?

“If the school system worked for me, why can't it work for my child?”



In many districts that are moving to personalized learning, parents especially can be apprehensive around change in their child's classroom. And who can blame them? Without clear, transparent communication around how personalized learning works for each individual student, parents are bound to be nervous about this transformation. Securing the support of parents, educators, students, and community and business leaders, however, is essential. A vision for personalized learning must be shared and celebrated by everyone involved or this work will be an uphill battle.



Get started with your own profile of a graduate in just a few clicks in this helpful **Visioning Tool from EdLeader21.**

In talking with district leaders throughout the country, we've sought to better understand their roles, goals, motivations and challenges. Through these conversations, we've learned that districts are facing similar barriers to personalized learning. One common challenge is being intentional about how you communicate about personalized learning, and being clear.

Ready to build public support?

Consider the following to better engage your community:

- 1 Be upfront and transparent about personalized learning from the very beginning.
- 2 Attend other, non-district events in the community. By being involved in local events, parents and community members will become familiar and comfortable with you and your staff. This trust will allow for greater partnerships for learning opportunities both inside and outside of school and reinforce a shared vision across your learning community.
- 3 Plan community focus groups – including learners – to have honest conversations and gain insight.
- 4 Allow time for parents to visit classrooms and speak with principals to see personalized learning in action. Let students speak for themselves – they'll be your best advocates.
- 5 Conduct a community survey to learn about common concerns and engage stakeholders in designing potential solutions.
- 6 Continually use common language to create better understanding. Once you choose a term for personalized learning, stick with it. Inconsistent language can result in confusion, which can cause apprehension.
- 7 Invite higher education partners to dispel myths about the transition from a personalized learning environment to postsecondary institutions and establish a seamless K-16 learning continuum.
- 8 Focus on strong, strategic online and virtual communication. Use the website and social media sites to your advantage.

*When you've established open lines of communication and **a culture of transparency and trust** throughout your learning community, **you're ready** to craft a vision for personalized learning, together.*

Vision Creation Worksheets

Use the results of the discussion about personalized learning in your district inspired by the Visioning Process and the District Conditions Assessment to think about your vision. Be certain that your vision and values related to personalized learning effectively represent your desired outcomes for your district. As a Committee, answer the following questions.

VISION STATEMENT QUESTIONS

Think of the school district about 5 to 10 years in the future. Picture yourself making a report to the community on the state of the school district. Be imaginative and address the following questions. Do not limit yourself.

1. *What are the characteristics of the communities the school district serves?*

2. *How have the community and the school district changed over the last 5 to 10 years?*

3. *How has personalized learning impacted students? In what ways has this style of learning helped students reach their goals more efficiently and effectively?*

4. *What skills and capabilities have made us unique over the last 5 to 10 years?*

Vision Creation Worksheets

BELIEFS / VALUES STATEMENT QUESTIONS

Consider what makes your learning community unique - the values that are core to your vision for personalized learning and how individuals demonstrate their commitment to those values.

1. *What are the specific attributes about our school district that make us unique?*

2. *What characteristics about ourselves are we unwilling to compromise?*

3. *How do we expect our board and staff to act when representing our organization?*

4. *What do we believe in our “heart of hearts” about what we’re doing and why it makes a significant difference?*

Vision Creation Worksheets

PERSONALIZED LEARNING VISION AND VALUES STATEMENTS

Use answers from the previous questions to craft new statements, if necessary.

Insert your school district's personalized learning vision statement:

Insert school district's personalized learning values:

Building Your Team

Creating a Core Planning Committee for Personalized Learning

The work to implement personalized learning is important, but it's just as important to think about who will be doing it.

Your core planning committee will ensure that a variety of stakeholder perspectives inform the work, and will serve as champions of your vision for personalized learning. They will be involved in communications and strategic planning efforts. The committee should be diverse, cross functional, representative of your district and autonomous so that various points of view are considered throughout the process of implementation. The size of the committee isn't as important as being sure it reflects who you are – it's not just district leaders and teachers, but individuals who will challenge, celebrate and collaborate on what the work will mean for everyone within your learning community.

LEARNING TOGETHER

Your community – and your core planning committee – should have regular access to materials and resources that grow their knowledge about and investment in personalized learning. Consider:

- a resource center that includes relevant literature and both digital and physical media, open to the public
- the opportunity for site visits to other communities and schools implementing personalized learning
- webinars and conferences that deepen perspectives around personalized learning
- guest speakers, including testimony from learners and educators

Core Planning Committee Worksheet

Use this table to identify individuals who may be good Core Planning Committee members. List names in each cell who are part of the particular group (columns) and bring appropriate skill sets of characterization (rows). Additional space is provided for other groups and skills that are important to you and your district.

From this point forward, the Core Planning Committee will be responsible for the communications toolkit and strategic planning efforts. The facilitator or “chairperson” will be responsible for leading meetings, delegating tasks, and sharing documents in the plan with other members of the Core Planning Committee. Assigning responsibility for various documents to individuals on the committee will ensure that one person is not in full control of, or overburdened with, the planning efforts.

	School Board	Administration	Teachers	Staff	Students	Parents	Alumni	Post-Secondary Professionals	
Technical Experience									
Community Influence									
Political Influence									
Interaction with students									
Awareness of policy or regulations									

Environmental Scanning

The Importance of Looking Beyond the Classroom

Environmental scanning is the process of gathering information about events and their impact on an organization's internal and external environments.¹

Essentially, what's going on in your community? Your region? What are some of the challenges faced by business or industry? How supportive is the local government? Your learning community extends outside the school walls, and environmental scans help you understand the broader context in which you are operating. Taking the time to identify key trends and environmental factors that impact your district provides you the opportunity to begin thinking through the implications and, where appropriate, plan a course of action. And remember – share what you learn. The more your community can see the work you're doing and understand why, the greater their support.

There are four basic environments which could impact your district:

- 1. Macro Environment** – economy, technology, politics, society. How will political events impact your district's implementation of personalized learning?
- 2. Industry Environment** – structure, finance, regulation, products, students and families, and needs. What events in education will positively or negatively impact your school district?
- 3. Competitive Environment** – who are your competitors, how do they compete with you? How is your competition performing and how can you stay relevant?
- 4. Internal Environment** – organizational structure, strategic plans, school climate, teacher satisfaction surveys, student achievement data, student population, productivity, work environment, distinctive strengths and weaknesses. What are the most pressing issues in your district?

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“We talked with our chamber of commerce, and it became clear that we had their future workforce sitting in our buildings”

In 2013, Diane Mankins, superintendent of Marysville School District, held more than 20 community meetings that were open to parents, educators, community leaders and stakeholders to get a pulse on her community and their hopes for the future of the district. An understanding of local employer and workforce needs was one of many environmental factors that informed their decision to hold these meetings.



HONDA LAB
Marysville School District

“Everything we’ve done in the district since that time has been a result of those conversations,” said Mankins, which included a critical partnership with Honda North America in the design of the district’s STEM-focused early college high school that would not have been possible without a deep understanding of local and regional needs. They even repurposed a vacant building within the community to house the early college.

Design team meetings for the early college included local manufacturer Honda and Columbus State Community College so that the school’s curriculum would reflect real-world employer needs. These community partners raised critical questions around retirement age, workforce development needs, and ensuring that Marysville graduates had a reason – and the desire – to stay and contribute to the community.

“We talked with our chamber of commerce, and it became clear that we had their future workforce sitting in our buildings,” said Mankins. “So the conversation then became, how can we help? How can we keep kids local?”



DIANE MANKINS
Superintendent of Marysville School District

Macro Environment Worksheet

Use this table to answer the following questions and statements:

1. List some major issues in the Macro Environment that could impact your organization.
2. Are there any changes in these Macro Environment areas or issues that could impact your organization?

Major Issues	Impact on Your District	Potential Importance		Potential Probability	
		HIGH	LOW	HIGH	LOW

Industry Environment Worksheet

Use this table to answer the following questions and statements:

1. List some major issues in the Industry Environment that could impact your organization.
2. Are there any changes in these Industry Environment areas or issues that could impact your organization?

Major Issues	Impact on Your District	Potential Importance		Potential Probability	
		HIGH	LOW	HIGH	LOW

Competitive Environment Worksheet

Use this table to answer the following questions and statements:

1. List some major issues in the Competitive Environment that could impact your organization.
2. Are there any changes in these Competitive Environment areas or issues that could impact your organization?

Major Issues	Impact on Your District	Potential Importance		Potential Probability	
		HIGH	LOW	HIGH	LOW

Internal Environment Worksheet

Use this table to answer the following questions and statements:

1. List some major issues in the Internal Environment that could impact your organization.
2. Are there any changes in these Internal Environment areas or issues that could impact your organization?

Major Issues	Impact on Your District	Potential Importance		Potential Probability	
		HIGH	LOW	HIGH	LOW

Messaging Development

Sustaining Your Vision for Personalized Learning

Simple, easy to understand language is essential with every audience.

To successfully scale personalized learning and sustain the support and involvement of your community, it's necessary to think about how you will continue to engage with stakeholders and effectively communicate how your vision serves all students well. Simple, easy to understand language is essential with every audience. Consider how your message will adapt based on who you're communicating with, what the best medium for communication is based on your audience and how you will solicit and incorporate feedback. Because while listening is key, your parents, community and business leaders – and your principals and teachers – will know they're being heard when they can see how you're using their voices to inform decision-making.



Local media and civic leaders can make or break your vision. But how can you engage them? See **Six Ways to Increase Partnership Engagement.**



“Continuously promote the vision everywhere you go. Everything I do, I tie back to our vision.”

According to Bill Zima, superintendent of RSU2 in central Maine, keeping the vision alive and making sure everyone understands how the work you’re doing fits in the vision is the primary role of the superintendent. Because the vision was created in partnership with your stakeholders, it’s important to keep that central. Real transformation takes time and dedication – from everyone.

“It’s going to take steps to get there. Don’t rush it,” Zima said. RSU2 began their implementation in 2011, and within the first two years, district leaders made a special effort to invite the community, including parents and local business and community leaders, to school board and committee meetings. They also went to the big events in town where people were congregating to answer questions and share results.



RSU2 continues to refine their approach today. “Continuously promote the vision everywhere you go,” said Zima. “Whenever I meet with parents. Whenever I meet with stakeholders. When I meet with teachers. When I send out messages. Everything I do I tie back to our vision.”



BILL ZIMA
Superintendent of RSU2

Message Development Worksheet

Answer the following questions about each stakeholder group (audience). You will need multiple copies of this worksheet.

Audience: _____

1. *What are the benefits and drawbacks to your audience's thinking, feeling, or action related to personalized learning or the education system in general?*

2. *What change in attitude do you want to motivate in this audience to meet your goals for personalized learning in the school district?*

3. *What change in behavior (day-to-day actions) of this audience are you trying to achieve?*

4. *Based on the answers above, what are the three or four most compelling sentences you could use to motivate this audience? These will be your key messages for this audience.*

Communication Worksheet

Answer the following questions about each stakeholder group (audience). You will need multiple copies of this worksheet.

Audience: _____

1. *Where or from whom does this audience get its information?*

2. *Who do they find credible?*

3. *Where does this audience spend most of their time? Where are they mostly likely to give you their attention?*

4. *List channels to use to reach this audience:*

Feedback Worksheet

Two-way communication promotes dialogue and enables the school district to gather ideas, suggestions, and feedback from stakeholder groups. This can be beneficial for adjusting communications efforts to better fit stakeholder needs. Some examples include formal community meetings, creating a feedback email or hotline, or simply commenting on social media posts.

Answer the following questions to inform how the planning committee prefers to get feedback.

1. *How does the planning committee prefer to receive feedback?*
(i.e. email, phone, in-person)

2. *How often will the planning committee address suggestions or feedback?*

3. *How will the planning committee communicate responses to the community?*

4. *Do any of the communications channels have the possibility for built-in feedback?*
(i.e. social media posts, email blasts, community meetings)



Conclusion

**With a community-wide vision,
anything is possible.**



A strong vision, shared across diverse stakeholder groups, can have **lasting impact and influence** even through changes in leadership both at the district and the local level. **Ready to begin the work?** Schedule a call with one of our teaching and learning experts to learn how **KnowledgeWorks** can support you in ensuring that every child graduates ready for what's next.

Get started today at knowledgeworks.org/contact.

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.

Get more resources to help make personalized learning a reality at KnowledgeWorks.org.