

Albemarle County Public Schools
White Paper on Personalized Learning Nov 12, 2015

In a **personalized learning** model “*staff* facilitate the academic success of each student by first determining the *learning* needs, interests, and aspirations of individual students, and then providing *learning* experiences that are customized—to a greater or lesser extent—for [each student](#).” Personalized learning opportunities actively engage students through positive community relationships with peers and teachers, and learning relevance and rigor.

In our schools, the [Framework for Quality Learning](#) sets the expectation that local concept-centered, standards-driven curricula drives what students should know, understand, and be able to do. Progress of learners in acquiring lifelong learning standards and curricular objectives occurs through [balanced formative and summative performance assessments](#). The pedagogy used by teachers offers students opportunities to:

- work individually and together,
- use a variety of learning tools and resources in and out of school,
- engage in activities, discussions, and projects through which they apply, analyze, evaluate and create,
- pursue personal learning interests that extend learning beyond curricular standards.

Teachers use a variety of strategies to develop understanding of the needs, strengths and interests of individual learners. These include pre-assessments, observations, individual conferences, class meetings, parent and student feedback, and surveys. As teachers develop understanding of learners they are able to [differentiate](#) the curricula through strategies such as different grouping patterns, use of a variety of learning materials or resources, and active response to student needs for intervention and enrichment support. Teachers use knowledge of students to also [individualize](#) instruction so that the pace of instruction can be varied as appropriate to each student. Today, educators consider personalization of learning as providing opportunities for students to make choices about the work they do from choices of books they read to projects they complete.

In a **personalized** learning environment, students actively engage with teachers to set goals and monitor their own progress. In Albemarle’s schools, students participate in owning their learning through a range of activities including but not limited to planning and completing projects, making program choices such as AVID, academies or arts pathways, leading student conferences, or setting up and completing practicums, community service, independent studies and internships. In personalized learning environments, students begin to advocate for what they need for optimal learning and become comfortable discussing their needs and interests with teachers.

Key considerations for further development of a personalized learning model in our schools include:

- 1) aligning curricular mastery to an individual student’s pacing needs for learning rather than to a specified number of “seat-time” hours or class schedule. Some students need extended learning time while others can move more quickly through curricula. To maximize personalized learning, the school calendar must align to meet student needs for extended learning, enriched learning, community work experiences, independent studies, college opportunities, and choices such as specialty program options including CATEC, AVID, CTE, Arts and make to learn pathways, and elective/exploratory programs.
- 2) using technology to provide more choices and opportunities to personalize learning through virtual and blended learning options. To ensure division-wide equity of access to digital resources and coursework, the capital improvements broadband project once completed will offer internet connectivity to students regardless of geographic location or time of year so that they can complete homework, do project research, and participate in virtual courses. As indicated in prior reports on virtual learning, there is a trend increase in both student participation in virtual classes and courses

offered. Participation typically is in response to the need for credit recovery, to address schedule complications, for personal interests, homebound needs, and/or to take college courses.

- 3) implementing the *Response to Intervention (RTI)* Model using student progress monitoring to further differentiate and individualize instruction so that tiered intervention strategies support growth in student performance across three tiers: I. high quality in-class learning support, II. targeted intervention to learning gaps, III. intensive intervention for significant learning gaps. Student engagement in goal-setting, monitoring progress, evaluating work, leading progress conferences or participating in IEP or meetings with parents are examples of how RTI can be personalized with students. **Professional Learning Community** meetings are a critical element of the RTI model to case study student learning progress and support needs.
- 4) providing ongoing and consistent professional development that supports teachers, classified staff, and administrators to develop and use strategies to personalize curricula, assessment, instruction to the needs of individual students. Teacher expertise in varying the use of time, tools, resources, space, grouping, cultural responsiveness, and differentiated instructional activities is essential to effectively personalize learning. Engaging students in understanding and advocating for their own unique learning needs and pursuit of personal learning interests in partnership with teachers distinguishes personalized learning from differentiated or individualized learning models alone.

Next Steps:

- Seek grant (HQ Proposal: Innovative High Schools of the Future as example) and operational funding to further expand personalized learning opportunities for high school students including but not limited to virtual and blended learning courses, summer extended learning opportunities, exploratory and elective offerings, community-based work experiences, independent study and college courses on and off campus, interdisciplinary learning teams, etc.) A high school of the future model will offer more independent learning transition experiences designed so that graduates are ready for adult citizenship, employment, and post-secondary education. Development of a school calendar that supports more extended-year opportunities for high school students is key.
- Monitor and report impact of RTI implementation on student growth progress (output) and strategies that teachers use to engage students in owning their learning (input) at the annual Board retreat in June.
- Monitor and report progress of virtual learning, digital integration, and Broadband access initiatives at the annual Board retreat in June.
- Seek increased funding in the 2016-17 funding request for professional development that supports expertise in implementing personalized learning pathways including differentiated use of resources, tools, time, grouping, learning projects, and pedagogical strategies including cultural responsive teaching.
- Continued development of student portfolios to document personalized learning
- Development of guidelines, procedures, and processes for Local Alternative Paths to Standard Units of Credit (Alternatives to the 140-Clock-hour requirement) (House Bill 1675 and Senate Bill 982) adopted on October 22, 2015.

