

Portrait of a Leader

Essential leadership competencies for educators championing personalized, competency-based learning, from the classroom to the district level



SECOND EDITION:
With competencies
and rubrics

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The *Portrait of a Leader* was developed in partnership with educators across the country through KnowledgeWorks' Lead for Learners network, a national network of educators dedicated to systems transformation through personalized, competency-based learning.

[Get involved at LeadForLearners.org »](https://leadforlearners.org)

What is personalized, competency-based learning?

Personalized, competency-based learning centers each student's strengths, needs and interests and provides differentiated ways to demonstrate what they know and know how to do, ensuring each learner graduates ready for what's next.

[Learn more »](#)



Leadership Development for Lasting Change

“As leaders, we’ve seen implementation of personalized, competency-based learning lose steam when a key person leaves. The *Portrait of a Leader* is about creating a pipeline of school-, district- and classroom-level leaders who not only embrace a learner-centered vision but have the capacity to move the work forward. **It’s a critical step toward ensuring that the work we start today continues to serve students for years to come.**”

Dr. Jeni Gotto,
Superintendent
Westminster Public Schools
Westminster, Colorado

Leadership is about everyday actions, not job titles

The *Portrait of a Leader* defines the knowledge, skills and mindsets essential for leading systems change in schools and districts advancing personalized, competency-based learning. Grounded in the lived experiences of teachers, principals, district administrators and other instructional leaders, the *Portrait* articulates a shared vision for leadership development among those driving transformation in classrooms and school systems.

The *Portrait of a Leader* centers five essential attributes—human-centered, authentic, collaborative, advocate and transformational—each explored through competency-based progressions that support reflection, growth and continuous learning. Designed to enable personalized leadership development, this resource:

- » Activates each *Portrait of a Leader* attribute through specific, observable actions and dispositions
- » Provides a developmental pathway for growth that is relevant across roles, settings and career stages
- » Establishes a shared language to support professional learning, coaching and evaluation
- » Connects vision and practice, helping educators translate belief into meaningful impact

Key considerations:

- » **All educators can be leaders who drive transformation.** The *Portrait of a Leader* supports continuous self-reflection and leadership development for district administrators, principals, instructional coaches, teacher leaders and others working to influence learner-centered change.
- » **The *Portrait of a Leader* is both aspirational and achievable.** Developed in partnership with educators, this resource captures essential competencies needed to lead systemic change. As leaders reflect on these attributes, they are encouraged to consider how [emerging drivers of change](#), such as artificial intelligence or climate disruption, may shape education systems and the leadership required to navigate uncertainty.
- » **Transformational leadership looks different in a personalized, competency-based learning system.** While many effective leadership development frameworks exist, this resource focuses specifically on leading change in contexts that prioritize learner agency, personalized growth, mastery of competencies and flexible learning pathways.
- » **Creating the [conditions for systemic change](#) requires collective effort.** Shifting to a personalized, competency-based learning system takes time. Members of the learning community must work together to nurture the shared vision, culture, transparency and agency alongside leadership capacity. This collective work is essential to move beyond isolated pockets of innovation toward sustainable transformation.

The *Portrait of a Leader* is designed to support individual professional growth and system-wide approaches to leadership development in schools and districts pursuing learner-centered transformation

Individual Growth

Whether you are a teacher leader, school administrator, district leader, instructional coach or other instructional leader, the *Portrait of a Leader* can be used to:

- » Self-assess proficiency across leadership competencies, identifying strengths and areas for growth
- » Set short- and long-term goals for professional learning and strategic action
- » Prompt ongoing reflection on leadership practice and decision-making
- » Collaborate with colleagues to identify shared leadership development priorities

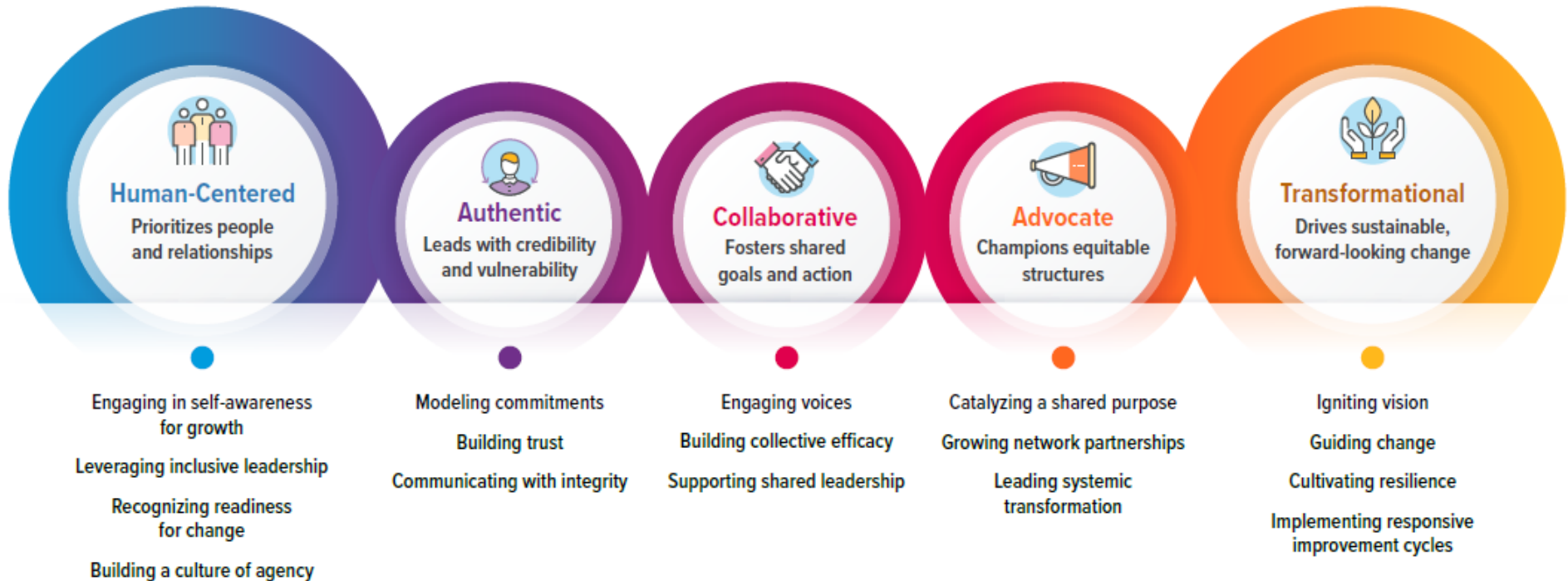
System Leadership

The *Portrait of a Leader* can also be used at the school or district level to reflect on and strengthen systemic approaches to leadership development. Learning communities can leverage this set of leadership competencies and rubrics to:

- » Inform coaching, mentoring and feedback conversations
- » Shape recruitment, onboarding and succession planning practices
- » Guide capacity building for distributed leadership and the development of [emerging leaders](#)
- » Align leadership practices with the vision and culture of personalized, competency-based learning
- » Inspire professional learning communities, coaching cycles and leadership institutes
- » Strengthen existing district or school leadership frameworks, ensuring coherence and consistency across the system

Portrait of a Leader

The knowledge, skills and mindsets educators need to lead systems change through personalized, competency-based learning



Above all else, educators leading change must be human-centered and transformational. Without a human-centered focus, all other leadership attributes become disingenuous. Without a transformational approach, all other leadership attributes would be in service of a traditional system.

How to use *Portrait of a Leader* competencies and rubrics

The *Portrait of a Leader* has been expanded into a set of essential leadership competencies—the most critical observable skills, behaviors and knowledge that can be practiced, developed and measured over time.

Each competency is broken down into a progression of learning using a rubric to help individuals and teams self-assess where they are and set goals for growth using the following levels:

ESTABLISHING

Establishing awareness of the knowledge, skills and/or dispositions required for the competency.

DEVELOPING

Working toward proficiency by practicing the more rigorous learning of the knowledge, skills and/or dispositions required for the competency.

PROFICIENT

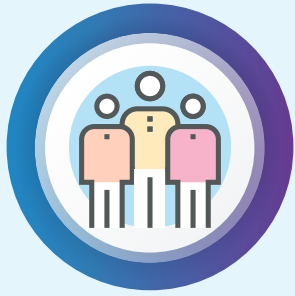
Demonstrating proficiency in knowledge, skills and/or dispositions required for the competency.

ADVANCED

Sustaining the practice and ongoing reflection on the knowledge, skills and/or dispositions required for the competency while cultivating capacity in others.

Tips to guide your reflection:

- » Remember that this is a tool for reflection and goal setting; there is no “right” place to be, and you might find yourself at different points depending on a situation or context
- » Review each competency first, then reflect honestly across the progression of learning
- » Journal your thoughts and consider potential action steps
- » Reflect on each competency for yourself, as well as for your school or district team(s)
- » Consider making meaning of the competencies collaboratively, then reflecting on the rubrics as a group



Reflection Questions

- » What are the collective values and beliefs of your learning community? How do you know? How are these used to nourish a human-centered culture?
 - » What systems are in place to foster voice, choice, transparency and agency for students and educators?
 - » What data do you have to measure trust, inclusivity and belonging? How are you using that data to continuously improve?
-

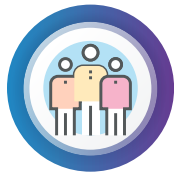
Human-Centered

Prioritizes people and relationships

Being human-centered is a foundational attribute. Without a human-centered focus, all other leadership attributes become disingenuous.

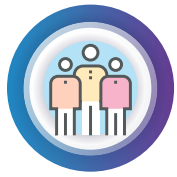
Human-Centered Competencies

- » **Engaging in Self-Awareness for Growth:** Reflects on biases and perspectives, recognizing how these shape actions, patterns and behaviors, to lead with greater awareness, authenticity and trust.
- » **Leveraging Inclusive Leadership:** Actively seeks out and amplifies multiple perspectives and needs to ensure transparent decision-making is shaped by those most directly affected.
- » **Recognizing Readiness for Change:** Leverages internal and external factors as well as system conditions that shape learning experiences and works to build the people, skills and support needed for lasting change.
- » **Building a Culture of Agency:** Establishes and maintains a learning community built on trust and belonging, ensuring that all voices are valued, supported and empowered.



Human-Centered: Prioritizes people and relationships

| COMPETENCY | ESTABLISHING | DEVELOPING | PROFICIENT | ADVANCED |
|--|--|--|--|--|
| <p>Engaging in Self-Awareness for Growth: Reflects on biases and perspectives, recognizing how these shape actions, patterns and behaviors, to lead with greater awareness, authenticity and trust.</p> | <p>Develops self-awareness of personal biases and perspectives through reflection, feedback or examples.</p> <p>Recognizes that personal biases and perspectives influence leadership beliefs, actions and interactions.</p> | <p>Explores how personal biases and perspectives influence actions and behaviors in familiar situations.</p> <p>Initiates reflective strategies such as feedback, journaling or dialogue to examine and begin adjusting responses.</p> | <p>Reflects on personal biases and perspectives to adjust leadership behaviors, communication and decision-making.</p> <p>Leads with authenticity and trust through intentional reflective practices.</p> | <p>Mitigates personal biases and embeds reflective practices into daily leadership routines.</p> <p>Creates systems and structures that build capacity in others to examine biases and sustain a culture of reflection, authenticity and trust.</p> |
| <p>Leveraging Inclusive Leadership: Actively seeks out and amplifies multiple perspectives and needs to ensure transparent decision-making is shaped by those most directly affected.</p> | <p>Understands the importance of multiple perspectives and seeks input when prompted.</p> <p>Acknowledges the role of transparency in decision-making and recognizes who may be impacted by decisions.</p> | <p>Initiates strategies such as asking targeted questions, gathering feedback or including others in discussion to surface multiple perspectives.</p> <p>Practices communicating how perspectives are considered in decision-making.</p> | <p>Proactively incorporates multiple perspectives and feedback sources into the decision-making process.</p> <p>Ensures transparency by clearly communicating how input from those most directly affected shaped decisions and outcomes.</p> | <p>Systematically restructures learning experiences that consistently center diverse perspectives in decision-making, ensuring that a multi-perspective approach is a foundational requirement for all collaborative efforts.</p> <p>Cultivates capacity in others to lead transparent decision-making models in which those most affected have ongoing influence and decision-making power.</p> |



Human-Centered: Prioritizes people and relationships

| COMPETENCY | ESTABLISHING | DEVELOPING | PROFICIENT | ADVANCED |
|---|---|--|--|--|
| <p>Recognizing Readiness for Change: Leverages internal and external factors as well as system conditions that shape learning experiences and works to build the people, skills and support needed for lasting change.</p> | <p>Describes internal and external elements that may impact the learning experience.</p> <p>Identifies the basic resources and skills individuals need to navigate new organizational shifts.</p> | <p>Connects specific system conditions to their effects on learners and begins to adapt strategies to better align with the learning experience.</p> <p>Actively prepares team members and aligns organizational workflows to ensure a smooth transition during periods of growth or adjustment.</p> | <p>Leverages internal and external factors and system conditions to proactively stabilize and optimize the learning experience.</p> <p>Intentionally builds capacity to ensure both human and organizational readiness for sustainable change, balancing individual needs with structural stability.</p> | <p>Anticipates shifts in internal and external factors, proactively optimizing system conditions to create a resilient, high-performing learning ecosystem that thrives amidst change.</p> <p>Cultivates a self-sustaining culture of agility where human and organizational systems are inherently designed to evolve, innovate and lead through continuous change.</p> |
| <p>Building a Culture of Agency: Establishes and maintains a learning community built on trust and belonging, ensuring that all voices are valued, supported and empowered.</p> | <p>Grows understanding of the importance of trust, belonging and voice by reflecting on interactions and observing effective practices.</p> <p>Identifies ways to include and support diverse voices in the learning community.</p> | <p>Initiates opportunities for participation and support within the learning community using strategies such as check-ins, structured discussions or relationship-building routines.</p> <p>Explores practices that elevate and support diverse voices.</p> | <p>Maintains a learning community built on trust and belonging through consistent routines, inclusive practices and intentional relationship-building.</p> <p>Implements structures that ensure all voices are valued, supported and empowered so that everyone can contribute meaningfully.</p> | <p>Sustains systems that embed trust, belonging and voice across the learning community.</p> <p>Cultivates capacity in others to create environments where all voices are valued, supported and empowered, ensuring lasting and scalable impact.</p> |



Reflection Questions

- » How are you using your shared vision and inclusive decision-making to inform the learning community's goals?
 - » How does your use of data and continuous improvement focus on relationships, reflective learning and innovation in pursuit of systemic transformation?
-

Transformational

Drives sustainable, forward-looking change

Driving transformational change is foundational. Without a transformational approach, all other leadership attributes would be in service of a traditional system.

Transformational Competencies

- » **Igniting Vision:** Cultivates shared ownership and a future-focused culture among the community to realize a vision for personalized, competency-based learning.
- » **Guiding Change:** Implements intentional, systemic strategies and actions to enable the spread, scale and sustainability of change efforts.
- » **Cultivating Resilience:** Responds to setbacks by adapting with optimism and persistence, engaging in reflection to learn from challenges and maintaining focus on the long-term vision.
- » **Implementing Responsive Improvement Cycles:** Leverages feedback, data and current research to ensure continuous improvement and sustainability of systems.



Transformational: Drives sustainable, forward-looking change

| COMPETENCY | ESTABLISHING | DEVELOPING | PROFICIENT | ADVANCED |
|--|---|---|---|--|
| <p>Igniting Vision: Cultivates shared ownership and a future-focused culture among the community to realize a vision for personalized, competency-based learning.</p> | <p>Communicates and identifies a shared vision among the community for a future-ready system.</p> <p>Understands a need for system change toward personalized, competency-based learning to ensure all learners are future ready.</p> | <p>Engages stakeholders in shaping a shared vision, resulting in growing transparency and ownership across the community.</p> <p>Describes, to a broad range of audiences, how personalized competency-based learning practices prepare learners for their future and tailors the message for diverse stakeholders.</p> | <p>Cultivates a shared vision that is owned and embodied by the community.</p> <p>Engages the community in shaping a future-focused culture aligned to a collective vision for personalized, competency-based learning.</p> | <p>Sustains and adjusts the shared vision based on the evolving needs of the school and community.</p> <p>Networks across the broader community to inspire and scale leadership for personalized, competency-based learning.</p> |
| <p>Guiding Change: Implements intentional, systemic strategies and actions to enable the spread, scale and sustainability of change efforts.</p> | <p>Understands the key components of complex change and explains how strategies relate to systems, structures and desired outcomes.</p> | <p>Designs a plan for complex changes to include strategies and actions for systemic change.</p> | <p>Implements intentional, co-created strategies that enable the spread, scale and sustainability of change efforts.</p> | <p>Refines actions to optimize scalability and sustainability across context by experimenting with approaches and predicting outcomes.</p> |



Transformational: Drives sustainable, forward-looking change

| COMPETENCY | ESTABLISHING | DEVELOPING | PROFICIENT | ADVANCED |
|--|---|---|--|--|
| <p>Cultivating Resilience: Responds to setbacks by adapting with optimism and persistence, engaging in reflection to learn from challenges and maintaining focus on the long-term vision.</p> | <p>Summarizes setbacks and key takeaways from the experience, explaining how their responses affect outcomes.</p> <p>Identifies immediate challenges and begins to recognize how they relate to the long-term vision.</p> | <p>Describes logical connections between setbacks, strategies and outcomes, making predictions about how adjustments may improve future performance.</p> <p>Practices reflection after major milestones to gather lessons and reconnects those lessons to the long-term vision.</p> | <p>Models how to respond to setbacks by reflecting on feedback and revising strategies to persist with optimism.</p> <p>Engages in consistent reflection to navigate challenges, successfully using insights to keep the team aligned with the long-term vision.</p> | <p>Systemizes using adaptive strategies to persist in transformation in varied contexts.</p> <p>Integrates deep reflection into setbacks, transforming challenges into strategic fuel that accelerates the long-term vision of the system.</p> |
| <p>Implementing Responsive Improvement Cycles: Leverages feedback, data and current research to ensure continuous improvement and sustainability of systems.</p> | <p>Recognizes the need for and participates in continuous improvement cycles guided by a structured cycle and research-based practices.</p> | <p>Responds to and uses feedback, data and research to inform continuous improvement efforts.</p> | <p>Leverages structured continuous improvement cycles that use feedback, data and research to refine practices and monitor progress toward improved outcomes.</p> | <p>Builds the conditions for continuous improvement by leading rapid cycles of testing and refinement, using stakeholder feedback, data and research to identify, scale and sustain high-impact practices across the system.</p> |



Reflection Questions

- » How do you model being a lifelong learner and help members of your learning community engage in long-term goals aligned with the shared vision?
 - » How are you establishing or sustaining communication practices that prioritize transparency within your learning community?
-

Authentic

Leads with credibility and vulnerability

Authentic Competencies

- » **Modeling Commitments:** Champions and models personalized, competency-based learning tenets through leadership practices, professional learning and policy decisions.
- » **Building Trust:** Cultivates credibility and trust by engaging in collaborative learning, jointly exploring challenges, sharing expertise and reflecting on collective insights to drive growth and shared success.
- » **Communicating with Integrity:** Establishes open, transparent and honest dialogue by clearly articulating vision and expectations, creating structured feedback loops and co-constructing shared understanding that builds trust and accountability.



Authentic: Leads with credibility and vulnerability

| COMPETENCY | ESTABLISHING | DEVELOPING | PROFICIENT | ADVANCED |
|---|---|---|---|--|
| <p>Modeling Commitments: Champions and models personalized, competency-based learning tenets through leadership practices, professional learning and policy decisions.</p> | <p>Studies leadership practices aligned to personalized, competency-based tenets that should be modeled during adult learning sessions.</p> <p>Understands the relationship between policy decisions and leadership behavior.</p> | <p>Analyzes the alignment between current professional learning structures and tenets of personalized, competency-based learning.</p> <p>Diagnoses gaps in policy decisions that conflict with personalized, competency-based learning.</p> | <p>Revises professional learning structures to better champion the vision for personalized, competency-based learning.</p> <p>Leads revision of policy efforts to champion learner agency.</p> | <p>Inspires adoption of personalized, competency-based learning-aligned professional learning approaches beyond the leader's context.</p> <p>Investigates and advances new policy frameworks that revolutionize systemic access to personalized, competency-based learning.</p> |
| <p>Building Trust: Cultivates credibility and trust by engaging in collaborative learning, jointly exploring challenges, sharing expertise and reflecting on collective insights to drive growth and shared success.</p> | <p>Understands ways leaders use collaborative learning structures to build trust.</p> <p>Identifies the importance of balancing vulnerability and professional expertise to build trust.</p> | <p>Practices the facilitation of collaborative learning structures to build trust.</p> <p>Examines how one's own behaviors impact the creation of high trust and low trust environments.</p> | <p>Implements lifelong learning practices using strategies to jointly explore learning outcomes and challenges.</p> <p>Models a balance of professional expertise and vulnerability to build collective insights that drive growth.</p> | <p>Sustains a transparent learning culture where feedback flows in all directions and dialogue is maintained in times of crisis or high stakes change.</p> <p>Cultivates the psychological safety of the community by championing marginalized voices and ensuring equitable transparency.</p> |



Authentic: Leads with credibility and vulnerability

| COMPETENCY | ESTABLISHING | DEVELOPING | PROFICIENT | ADVANCED |
|--|---|--|---|---|
| <p>Communicating with Integrity: Establishes open, transparent and honest dialogue by clearly articulating vision and expectations, creating structured feedback loops and co-constructing shared understanding that builds trust and accountability.</p> | <p>Examines current communication methods to diagnose gaps in clarity or transparency regarding vision and expectations.</p> <p>Studies established feedback methods and begins to participate in gathering basic team input.</p> | <p>Practices communication strategies to improve the transparency gaps.</p> <p>Facilitates feedback protocols to gather collective insights as part of regular practice.</p> | <p>Implements a decision-making process through open and honest dialogue.</p> <p>Creates structured feedback loops and co-constructs shared understanding around vision that builds trust and accountability.</p> | <p>Empowers a unified voice to drive vision and expectations.</p> <p>Mobilizes systemic communication frameworks that influence and inspire shared ownership.</p> |



Reflection Questions

- » How are you fostering trust in the collective wisdom of your learning community to sustain a culture of collaboration?
 - » How do you model asking for feedback/ input and making changes in response to that input?
 - » How are you using the time and space that community members have together for shared decision-making and learning?
-

Collaborative

Fosters shared goals and action

Collaborative Competencies

- » **Engaging Voices:** Uses shared decision-making structures that authentically engage all voices in shaping school and district practices to reflect the needs of the community.
- » **Building Collective Efficacy:** Cultivates an inclusive culture that leverages data to co-design and evolve personalized learning environments.
- » **Supporting Shared Leadership:** Leverages the strengths of others for leadership that builds agency and inspires trust among all voices to lead change efforts and systemic transformation.



Collaborative: Fosters shared goals and action

| COMPETENCY | ESTABLISHING | DEVELOPING | PROFICIENT | ADVANCED |
|--|---|--|--|---|
| <p>Engaging Voices: Uses shared decision-making structures that authentically engage all voices in shaping school and district practices to reflect the needs of the community.</p> | <p>Develops awareness of the importance of including all stakeholder voices in decision-making structures.</p> <p>Identifies existing structures and gaps for stakeholder input connected to decisions.</p> | <p>Connects stakeholder input to decisions by identifying patterns and areas of alignment.</p> <p>Initiates structures for gathering and organizing stakeholder input.</p> | <p>Integrates stakeholder input from multiple data sources to inform decisions and adjust processes.</p> <p>Implements shared decision-making processes that incorporate diverse stakeholder input.</p> | <p>Sustains structures for using stakeholder input, ensuring long-term effectiveness and continuous improvement.</p> <p>Empowers others to implement shared decision-making systems that strengthen inclusion and impact across the community.</p> |
| <p>Building Collective Efficacy: Cultivates an inclusive culture that leverages data to co-design and evolve personalized learning environments.</p> | <p>Seeks to understand characteristics of inclusive learning environments and explores available learner data.</p> <p>Develops awareness of the role of data in designing personalized learning environments.</p> | <p>Establishes conditions that establish belonging and invite learner voice and participation.</p> <p>Connects data patterns to strategies that promote personalization.</p> | <p>Cultivates an inclusive learning culture through strong relationships, co-design and consistent integration of learner voice.</p> <p>Co-designs personalized learning experiences and adapts learning environments over time using multiple data sources.</p> | <p>Sustains an inclusive learning culture with a shared belief that their actions can make a lasting impact on the community in alignment with its shared vision and future needs.</p> <p>Grows capacity in others to interpret and apply data to strengthen inclusive practices across the learning community.</p> |



Collaborative: Fosters shared goals and action

| COMPETENCY | ESTABLISHING | DEVELOPING | PROFICIENT | ADVANCED |
|--|--|---|---|--|
| Supporting Shared Leadership: Leverages the strengths of others for leadership that builds agency and inspires trust among all voices to lead change efforts and systemic transformation. | <p>Identifies individual strengths, skills or perspectives within a group or community.</p> <p>Recognizes how trust and agency influence participation in leadership and collaborative work.</p> | <p>Aligns others' strengths to roles, tasks or opportunities within change efforts.</p> <p>Builds trust by inviting participation from others to contribute to leadership or problem-solving.</p> | <p>Leverages the strengths of others to expand agency and shared leadership across change initiatives.</p> <p>Maintains trust by consistently engaging diverse voices in decision-making for systemic transformation.</p> | <p>Evaluates strategies for sustaining strength-based leadership to drive systemic transformation.</p> <p>Adapts leadership structures based on feedback, outcomes and evolving needs.</p> |



Reflection Questions

- » How are you communicating your commitment to creating a more equitable, learner-centered system?
 - » How are you modeling risk-taking?
 - » How are you empowering others to take risks toward your shared vision?
-

Advocate

Champions equitable structures

Advocate Competencies

- » **Catalyzing a Shared Purpose:** Activates members of a learning community as agents of change united by a shared commitment to learner-centered practices that advance systemic transformation.
- » **Growing Network Partnerships:** Builds capacity and creates opportunities with community partners across local, state and national levels to amplify learner voice, increase access and drive equitable achievement.
- » **Leading Systemic Transformation:** Utilizes data to drive change by transforming policies, procedures and structures to ensure appropriate access, strengthen learner agency and improve achievement.



Advocate: Champions equitable structures

| COMPETENCY | ESTABLISHING | DEVELOPING | PROFICIENT | ADVANCED |
|--|--|--|--|--|
| <p>Catalyzing a Shared Purpose: Activates members of a learning community as agents of change united by a shared commitment to learner-centered practices that advance systemic transformation.</p> | <p>Recognizes how advocacy efforts advance transformation within educational systems.</p> | <p>Practices strategies to engage stakeholders in building a shared purpose.</p> | <p>Mobilizes stakeholders by collaboratively developing a shared purpose and using evidence to drive collective action.</p> | <p>Empowers members of the learning community as agents of change, systematizing the use of data to refine and scale advocacy efforts that advance deep, systemic, learner-centered transformation.</p> |
| <p>Growing Network Partnerships: Builds capacity and creates opportunities with community partners across local, state and national levels to amplify learner voice, increase access and drive equitable achievement.</p> | <p>Identifies and explores opportunities to engage community partners in understanding learner voice and equitable achievement.</p> <p>Reviews existing partnerships to identify strengths and gaps in serving all learners.</p> | <p>Engages community partners to begin building capacity to support learner voice and equitable achievement.</p> <p>Creates structured opportunities for stakeholders to gather and consider student perspectives and needs.</p> | <p>Implements specific initiatives with community partners, leading to clear outcomes that link partnership activities to student achievement.</p> <p>Develops clear advocacy goals and opportunities for partners and stakeholders to engage in ways that amplify learner voice, address student needs and increase access.</p> | <p>Builds capacity in others to lead, evaluate and continuously improve advocacy efforts with partners.</p> <p>Sustains cross-sector partnership systems that scale equitable outcomes and center learner voice across contexts.</p> |



Advocate: Champions equitable structures

| COMPETENCY | ESTABLISHING | DEVELOPING | PROFICIENT | ADVANCED |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| <p>Leading Systemic Transformation: Utilizes data to drive change by transforming policies, procedures and structures to ensure appropriate access, strengthen learner agency and improve achievement.</p> | <p>Identifies patterns, gaps or inconsistencies in student data related to access and achievement.</p> <p>Recognizes how current policies or structures (e.g., grading, scheduling) may unintentionally limit learner agency.</p> | <p>Analyzes data to assess the impact of existing structures on specific learner groups and identify opportunities for change.</p> <p>Examines how existing policies, procedures and structures contribute to patterns in access, agency and achievement.</p> | <p>Uses data and research to redesign policies, procedures or structures to improve access, strengthen learner agency and increase achievement.</p> <p>Implements policies and procedures to guarantee equitable access and elevate learner agency.</p> | <p>Embeds formal, data-driven reflection into the institutional culture, building the capacity of others to lead, evaluate and continuously improve advocacy efforts.</p> <p>Scales cycles of evaluation and refinement for continuous improvement in access, agency and achievement.</p> |

Attributes in Action

Consider the following examples of actions that exemplify the attributes of the *Portrait of a Leader* in support of learner-centered systems change.

Teacher leader or instructional coach

» Communicate transparently with families and the community about strategic changes by providing regular and clear updates, listening empathetically to concerns and adjusting strategies based on feedback.

Human-Centered | **Authentic** | **Collaborative**

» Advocate for creating a school- or district-wide team of innovative educators to facilitate a mentorship program to guide colleagues through establishing instructional, curricular and assessment models aligned with personalized, competency-based learning principles.

Transformational | **Collaborative** | **Advocate**

» Research and share ideas with fellow educators and school and district leaders about best practices that support personalized, competency-based learning models (e.g., restructuring grading practices, scheduling, professional development). Pilot practices in your classroom or with teachers you support.

Advocate | **Authentic** | **Transformational**

» Partner with students to establish a school or district-level youth advisory group to advocate for and co-create innovative, learner-centered practices and structures at the school and district level.

Human-Centered | **Collaborative** | **Advocate**



School-level leader

- » Drive sustainable change by ensuring school-based professional learning experiences are aligned to the community's shared vision and long-term district goals. Incorporate/model transformational practices, including systems thinking and continuous improvement.

Transformational | **Collaborative** | **Authentic**

- » Launch and sustain initiatives that nurture relationships among staff and students, emphasizing social-emotional growth alongside academic success. This could include facilitating community working groups or building teams of learners and families to identify needs, develop action plans and advocate for policy changes that challenge systemic barriers.

Human-Centered | **Advocate** | **Collaborative**

- » Demonstrate commitment to personalized, competency-based learning principles by fully participating in professional learning, regularly modeling strategies and co-teaching.

Authentic | **Transformational** | **Collaborative**

- » Establish opportunities for teacher-leader development, such as mentoring or building leadership teams to foster teacher agency and strengthen leadership capacity for high-impact initiatives.

Collaborative | **Human-Centered** | **Authentic**

District-level leader

- » Facilitate a district-wide task force to co-create a vision for personalized, competency-based learning, ensuring the plan includes measurable goals and strategies for scaling innovations.

Transformational | **Collaborative** | **Authentic**

- » Establish advisory councils consisting of teachers, students and parents to contribute to curriculum revisions or school improvement plans, ensuring all voices are engaged in improvement planning.

Collaborative | **Human-Centered** | **Transformational**

- » Propose and support district-level policy or program changes that dismantle barriers for all members of the learning community, such as creating mentoring programs for underrepresented groups in education leadership and fostering a pipeline of leaders who represent the underserved communities and can drive change in the district.

Advocate | **Human-Centered** | **Transformational**

- » Use data and continuous improvement tools to identify and address resource gaps between schools and redistribute funding or staffing to ensure all students have access to student-centered learning environments.

Transformational | **Advocate** | **Authentic**

For Educators, By Educators

With guidance from [KnowledgeWorks' Lead for Learners Steering Committee](#), educators from across the country collaborated to identify the knowledge, skills and dispositions leaders at all levels of the education system need to advance equitable, learner-centered systems change. Their contributions, informed by 280 surveys, 18 focus groups, three design workshops and the collaborative development of aligned competencies and rubrics, collectively shaped the *Portrait of a Leader*.

The following educators generously contributed their time, expertise and perspectives to this work.

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| | |
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Related Resources

- » [Advocacy as a Practice of Critical Teacher Leadership](#). International Journal of Teacher Leadership. Bradley-Levine, Jill. (2018)
- » [Educator Competencies for Personalized, Learner-Centered Environments](#). KnowledgeWorks and the Council of Chief State School Officers. (2020)
- » [Educator Competencies: Assessment Tool for Prioritized Competencies](#). KnowledgeWorks and the Council of Chief State School Officers. (2020)
- » [Envisioning Educator Roles for Transformation](#). KnowledgeWorks. (2024)
- » [Finding Your Path: A Navigation Tool for Scaling Personalized, Competency-Based Learning](#). KnowledgeWorks. (2021)
- » [Leadership Competencies for Learner-Centered, Personalized Education](#). JFF and the Council of Chief State School Officers. (2017)
- » [Looking Beneath the Surface: The Education Changemaker’s Guidebook to Systems Thinking](#). KnowledgeWorks. (2020)
- » [Vision-Led, Learner-Driven: Supporting Student Success Through Personalized, Competency-based Learning](#). KnowledgeWorks. (2025)

GLOSSARY

Visit our online glossary for common terms and phrases used when talking about personalized, learner-centered environments, including those referenced here.

<https://knowledgeworks.org/glossary>.



KnowledgeWorks is a national nonprofit organization advancing a future of learning that ensures each student graduates ready for what's next. For more than 25 years, we've been partnering with states, communities and leaders across the country to imagine, build and sustain vibrant learning communities. Through evidence based practices and a commitment to equitable outcomes, we're creating the future of learning, together.
[KnowledgeWorks.org](https://www.knowledgeworks.org)