

Rhode Island Teach Plus Policy Fellows' Perspective on Personalized Learning and Recommendations for Successful Statewide Implementation



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2017-18 Teach Plus Rhode Island Teaching Policy Fellows

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+++++ INTRODUCTION +++++

The Teach Plus Rhode Island Teaching Policy Fellows are 24 teachers from traditional district and charter schools from across the state. We are the members of the inaugural [Rhode Island Teach Plus Policy Fellowship cohort](#). Teach Plus recruits and selects educators to become part of a larger movement of teacher leadership to mobilize their peers around issues impacting the teaching profession and our students.

Teach Plus established the Rhode Island Teaching Policy Fellowship with funding from the Nellie Mae Education Foundation (NMEF) to engage Rhode Island educators interested in learning more about personalized learning. We spent the year developing a deeper knowledge of personalized learning and sharing our reflections on why it is important to work towards a more student-centered approach to better meet the needs of our students and prepare them for success. As part of our Fellowship, we:

- + Met monthly in four-hour sessions held both virtually and live.
- + Received training through expert-led modules on using our professional expertise and voice as educators to influence policymakers.
- + Read national and state-level case studies and accounts of teachers and districts that are implementing student-centered learning models.
- + Reviewed research and met with leading advocates for personalized learning.
- + Met with key Rhode Island stakeholders and policymakers to discuss their vision for personalized education in the Ocean State.

As a culminating activity, we worked together to develop a set of recommendations Rhode Island policymakers, district and state education administrators, parents and the business community should consider in order to support the adoption and successful implementation of models student-centered, personalized learning across the state.

+++++ RHODE ISLAND LEADING THE WAY! +++++

The Rhode Island Teacher Policy Fellows were specifically recruited and convened to study the issue of personalized learning and Rhode Island's leading role in this educational movement. ¹ Governor Gina Raimondo, through the State of Rhode Island Office of Innovation, and Rhode Island Commissioner of Education Dr. Kenneth Wagner, through the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE), have both been charting a new course for the state education system with their [Rhode Island Strategic Plan for Pre K to 20](#) and [Personalized Learning Initiative](#) ². They hope to develop more student-centered approaches to learning in order to meet the needs of all students and young adults from pre-school through higher education and to prepare them and Rhode Island for life in an innovation- and knowledge-based economy.³

With the support of organizations such as the Nellie Mae Foundation, Highlander Institute, Rhode Island Kids Count, New England Secondary School Consortium, League of Innovative Schools, Big Picture Learning, Annenberg Institute, and Blackstone Valley Prep the state has become a pioneer in developing personalized learning models. It is the home of pioneering schools and districts like the Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center (MET), Big Picture Learning, Blackstone Valley Prep, Providence Public Schools and Foster Glocester Regional School District. In addition, due to its size, Rhode Island is an ideal state to serve as a learning lab for other states and large districts in how to create policies and the right environment to expand this work.⁴

+++++ WHAT IS PERSONALIZED LEARNING? +++++

Personalized learning has been a topic of discussion among educators for quite some time and defining personalized learning has been the subject of many debates and conferences.⁵ Many organizations have sought to clarify the meaning of personalized learning, especially during the past decade with the advent of new technology and brain science, and an acknowledgement that our

traditional industrial system of education has proven insufficient to meet the needs of all of our students or produce the number of graduates our knowledge-based economy needs to thrive.

The Rhode Island Office of innovation has defined personalized learning as follows:

“Personalized learning is a student experience in which the pace of learning and the instructional approach are optimized for the needs of each learner. Standards-aligned learning objectives, instructional approaches, and instructional content (and its sequencing) may all vary based on learner needs and interests. Learning activities are meaningful and relevant to learners, driven by their interests and past performance and are often self-initiated or self-selected.”⁶

We believe that with personalized learning schools can offer:

- + Student learning that will be rigorous and relevant and assessed regularly with near-time feedback.
- + Progression through the standards and curriculum will be measured by a learner's mastery of essential knowledge and skills and not simply a function of age or seat time.
- + The pace and level of challenge will be set based on the individual student's readiness and with meaningful goals to drive continuous learning and greater attainment.
- + Learning will not be confined to one place called "school" or one method of delivery. It will encompass all forms of learning — formal coursework, extra-curricular activities, online learning, independent projects, workplace experiences, etc. All will be incorporated and included in the student's record of accomplishment and attainment through traditional grades, performance-based projects, credit for prior learning assessment or other measures of a student's personal growth.⁷

Critics of personalized learning argue that it is heavily reliant on technology and is meant to undercut the human element in education and earn profits for private technology companies.⁸ Proponents, however, emphasize that technology is a tool to be used in support and facilitation of personalized learning, not as a replacement for contact with teachers.

"The learner-centered paradigm changes our very view of learners themselves. Learners are seen and known as wondrous, curious individuals with vast capabilities and limitless potential. This paradigm recognizes that learning is a lifelong pursuit and that our natural excitement and eagerness to discover and learn should be fostered throughout our lives, particularly in our earliest years. Thus, in this paradigm, learners are active participants in their learning as they gradually become owners of it and learning itself is seen as an engaging and exciting process. Each child's interests, passions, dreams, skills, and needs shape his or her learning experience and drive the commitments and actions of the adults and communities supporting him or her."⁹

The paradigm shift from teacher-centered to student-centered and student-driven education must encompass a holistic approach focused on academic and social

emotional growth. Technology may be a useful tool in supporting these efforts but it is no replacement for meaningful relationships between teachers, students, and peers.¹⁰

WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN TO SUPPORT RHODE ISLAND DISTRICTS, SCHOOLS, TEACHERS AND STUDENTS IN TRANSITIONING TO A PERSONALIZED LEARNING EDUCATION

As classroom educators from across Rhode Island we are excited by the promise of personalized learning and want to see our students succeed and thrive as lifelong learners. To be successful, we believe that Rhode Island education and political leaders, policymakers, district and school administrators, educators, foundations and the business community must work together to:

- + Support greater engagement of students, parents, and the broader community in creating understanding and demand for personalized learning environments;
- + Rethink and revise teacher preparation and professional learning for educators to support student-centered teaching and provide incentives and supports to encourage this shift;
- + Move towards a fully Competency-Based Education (CBE) system with Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) and provide grants to schools and districts interested in implementing;
- + Redesign the physical, programmatic, and pedagogical structures of our schools to support teachers in implementing personalized student learning and prioritize schools and districts interested in doing so when awarding funds; and,
- + Conduct ongoing action research with RIDE, districts, teachers, and area colleges to identify key learnings and measure student outcomes.

RECOMMENDATION 1: Support greater engagement of students, parents, and the broader community in creating a greater understanding and demand for personalized learning environments

Despite developing a comprehensive [strategic plan](#), and the many discussions, articles, white papers, conferences, and outreach by the Rhode Island Department of Education and partner organizations, the term personalized learning is still little understood among educators, students, and parents, and even less so among the general population. Once students, parents, and educators are engaged in a meaningful discussion about their aspirations for education, the need and desire for a more individualized, student-centric approach based on strong, supportive

relationships focused on meeting real-world challenges becomes clear. Rhode Island Kids Count provides multiple student perspectives in its report [Engaging Students in Their Own Learning: Rhode Island Youth Perspectives](#)¹¹ As educators and leaders, we need to amplify this conversation and engage a greater number of students, fellow educators, and political, community, and business leaders in this work in order to promote and support implementation of personalized learning methods in our schools and districts.

To build greater community support for personalized learning, we recommend:

A: Surveying students, parents, education leaders, and the business community to better understand their aspirations for public education and to measure their knowledge level of personalized learning and the real economic need for preparing students for a 21st century, knowledge-based innovation economy.

B: Conducting interviews with students, educators, and parents that have had successful experiences with personalized learning and promote their stories via podcasts, digital media, social media, etc. to increase awareness of the vision of what could be. See Rhode Island Kids Count report [Engaging Students in Their Own Learning: Rhode Island Youth Perspectives](#) for an exemplar for further community engagement.

C: Recruiting and training community cadres of socioeconomically, racially, and linguistically-diverse parents, teachers, students and community/business leaders to conduct regional community meetings in partnership with allied organizations to engage and educate others as to the need to embrace and support personalized learning moving forward. Begin by convening all of the supportive organizations in Rhode Island to develop a joint training and communications program and create a plan for mapping out locations and a timeline for conducting community meetings.

D: Preparing and distributing printed material and web-based tools for engagement. All materials should be translated into the home language of students in the school or community. See Education Elements **The Core Four of Personalized Learning: A Parent's Guide to Personalized Learning** and **Students at the Center Hub** for exemplars.

E: Providing regular open house opportunities to visit local showcases of personalized learning such as the MET, Blackstone Valley Prep High School, and other Rhode Island schools that are deep in the work with the New England Secondary School Consortiums' **League of Innovative Schools**¹² and **Lighthouse Schools**.

F: Providing a fund to cover substitute teacher costs to allow teachers to visit schools showcasing personalized learning methods during the school day to study tangible examples of success.

Establishing a clear vision and rationale for personalized learning and better communication between the state, schools, parents, and the broader community is essential for building interest and sustained support for this critical transition in our education system. It will take building a larger network of active ambassadors and supporters to make sure the vision becomes a reality.

RECOMMENDATION 2: Rethink and revise teacher preparation and professional learning for educators to support student-centered teaching and provide incentives and supports to encourage this shift

While Rhode Island has been praised for leading the way on personalized learning in its schools, the fact remains that out state is not preparing teachers who are able to execute these learning strategies. As teachers, we are excited by the former, but we are concerned that the teacher preparation programs in our state are not preparing teachers for this new era in teaching.

A perfect example of the challenge we face is that, despite all the headlines declaring that Rhode Island is leading the way in personalized learning, when a Rhode Island Teach Plus Fellow mentioned this to a young colleague and a recent education graduate from a local university, she was unfamiliar with the term and unaware that Rhode Island was leading the way. As a first-year teacher, she joins a teacher workforce in Rhode Island that is at worst unaware and/or opposed to personalized learning or, in a best-case scenario, is open and willing but untrained in personalized learning methodologies.

As a state we need to change this dynamic. For our students to achieve at a high level, we must first properly train our educators. If Rhode Island truly expects to successfully expand and implement personalized learning as a mindset and educational strategy, RIDE, teacher preparation programs, and professional development providers need to rethink and revamp how they are preparing, certifying, and continuously developing their current teacher workforce to meet the needs of students in this new methodology. RIDE is currently engaging stakeholders in this work and as classroom educators we applaud these efforts.

We believe that the state needs to develop a long-term human capital strategy to develop

the educator workforce and educational leadership pipeline necessary to implement their vision of personalized learning moving forward. To begin with, we must better understand the nature of teaching in a personalized learning environment. We must then accurately forecast the demand for educators in various certification areas to better meet the needs of our districts and inform individuals enrolling in an approved teacher certification program where they are most needed. The possibility of a future teaching shortage in potential high-need certification areas has been a hot topic in education debates for years in various states, but the actual figures to determine where teachers are needed most are hard to pinpoint. In 2015, Massachusetts commissioned the American Institute for Research (AIR) to compile a set of projections to inform their future workforce needs regarding teacher supply and demand. Some key findings from the AIR study include: a surplus of general education and vocational teachers, but a shortage of special education and English language learner educators; and the demand for educators of color is expected to increase.¹³ Rhode Island should conduct a similar review to determine where our greatest workforce needs are moving forward and set clear benchmarks for the field. We especially believe that as our student population has steadily grown more diverse, the state, districts, teacher preparation programs, alternative certification programs, unions, and youth organizations must work together to recruit, prepare, hire and retain more educators of color.

As classroom practitioners, we also believe that current teacher preparation and professional development programs need to rethink and revamp their course offerings.

Based on our own experience, we identified key skills and strategies that we believe are necessary for teachers to be successful delivering on the promise of personalized learning. They include instruction in how to incorporate and employ the use of:

- + Social Emotional Learning;
- + Cultural Competency;
- + Using Data to Inform Practice;
- + Technology and Blended Learning; and,
- + Project-Based Learning Through In-School and Community-Based Projects and Internships

SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING

A common phrase uttered in the discourse around personalized learning is “meeting students where they are at academically.” While tailoring instruction to a given student’s academic context is important and vital to effective implementation of personalized learning, it is equally important and vital, according to Teacher Educator Chris Emdin, to “[meet] each student on his or her cultural and emotional turf.”¹⁴ They must address student’s social emotional learning (SEL) needs as well. The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) defines SEL as

“Social and emotional learning (SEL) is the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the

knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions.”¹⁵

Teachers must also recognize and incorporate who students are and the social-emotional challenges they face daily. Teacher preparation programs should make a concerted effort to incorporate training in restorative justice, trauma-informed teaching, as well as other methods of addressing the social emotional development of students beyond the traditional child development coursework.

CULTURAL COMPETENCY

The student demographics in our schools are becoming increasingly diverse while the teacher workforce remains predominantly Caucasian. We must recruit and retain significantly more teachers of color to diversify our workforce. In the meantime, however, current teachers need to develop their own cultural competency to understand the perspectives of their students, including the inequities present in their lives, and how these contribute to their challenges and successes. Culturally-sensitive curricula and instructional strategies are essential, but more important is an instructor who is sensitive

and responsive to the unique differences of each student. Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) connects a child’s home, school, and community—it incorporates multicultural curriculum content, and views everything from multiple perspectives. Through culturally-relevant teaching, teachers can forge strong relationships with their students, allowing students to feel comfortable enough to share their feelings with their teachers while enabling teachers to better understand their students’ needs. Research has found that when students are understood, they are better able to succeed, which in turn lowers dropout rates and improves student achievement.

USING DATA TO INFORM PRACTICE FOR TARGETED INSTRUCTION

Educators have access to enormous amounts of data about their students derived from local and state assessments. Effective use of data can lead to significant gains in student achievement and is essential to personalize learning. In order to tailor instruction to individual students, we must understand where they are starting from, where they have strengths, and where they have gaps in their learning. In order to do so, teachers

must regularly gather and analyze formative data to modify their lessons to individualize instruction for each student. Using data effectively can help teachers establish groups for targeted instruction, set the tone and pace for the class and individualized learning plans for all students. Reviewing data with students allows them to reflect on their efforts and set personal goals for moving forward.

TECHNOLOGY AND BLENDED LEARNING

The 21st century is seventeen years old. The amount of technology in the lives of our students, both in and out of the classroom, is only going to increase in the coming years. Technology as a tool to support teachers and students is an essential component of a robust personalized learning environment. Unfortunately, when discussing technology, critics immediately assume proponents are seeking to replace teachers and other staff with computers. To be clear, increased access to technology alone does not improve student learning, and in some cases may do more harm than good. Blended learning

combines the effective use of technology with great teaching. It enables teachers to provide timely feedback and spend more time working with students as they take ownership over the path and pace of their learning. The way we teach must change to prepare students for the future that awaits them. To achieve this at scale, preparation programs must ensure that prospective teachers can use technology effectively, enabling them to spend more time doing what computers cannot—building relationships with students and meeting their individual needs.

PROJECT-BASED LEARNING THROUGH IN-SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY-BASED PROJECTS AND INTERNSHIPS PROJECT-BASED LEARNING (PBL)

is a teaching method in which students gain knowledge and skills by working for an extended period investigating and responding to an authentic, engaging, and complex question, problem, or challenge.¹⁶ PBL in school and out in the community or workplace is a key feature of personalized learning environments. Teacher preparation programs in Rhode Island have a responsibility to train their teachers on the creation and implementation of engaging, relevant, and rigorous PBL experiences for students. PBL provides students with excellent opportunities to create a product, solve a problem, and/or learn about and impact their communities. PBL projects are student-chosen, self-paced, and give students the freedom,

creativity, and design-thinking skills to solve them. They require students to persist, to try various methods of solution, and to work collaboratively. To prepare our students for the workforce and for higher education, this aspect of personalized learning is crucial. We are doing a disservice to our future teachers and our students by ignoring training in this area. Teacher preparation and professional development programs must address this gap in their current programs for new and current teachers.

When we reviewed the course offerings on the websites of the leading Rhode Island teacher preparation programs, we found that very few, if any, of these skill areas were

offered. We saw very little indication that teacher preparation programs in the state are training new teacher candidates in the many dimensions of personalized learning. In addition, based on our own experience,

we believe that the state needs to identify and/or provide training in order to upskill the current teachers already in the workforce through high-quality, embedded professional development in many of these areas.

To better train and equip new and current educators to meet the demand for personalized learning, we recommend that RIDE:

A: Convene a taskforce of educators, teacher preparation programs administrators, and students to develop a long-term human capital strategy that clearly identifies future educator workforce needs, and the necessary skills and knowledge required for new and current educators to be successful practitioners of personalized learning. RIDE has developed an Educator Preparation Fellowship and Design Challenge.¹⁷

B: Conduct a thorough audit and review of current teacher preparation and professional development program offerings in Rhode Island to identify where there are gaps between their offerings and the necessary skills identified by the taskforce.

C: Incentivize and/or require through RIDE's teacher preparation and professional development program approval process and teacher certification/recertification process that all current teacher preparation and professional development programs update their offerings to include the skills necessary to be successful in creating student centered learning environments. (See Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education <http://www.doe.mass.edu/edprep/pr.html> for an example of possible approval process).¹⁸

We believe that if Rhode Island is truly going to be the leader of the next generation of teaching and learning, we must empower our future educators with the training they need to serve our students. Moving forward, we imagine a future in which our teacher education programs collectively commit to revising their curricula in order to best prepare teachers to serve our students for their roles in college, career, and community.

It is our belief that such vital preparation cannot happen without embedding a robust personalized learning program into teacher training. While there has been some progress, we must train our teachers to create learning strategies that affirm their identities and experiences, enhance their technology literacy, and empower them to make a change in their communities.

RECOMMENDATION 3: Move towards a fully Competency-Based Education (CBE) system with Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) and provide implementation grants to schools and districts interested in implementing this

The problem faced by Rhode Island and every other state is that we have far too many high school seniors graduating without the prerequisite skills and knowledge they need to be successful in college or future careers.¹⁹ Many have been moved along through our current system without mastering the prerequisite competencies needed to be successful in the following year. This has often led to students feeling frustration, anger, and developing low self-esteem. It also leads to higher dropout rates, higher remediation, lower college completion rates, and higher student debt.²⁰ This is the result of many years of missed opportunities to address and close these gaps earlier in a student's academic career.

We believe that Competency-Based Education (CBE) combined with thoughtful Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) has great promise to close these gaps and deal with inequitable results. CBE, often called mastery-based or proficiency-based learning, measures student success and determines their readiness for advancement based on their demonstrated mastery of skills and academic content, rather than age, seat time, or hours on task. ILPs, developed with the student and their family, provide students with clear learning objectives and give them control over their pace and means of learning. CBE is becoming more common in adult education. It is being used to battle high unemployment rates and the high cost of education. Adults can go back to school for less money, finish the same class work in less time at their own pace, and obtain better paying jobs in new fields.²¹ Schools like Western Governors and Southern New Hampshire University are seeing better results with their CBE and individualized coaching models than traditional systems. These models meet their students where they are in their

Blackstone Valley Prep Mayoral Academy Middle School 2 assigns each teacher a caseload of approximately ten students to mentor for conferences each trimester. These teachers meet with parents for a half hour and discuss the following:

- + Trimester attendance and PRIDE/Team point information, which is BVP's individual scholar and whole school incentive program that tracks points for positive behaviors (PBIS)
- + Star math/reading scores and what those scores mean for each student
- + Each student's report card and their standard based scores compared to each set of standards for each content and enrichment class
- + Each student's cumulative trimester assessment scores compared with the grade level averages
- + Each student's working document in which ALL teachers have commented on academic strengths, academic growth areas, homework/behavior comments
- + Each student's own self reflection of how they think their trimester has gone including each student's views of their own strengths and weaknesses

All mentors are then in charge of recording and tracking action steps from each conference and sending those action steps to grade level chairs so they can be discussed and implemented with each corresponding teacher during common planning time.

lives and provide the flexibility and support necessary for them to be successful.

We believe that our K through 12 systems must also move towards a CBE system with ILPs to fully implement personalized learning. Personalized learning and competency education go hand in hand. When you're personalizing education, you can't be sure you are helping kids reach proficiency without the competency-based infrastructure and you can't help each student become proficient without personalization.²²

In our current system, too often, students fail and are either simply held back or pushed ahead. Retention and social promotion have become contentious terms, and evidence shows that neither is a solution because these options do not often address students' real needs. Competency-based education is based on forward progression at the individual student's pace and getting regular, targeted feedback and coaching to improve outcomes.²³ Studies have shown that students who were below grade level that are enrolled in competency-based and self-paced learning atmospheres have been able to make great strides in closing gaps with their peers.²⁴ Students who are at or above grade level will be better engaged and challenged

and will continue to excel at their individual pace. Competency-based report cards that include narratives highlight student strengths and illustrate what they must do to improve their learning. The narratives encourage and generate an entire discussion around what teachers, administrators, and families can do for students to ensure their success and guarantee that they are able to apply content knowledge and skills to their lives. We believe that this will provide educational professionals, students, and parents the opportunity to dig deeper into what students are learning and whether they are truly prepared for college, career, and life.

Notably, RIDE, with the support of funding from the Nellie Mae Education Foundation, has developed a set of graduation proficiencies that are back-mapped to performance indicators from K through grade 12. RIDE is about to begin the creation of rubrics and assessment tasks that will provide examples of proficient work moving up the grade levels aligned to the performance indicators. Each performance indicator includes the integration of 21st C Learning Skills.

To accelerate moving towards a fully competency-based system of education in Rhode Island, we recommend that:

A: RIDE convene a statewide committee of pre-K through 12 educators, representatives from higher education, students, parents, and the business community to continue deepen their work to create state guidelines for establishing a set of rigorous, competency-based standards that will ensure students are put on a pathway to college and career readiness. This should include developing model standards, assessments, and evaluation rubrics for districts and schools to use to assess whether students have mastered the required skills and knowledge.

B: To ensure that students are college- and career-ready and have mastery of 21st century skills and state standards, districts and schools must engage educators, parents, and students in a planning process to move away from age-based grouping toward establishing clear community expectations, local competency-based grading system, and developing ILPs with all students.

C: Incentivize districts to adopt these new competency-based standards and assessments through grants and or/relief from other state policies/regulations.

We applaud Rhode Island's current efforts and believe that Rhode Island is on the right track in transitioning to a fully competency-based program of study and require that

all students have an ILP. This will ensure that every student has a plan for post-secondary success and is ready for college and career when they finish high school.

RECOMMENDATION 4: Redesign the physical, programmatic, and pedagogical structures of our schools to support teachers in implementing personalized student learning and prioritize schools and districts interested in doing so when awarding funds.

Many Rhode Island schools are diligently working to personalize the student learning experience. We believe that if Rhode Island as a state is to make good on its promise of a personalized education for all students and meet the goals presented in its strategic plan, it must rethink the entire educational delivery system in which students and educators operate. In order to be successful in implementing a proficiency-based, personalized learning program, in addition to training the educator workforce and developing proficiency-based standards and assessments, many of the traditional concepts and structures of schools as we know it need to be reconsidered and transformed, including the actual physical structures where we teach and learn.

As educators, we strongly support the Recommendations of the Rhode Island School Building Task Force (December, 2017).²⁵ Our school facilities in many of our districts are in desperate need of repair. However, we don't simply want to see shiny, new replicas of our current 20th century schools. We need to rethink our school structures to make sure that they are conducive to supporting students and teachers in implementing personalized learning methods and creating a more engaging and relevant educational experience to prepare our students as lifelong learners and for the workplace of the future.

To support the full development of our children's potential, we believe the state must begin by engaging students and their families as early as possible by expanding and improving its pre-kindergarten programs. Far too many of our students enter kindergarten

already significantly behind their peers. Access to high-quality preschool programs would greatly reduce achievement gaps and improve a child's chances of future success in k-12. Rhode Island must increase the number of seats and sites available, increasing awareness of free Pre-k programs, remove barriers to Pre-k attendance, and continue to push all programs to meet high quality national standards for Pre-K. Rhode Island has a federal grant and state categorical funds that has allowed for some increase but as teachers we believe more can be done in this area.

As stated earlier, we also believe that all students should have an ILP developed together with the student and family as early as possible in their formal academic experience. Beginning with their entry into Pre-K or Kindergarten, educators and schools need to meet every student and family where they are and build a relationship from the very beginning of their academic career. These conversations should include counselors and social workers so that schools can employ a holistic approach to student well-being with emphasis on mental health and relationship building. Using family interviews and available data and assessments of student academic and social emotional learning, educators and administrators can determine what academic interventions and wraparound services are needed build a plan to support their academic and social success. ILPs and wraparound services must address at-risk students' needs, as well as the needs of more advanced learners, in order to be successful. Informed by academic data and personal narratives, students, their families,

and teachers will co-create a pathway for each student's vision of success beyond high school.

To be successful, as we revision our roles as teachers and learners, we will need to rethink our school "infrastructure". We need to recognize that students learn 24/7 in formal and informal settings. This will require educators to play more of a role as facilitators of learning and as guides for students as they create their own pathways, rather than as lecturers and keepers of content knowledge. District and school leaders, school board members, union representatives and classroom educators will need to rethink collective bargaining agreements and school district policies to create more flexible learning environments for students and free up teacher time for collaboration with peers and individual planning time with students.

Policymakers should support the development of mastery-based education by providing support for educators to develop curriculum and grading rubrics through summer and after-school grants. As educators in a competency-based system, we need to make sure we measure what is important — actual learning, not rote memorization and/or seat time. Assessments should measure depth of knowledge, creativity, critical thinking, collaboration, and social skills. In addition, districts and schools must develop new policies regarding credit attainment and graduation requirements that incorporate credit for prior learning, internship, extracurricular and individual learning experiences.

Districts will also need to develop and

support learning management systems with technology platforms that create the kinds of real-time feedback loops optimal for mastery. Technology is critical to making this work. Having the necessary hardware, software, and interconnectivity to successfully implement such initiatives has been an obstacle in the past. Ideally, schools would have access to quality learning management systems that will give our students the opportunity they need to see their progress as they go, help them track their assignments, and move forward at their own pace. There are also legal and privacy issues that must be addressed, and regional or statewide technical assistance would help schools and districts quicken the process of moving forward with data sharing while protecting student privacy rights.

Technology provides needed support to make mastery-based, personalized education possible. But we want to assure teachers and parents that we are not advocating for a curriculum that is completely online where students work individually through a battery of course materials. While technology and online supports allow students, parents and educators to work together to support students' progress at their own pace and receive the appropriate levels of challenge and rigor, mastery requires more than performing well on computer-based assessments. Critical to mastery is the idea that learning is social, and mastery requires applying learning in context. Competencies do not focus only on course content alone but also on working with others, making sense of problems, and designing solutions and performance-based assessments in a real world setting.

We ask that District Leaders, School Board members, Union representatives and classroom educators consider the following recommendations:

A: Working with state leaders and community organizations increase the number of Pre K seats and sites available to families, starting with our highest need families and continue to push all programs to meet high quality national standards for Pre-K.

B: Schools and districts must provide teachers, students and families with structured time to develop an Individual Learning Plan and wraparound services based on individual students' academic assessments and student and family interviews

C: Support and implement the Rhode Island school building task force recommendations and prioritize schools and districts that are moving forward with creating personalized schools.

D: District leaders, School Boards, Unions and classroom educators should rethink school infrastructure to create school environments that are conducive to personalized learning. Priority areas to consider are:

- + Eliminating age-based structures and implementing a competency-based assessment system.
- + Assigning appropriate course loads and student caseloads to provide the personalized attention necessary to create and monitor ILPs for each student and support team.
- + Extending the school year and/or day where necessary.
- + Employing online learning courses to meet the interests and needs of students where appropriate.
- + Employing internships and community service blocks to provide students with relevant hands-on learning and to free up teacher time and further student learning experience.
- + Doubling up on core skill classes, or creating an intervention block.
- + Creating authentic Local Assessments and Credit Attainment policies.
- + Developing district and school-based technology plans to support the student learning.
- + Providing educators and students with the essential technology, connectivity, and training they need to support individualized learning

RECOMMENDATION 5: Conduct ongoing action research with RIDE, districts, teachers, and area colleges to identify key learnings and measure student outcomes as we deepen implementation.

The final recommendation is a request for action research. We are very excited about the possibilities for moving to personalized learning in our schools. However, we don't know enough about personalized, student-centered approaches to provide solid evidence of its efficacy. There is little research

right now documenting improved student outcomes and we have an obligation as the state "leading the way" to watch carefully and share what we learn. As we move forward in implementation, we must ask important questions: Are students absent less frequently? Are they learning more deeply?

Are discipline problems reduced? Do teacher, student, and family climate surveys register improved results? Do students report greater engagement? Do students persist in post-secondary college and career pursuits? RIDE, district leaders, educators, students,

and researchers should work together to determine the various indicators that are most important and establish methods for continuously using the data to guide, inform, and drive our work moving forward.

+++++ CONCLUSION +++++

Through its work promoting personalized learning, Rhode Island is letting 1,000 flowers bloom but we must also provide guardrails that ensure that all students experience rigorous, engaging, and relevant learning environments. We believe that RIDE, through its current strategic plan, has taken the lead in many of the areas we have highlighted. As classroom educators we are excited by the prospect of creating the necessary environment to implement personalized learning. We want to ensure that students are engaged and empowered in developing their own learning pathway to prosperity guided by their interests. We believe that putting the student at the center is core to creating lifelong learners. We must build public support for this vision and advocate for the resources and structural changes we need to make this

a reality throughout Rhode Island. We need to prepare and build an educator workforce that can implement this vision.

We offer our recommendations as classroom practitioners to encourage RIDE and our education and political leaders to continue their efforts to provide the supports we need to be successful in our classrooms. The path forward will require developing strong, trusting relationships between students, families, and teachers. Educators, unions, district leaders, community and business partners must reimagine school and learning as we know it. Through collaborative planning between state, district, and school-based education leaders, however, Rhode Island will lead in the transformation of education across the nation.

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