Ohio Personalized Learning Network Case Study
Riverside Local Schools

WHAT IS PERSONALIZED LEARNING?

Personalized learning is a learner driven approach to education that empowers students to take ownership of their learning.

HOW ARE SCHOOLS ENGAGED WITH PERSONALIZED LEARNING?

Schools across Ohio engaged in the LAUNCH pathway — a professional learning cohort that introduced teams of educators to personalized learning strategies. Schools received ongoing support from regional educational service centers (ESCs) and KnowledgeWorks.

LAUNCH PATHWAY ACTIVITIES:

→ Regular coaching

→ In-person and virtual convenings

→ Optional personalized learning implementation surveys with continuous quality improvement supports

→ Collaborative engagements with a national and state network of personalized learning practitioners

RESOURCES:

Ohio Department of Education and Workforce
http://education.ohio.gov/Personalized-Learning

PERSONALIZED LEARNING TIMELINE

2021/22 Exploring Opportunities

Educational service centers (ESCs) and KnowledgeWorks shared information about the Ohio Personalized Learning Network and LAUNCH pathway.

2022/23 LaMuth Middle School and Riverside Campus Joined LAUNCH

LaMuth Middle School and Riverside Campus participated in the LAUNCH pathway with school design teams consisting of one instructional coach and four teachers each.

Students and staff at LaMuth Middle School participated in the personalized learning implementation surveys as part of their continuous improvement efforts.

2023/24 Personalized Learning Continued

LaMuth Middle School and Riverside Campus continued to participate in LAUNCH pathway activities.

Instructional coaches supported educators in the middle school and high school.

The district, with support from their ESC, scaled the initiative to the elementary schools.
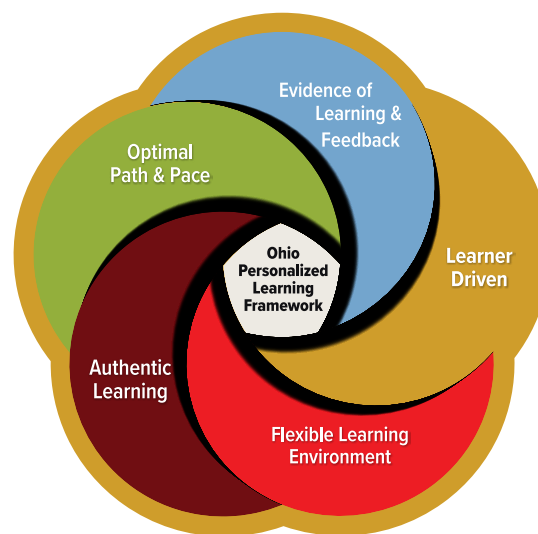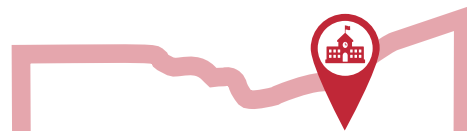

Ohio Personalized Learning Framework: Learner Driven, Evidence of Learning & Feedback, Flexible Learning Environment, Authentic Learning, Optimal Path & Pace

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District Spotlight

Getting Started with Personalized Learning

Riverside Local Schools expressed interest in personalized learning after their curriculum coordinator and one of two instructional coaches attended a presentation by their region's educational service center (ESC). An instructional coach shared, "In 2022, we heard our ESC talk about personalized learning, and at the beginning of 2022, that's when we decided that something needed to change. We needed something different and this was it, even though we couldn't really put a finger on what personalized learning necessarily meant." After the presentation by their ESC, the instructional coach did a lot of research on personalized learning. She also visited a district where personalized learning was being implemented. She started sharing what she learned with teachers at the middle school. One of her first points of emphasis was that of an innovation mindset – encouraging teachers to try something new and removing the pressure for implementation to be perfect the first time. Further, she noted the teachers often ask her for feedback and are willing to adjust as needed.

Building and Maintaining Momentum

Despite many changes, including a new superintendent, high school principal, and middle school principal, Riverside Local Schools is making great strides in their personalized learning implementation journey. The district administrators see that the teachers are engaging, and students are more curious and asking about their learning. The superintendent emphasized:

> We have some phenomenal instructional coaches. We really, truly leverage teacher leadership. I think that's essential to any sort of change project. The change agent is to have somebody who is a colleague coaching along the way. We also have an administrative team who sees value in personalized learning and has bought in. I think some of our early adopters who went all in and kept taking it and running with it, they sell the program as it is and have really moved it forward.

As part of their district's commitment to personalized learning, in school year 2022–2023, they built a district-wide "Riverside Way Instructional Framework for K–12" that includes five commitments:

1. Active Engagement
2. Student Centered
3. Data Driven
4. Positive Culture
5. Learning Spaces & Materials

This framework was created with the help of all stakeholders across the district, including students, parents/caregivers, teachers, staff, and school and district leaders. The framework provides indicators for what personalized learning looks like when it's intentionally integrated in the classroom. The framework will be used by school and district leaders as well as instructional coaches and peer teachers to provide support as they continue to expand their vision. For the 2023–2024 school year, the district chose their two instructional coaches to lead the work. One instructional coach is dedicated to the high school; the other is focused on the middle school and also supports the high school as needed.

School Spotlights

LaMuth Middle School

In 2022–2023, four out of 71 teachers were engaged in implementing personalized learning. Nine out of 70 teachers are engaged in implementing personalized learning. As of the 2023–2024 school year, the middle school has 527 students. Based on their work to expand implementation across the district, there are expected to be 25 teachers engaged in implementing personalized learning in the 2024–2025 school year. The principal shared:

> My "why" is the students; they are expressing needs, and we need to meet them where they are. It's also about meeting the needs of our teachers who are experiencing a lack of engagement. Personalized learning has new tools to help them reach their learners. As an administrator, I haven't done much because I'm choosing to give teachers the space to support each other. The most I've done is step back and give them time to collaborate and learn.

The 2023 Ohio Personalized Learning Implementation Survey suggested that educators needed more opportunities for collaboration, with only 25% of educators reporting they had dedicated time to collaborate with their colleagues on personalized learning. To increase opportunities for collaboration, the schools set aside Wednesdays for professional learning specifically for personalized learning implementation that all teachers attend. The teachers and instructional coach shared that they are leaning into team-based strategies based on content area and interdisciplinary approaches.

Their first year, the school design team[1] included four teachers who had never worked together before. By the end of the second convening, they were collaborating and sharing ideas with each other, excited about what they could create in their classrooms to support their students. An instructional coach shared the following:

> All of them started to work together and watch what each other were doing to get ideas. They would watch what other teams did and say, "Oh, I could do something like that. But what if I did it this way because this would be better for our kids? What do you think if I try that?" And I'd say, "Okay. You know what I'm going to tell you. Let's try." And they would try. We didn't know what it was at the beginning. So to have come this far, I think, is a pretty big deal. And I have six more teachers that came willingly to me and said they wanted to try next year with another two maybe that are thinking about it, which is 20% of the staff.

The culture of innovation and educator leadership was reflected in the results of the 2023 Ohio Personalized Learning Implementation Survey. Approximately 91% of educators reported they feel safe trying different instructional strategies and approaches in the classroom even if they do not work out. Further, 73% of educators report having opportunities for informal leadership.

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[1] School design teams were a key part of the implementation structure of the personalized learning initiative. School design teams typically consisted of at least one school leader and two to four teachers who participated in the LAUNCH pathway.

Interest is also growing in other grade levels because students who have already experienced personalized learning are asking why it's not implemented in other classes. The instructional coach emphasized, "The students are going to crave it. I am also seeing excitement in teachers that I haven't seen in a long time. And I'm seeing success and excitement in our kids too."

One of the teachers admitted that personalized learning reinvigorated her passion for teaching. She continued, "I started the professional learning for personalized learning, and I was so excited to be starting something new. It was a change I needed because it made me excited to do this, and the kids are more excited about being in class." The instructional coach on the school design team also shared her *why*:

> Kids that maybe weren't as motivated before, I see them excited now. Kids that struggled with being here for so many reasons, but now they see a connection. Teachers that are my age that maybe are burning out, all of a sudden there's a renewed spirit, and they're excited to come to work. It's not always easy to come to school; they're passionate again; they're excited again. Personalized learning is a win for everybody.

Personalized Learning in Sixth Grade: Learner Driven Approaches and a Flexible Learning Environment in English Language Arts

In a sixth grade English language arts class, a **flexible learning environment** is visibly evident. Some of the students sit at tall moveable desk, others opt to sit cross-legged or lay on the floor on the plush carpet, and a few have their backs against the wall with their knees bent in front of them. The focus for their class today is to catch up on their reading. Further flexibility is evident in their choice of books. By design, each student can choose their own book based on their interests. The teacher shared:

> I didn't like reading books that I was forced to read, so why would I make my students read a book if they don't want to read it? I always go back to me learning at this age and how education has changed. Education was always a box. You had to fit yourself in that box. If you're not conforming to the box, then you're not doing it right.

In this **learner driven** environment, students choose their book and then set three goals each week based on what they're working on and regularly reflect on their progress toward those goals. Across sixth grade, approximately 26% of students in 2023 reported having written goals most or all of the time, with another 46% having written goals some of the time. Even with the lower rates of consistent goal setting, students did report reflecting on their work. Approximately 85% of students in grade 6 reported their teachers help them see that mistakes and struggles are part of the learning process most or all of the time.

When the teacher looked back to last year, their first year of personalized learning implementation, she shared, "It was a little overwhelming at first when we started. We thought we had to do a million different things at once, and it wasn't. We just had to slow down and really look at what we were doing. As we looked at the whole framework, I realized I really do personalized learning all the time." She also said the team of teachers she works with are willing to help each other and administration has been very supportive.

When asked how a **learner driven** approach has changed her students, she said:

> It brings out this creative spark in my students. I did a book club last year for my seventh graders, and it was all about historical fiction. They had to read the book, look at the historical context, analyze and make connections about how history has impacted our society today. The projects they came up with were amazing...[G]iving them the freedom to choose what they are interested in, it encouraged them to be creative. It was amazing! I learned that if you let go of the reins a little bit, it's going to be magic!

She admitted, personalized learning is scary at first:

> You think it's this big, huge, ugly monster, and it's a lot of work, but it's not. Literally, every day, I don't use the whole framework every single day. Instead, I say to myself, "Okay, what can I implement today to make this lesson more personalized for each student?" It's just those baby steps that you do every day without making a big, huge production of it. I thought it was this huge production every day, and it's not that at all. I think people are scared of that; if you take one little step, you'll see it's worth it.

Personalized Learning in Sixth Grade: Flexible Learning Environment and Authentic Learning in Career Tech

In this **flexible learning environment**, the classroom is set up with desks in a horseshoe shape with space enough for the teacher to come around and support students as needed. Students sit on either side of the horseshoe so they can talk with each other about what they're working on. Today, the focus is on **authentic learning** as students choose three careers they're interested in. Some students know exactly what they want to explore. For those who are unsure of what they want to do, they are able to take interest surveys, including a picture-based survey that provides students visuals of what a career is like. The teacher explains that students also have the opportunity to learn from guest speakers who represent different career pathways, such as business, healthcare, engineering, and more. The teacher asks for student input to determine which professionals to invite for career talks so students have the opportunity to learn directly from a practicing professional about what it is like to be in that career. What students discover is that while they are choosing what they think they might be interested in, they find out the careers and work environments they want to steer away from as well.
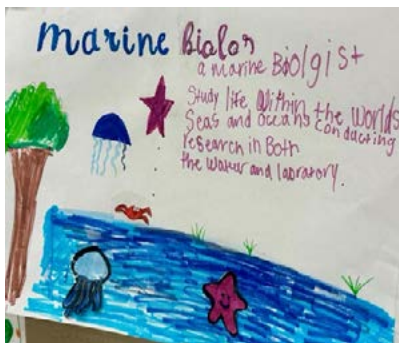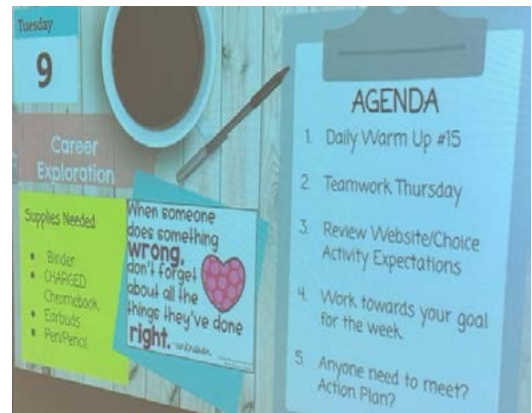
After the students decide on three different careers to explore, they design and build a website that serves as their digital portfolio to capture their research on each career. Students are also invited to create drawings about their potential career options. The teacher has students ask each other questions about their career interests and prompt each other to think about other careers. If students need more support, they meet one-on-one with their teacher. With support and guidance from their teacher, students create goal sheets and reflect on their progress weekly. Their goals are not only career-based but also include social emotional skills.

Personalized Learning in Sixth Grade: Authentic Learning and Evidence of Learning & Feedback in Math

When the bell rings to start class, the math teacher shares information about what the plan is for that day. The agenda includes students working on a project focused on the stock market. Students sit at large desks in teams of four. Students are asked to choose stocks for themselves as well as for a fictitious client. They take turns comparing progress with their stock options in their stock software and work closely with table partners to answer questions.

As an example of **evidence of learning and feedback**, the teacher provides feedback to students when they get stumped after researching on their laptops. The teacher has the students reflect on their learning as they examine their stock choices and whether or not they feel the need to make changes to their stocks to improve their portfolio or their client's.

This teacher wants to connect learning in the community so that it's more authentic: "Hey, what you're learning in science, what you're learning in social studies, all of it can be combined, and all of it is real world application. Look, right here, these jobs, these businesses, they implement what we're learning today in this way." Some aspects of **authentic learning** were a growth area for LaMuth Middle School, with 48% of students in grade 6 in 2023 reporting that they made connections between what they were learning and the world outside their classrooms most or all of the time. However, students do see the connections to future careers. Approximately 93% of students in grade 6 reported that they talked about possible jobs and careers.

CLIENT 1:

- I am a 27 year old and was living at home with my parents while saving for a house. I was able to save up a lot of money for a down payment and have a lot of money left over to invest. I do not have kids and am not married and don't have any large financial obligations. I really believe that after the pandemic clothing and in-person stores/restaurants will slowly make a comeback and want to invest a lot of money in them. Here is how I would like to split up my portfolio:

Portfolio Breakdown:

Food/Restaurant Company 1 : 20%   Company_____ Ticker_____

Food/Restaurant Company 2: 15%   Company_____ Ticker_____

Clothing Company: 20%   Company_____ Ticker_____

Banking Company: 20%   Company_____ Ticker_____

Technology Company : 15%   Company_____ Ticker_____

Cryptocurrency: 10%   Company_____ Ticker_____

Personalized learning has been difficult to implement for the teacher, especially this year because he is teaching new topics that he hasn't taught. He said, "Even though I have been here before, things have changed. My materials have changed. Despite that, I am keeping my eyes open this year for things I can do in the future, like some bigger projects and more community-based things." The teacher also shared how **authentic learning** is applicable to his own growth:

> Our building coach has been fantastic. Fortunately, she is located within our building. So, we have the opportunity to go right down the hall and say, "Hey, what do you think of this?" Or, "Do you think we could go ahead and manage this?" She's always super receptive and willing to pop in the classroom and see how things are going. Lots of good supports over the last year to be able to push this forward.

The LaMuth Middle school design team is still learning and sharing with others. The core group of teachers who have been engaged with personalized learning implementation over the last two years are presenting what they have learned at conferences and across their district and being compensated for their time. The district is celebrating them.

Riverside Campus

The high school has 1,769 students. The school began their implementation at the start of the 2022–2023 school year. In 2022–2023, four out of 96 teachers were engaged in implementing personalized learning. In 2023–2024, 10 out of 96 teachers are engaged in implementing personalized learning. Based on their work to expand implementation across the district, there are expected to be 25 teachers engaged in implementing personalized learning in the 2024–2025 school year. The principal shared:

> We need some conversation about what personalized learning is and how it's going to fit us…I'm a product of the 1980s, and we did no group work. We did no collaborations. It was bell to bell, be there on time. It was all compliance. School is still set up that way for the most part. With personalized learning, I see the opportunity for more positive relationships with kids.

An instructional coach who is dedicated to the high school is excited about personalized learning, as he is always up for trying new things and changing his mindset, "Our superintendent, who's new this year, has a clear vision that he wants learning to be more personalized in our district. Personalized learning is more of a mindset. It's thinking about the learners in your class versus what you're going to teach."

The instructional coach also shared that he sees more self-assessment and reflection by the students when personalized learning is implemented. The school design team has also seen more growth in less time for students, and students are engaged and more motivated to learn.

Personalized Learning in 11th and 12th Grades: Evidence of Learning & Feedback to Inform Learner Driven Instruction in AP® English

Upon entering the class, the first thing that's noticeable is flexible seating, including a sectional couch, groupable desks, and tall stools with high-top tables. Students choose what they want to work on based on their most recent practice AP® test, which identifies the areas where they need more practice. The assessments provide just-in-time data for students to self-assess and reflect on their learning.

> "Our superintendent, who's new this year, has a clear vision that he wants learning to be more personalized in our district. Personalized learning is more of a mindset. It's thinking about the learners in your class versus what you're going to teach."
>
> - Instructional coach, middle school

Based on those results, the students set goals for the next week. These **learner driven** goals are skill goals for the AP® test. Self-assessment questions include, "Where do I need to improve? Where am I struggling?" The options provide students with varying levels of challenge. Students receive feedback from the teacher as needed and then go back to their work to make adjustments. Peers also offer support. The teacher has students talking with each other about the stories they read and what they think. Each student acknowledges what the other students in their group see in the story compared to themselves. The activity is designed for students to negotiate meaning, talk through their understanding, and provide **evidence of learning and receive feedback** in a collaborative way.

The teacher expresses that personalized learning has become easier since last year. It just seems more natural this year for her. She shared, "I find myself going in that direction, no matter what I'm planning, kind of saying, 'Oh, okay. Well, how can I make this more personalized or make it so that the kids have a little bit of choice or so that they're working at their own pace?' So, I think personalized learning is just becoming something I just do now."

She continued, "People need to see that they may already be doing a lot of this in their classroom. It's just a matter of maybe adjusting some things here and there. It's not replanning every lesson, and it's not redoing everything you do in your classroom. It's little changes and trying some things out."

Personalized Learning in 11th and 12th Grades: Learner Driven Approaches to Support Optimal Path & Pace in AP® Environmental Science

One of the science teachers shared that he is still in the early stages of implementation. He implements personalized learning in his AP® Environmental Science class, "Using a full-length practice test as a diagnostic tool, students are able to target where they need support to be able to succeed more based on the units of study. So they guide themselves through different sections of review to help them prepare better for their actual test."

The teacher shared that he's working with the educational service center this year to see if the grid method could work to add **optimal path and pace** to his classes. For the grid method, he wants to structure a lesson to support **learner driven** choices where students can have different entry points based on where they are in the process of mastering the content. For instance, Depth of Knowledge (DOK) 1 could be basic vocabulary of a

topic; DOK 2 could be a one- or two-page document that has different activities that go deeper into the content; DOK 3 might be a lab with more application of the content; and DOK 4 could be extension activities. The biggest barrier for him and many other teachers who are in the process of implementing personalized learning is time, "I want to try these things, but I don't have time to plan for them. Little things, I can do, but I can't do a full implementation," he said.

As the superintendent pointed out:

> You're going to have the same barriers to any change. Obviously, time is definitely one. Space is one. The fear of change. Navigating the whole change process, to go and take those steps and take those risks. It is a big risk when you tell somebody, especially in our tested areas, that we're going to try something new that's personalized, and letting go of some of that control that's there, and giving students that autonomy is a challenge…We're making a huge shift in pedagogy, in the way we see a classroom, and in the way we kind of move forward with education.

Reflecting on Progress and What the Future Holds

When asked how they feel about implementing personalized learning, the superintendent shared, "It's a time of excitement. I think it's really what kids need today, what today's students need to be successful in our environment. Personalized learning provides strategies to make sure that we reach every single student." Riverside Local Schools chose to commit to the TRANSFORM pathway[1] for the 2023–2024 school year to "bridge the gaps across campuses." The middle school principal emphasized, "Change takes time. Big changes take three to five years. While we're in an era of now, we're celebrating incremental growth over time. We are encouraging small efforts over time, investing in mission and vision, and excited to see the progress we have made and the progress we continue to make."

The middle school instructional coach shared:

> I'm a coach, so I only have so much influence, but I would like to move personalized learning into the elementary buildings, which it sounds like we're going to do. Our implementation across buildings needs to have the support of both teacher leadership and building leadership. The promotion and implementation of personalized learning is becoming more organic. Teachers are coming to us saying, "Oh, I want to get on board. I want to be trained. Maybe I could try this."

The curriculum coordinator shared how the district plans to continue their efforts, "We are going to do a more general district rollout in February and start to prepare the rest of the teachers for what's happening." The district and school leaders and instructional coaches feel like providing time for teacher collaboration is key. One of the instructional coaches emphasized, "The time to get together and collaborate is so critical, especially right now, to work together to bounce ideas off of each other. We say to each other, 'What are you doing?' and "What do you think of this?'" Because of this, the district is trying to think differently about the school schedule so they can incorporate more time for their educators to collaborate and more freedom for the students to learn in different ways, especially at the high school level, including learning in the community and beyond.

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[1] TRANSFORM is another pathway of the professional learning model implemented as part of the Ohio Personalized Learning Initiative. In TRANSFORM, the focus is on building the capacity of district-level leadership to make systems-level changes to support personalized learning implementation across the district as a whole.

The curriculum coordinator added, "Personalized learning is something we've been leaning towards, so work is focused on solidifying what we're doing and giving us more of a structure. The work has allowed us to see where we needed to start, understand how best to collect data to analyze where we are right now, and set goals for where we want to go in the future."

METHODOLOGY: This case study highlights the experiences of one district and two of its schools that participated in the LAUNCH and TRANSFORM pathways in Ohio. The information shared in this case study is based on eleven interviews (two district leaders, two school leaders, two instructional coaches, and five teachers), five classroom observations, and student and staff responses to the Ohio Personalized Learning Implementation Surveys at LaMuth Middle School. In 2023, there were 238 survey responses from students in grade 6 and 275 responses from students in grade 7. There were 44 survey responses from educators at LaMuth Middle School in 2023. The term educators in this survey includes classroom educators, special education educators, subject matter educators, specialist educators, and paraprofessionals.

To learn more about Ohio's personalized learning efforts, visit: http://education.ohio.gov/Personalized-Learning.