



SYMPOSIUM BREAKOUT SESSION
MONDAY, OCTOBER 24, 2022 | 2:30-3:30 PM ET

Strategies to Support Personalized, Competency-Based Learning Implementation at the District Level: Lessons Learned From Three States

PRESENTERS:

- Mark Duffy, Research for Action
- Angie Rye, Lexington School District Three
- Eric Brooks, Yuma Union High School District
- Greg Dobitz, Oakes Public School



Overview of the Study

- Research for Action (RFA) is a Philadelphia-based education research and evaluation nonprofit organization with 30 years of experience.
- Over the past year, RFA partnered with KnowledgeWorks on the documentation and analysis of how personalized, competency-based learning takes hold in states and local districts.
- This research aims to directly support and inform states and districts already utilizing personalized, competency-based learning as well as others considering the effort.
- The study was informed by an array of qualitative sources from the study states and districts including document reviews, policy scans, and interviews with state and district level respondents.
- The study identified a sample of two districts in the three states implementing personalized, competency-based learning at the district level: Arizona, North Dakota, and South Carolina.
- In each of the study districts, RFA conducted interviews with a total of four respondents across the district, school, and classroom levels in the summer and fall of 2021.



Agenda

- Introduction of Presenters and Panelists
- Review of findings and structured discussion with panelists focusing on:
 - District Motivations
 - Systems Change
 - Capacity Building
 - Common Successes
 - Influence of COVID-19
 - Resource Needs
- Questions, Discussion and Recommendations
- Closing and Aurora Institute Survey



Presenters and Panelists



Mark Duffy
Project Director
Senior Research
Associate
Research for Action



Greg Dobitz
Personalized
Learning and
Instructional Coach
Oakes Public School



Eric Brooks
Instructional Coach
Vista High School
Yuma Union High
School District



Angie Rye
Chief Academic
Officer
Lexington School
District 3



District Motivations for the Adoption of Personalized, Competency-Based Learning

- **Previous work or existing interest aligned with personalized, competency-based learning:**
 - Districts reported that personalized, competency-based learning was something that they “already wanted to do” or had started to implement through aligned policies and practices
 - Individual teachers involved also identified personal alignment between personalized, competency-based learning and their prior teaching philosophies and practices.
- **Preparation for graduation and college and career:** Districts in all three states identified personalized, competency-based learning as a strategy to help students complete state graduation pathways and/or prepare them for the world
- **External site visits and observations of personalized, competency-based learning:** Observations of teachers in other districts, whether inside or outside the state, can act as a powerful motivator for district and classroom adoption

Panel Discussion: Do these motivations align with experiences in your own districts? Were there other motivations as well?



Changing Systems to Support Personalized Learning

- **Learning Progressions and Priority Standards:** Educators are working on “unpacking the state academic standards” to identify priority standards and learning progressions so that they can better track student progress against the standards.
- **Teacher Evaluation:** Districts reported revising their teacher evaluation systems to align with personalized, competency-based learning.
 - In one district, they will be modifying their evaluation tool to reflect personalized, competency-based learning “look-fors” in the classroom.
 - Two of the districts are implementing the Marzano Evaluation Method that is aligned with personalized, competency-based learning.
- **Standards-Based Grading:** All but one of the study districts are adopting standards-based grading. In some cases, this process had begun before implementing personalized, competency-based learning.

Panel Discussion: Why would you say that district policy change is important to supporting and implementing personalized, competency-based learning?



Building Capacity: Strategies for Districts

- Sharing convening learnings with other educators who were not in attendance
- Providing opportunities for internal and external observations
- Recruiting teacher leaders to adopt personalized, competency-learning in their classrooms and model the work/support their peers
- Offering problems of practice and study sessions for educators and leaders
- Developing human and material resources of ongoing support
- Leveraging existing meeting structures to deliver professional development



Building Capacity: Promising Practices

Design Teams at District and School Levels: Yuma	Personalized Learning and Instructional Coach: Oakes	Teacher Leaders: Lexington 3
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• District design team attends convenings, participates in monthly meetings, communicates with the school community, and supports vision setting.• Campus design teams focus on supporting school level practices and implementation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provides customized support for and feedback on classroom implementation of personalized learning.• Multiple interview respondents from the district identified this as an effective strategy for building teacher capacity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Each school recruited a group of teachers to lead the work with the help of the principal.• This group attended professional development and provide professional development in small groups during planning periods for teachers who did not receive training.

Common Successes

- **Increased student engagement:** Nearly all districts reported that students are more engaged in the classroom as a result of personalized, competency-based learning. As a result, there was also anecdotal evidence that students are better behaved, in part through more “personalized” relationships with their teachers.
- **Greater student agency:** Through efforts to encourage student “voice and choice” in the ways that they learn and the ways that they demonstrate their learning, student agency has also increased across districts.
- **Student ownership of their own learning:** District respondents also reported that students are better aware of how they are performing against the standards and what they need to learn to make progress against the standards. Further, students are able to articulate their learning goals in clear and specific ways.

Panel Discussion: What are some other successes that you would point to at the school and district levels?



Influence of COVID-19 Pandemic

COVID-19 has significantly impacted teaching and learning across the country since 2020. The interaction between the pandemic and personalized, competency-based learning efforts also changed education in the study districts in several common ways:

- First, there was broad consensus that personalized, competency-based learning helped implementing schools and districts adapt quickly during the pandemic.
- Second, the pandemic sparked interest in personalized, competency-based learning due to the student-centered approach in addressing learning needs and environments created by the pandemic.
- Lastly, the pandemic slowed implementation, professional development, and scaling.

Panel Discussion: In what ways did COVID-19 influence personalized, competency-based learning in your district?



Resource Needs

Additional resources are still needed to support implementation, and are aligned with the resources that were identified as most effective in supporting implementation:

- Respondents commonly reported that they need additional time, both on a daily basis and in the long term, to learn more about personalized, competency-based learning and prepare to teach using this approach. Respondents also explained that teachers need “time to create, time for conversations, and time to observe” concrete examples of what personalized learning looks like in the classroom.
- This need for “concrete examples” of personalized, competency-based learning could be addressed through a “toolbox” of instructional resources with learning activities to implement in classrooms. This can be provided through both observations of classroom instruction and curricular materials that can easily be incorporated into lesson plans.

Panel Discussion: Do these resources make sense? What additional resources do you think are needed to support the work and why?

Q & A

Recommendations

- Set clear goals for the work.
- Include educators at all levels in the district design teams.
- Develop district policy and practice that supports the work and removes barriers.
- Allow time for teacher orientation and implementation.
- Provide opportunities for classroom observations and reflections.
- Offer both human and material resources to provide ongoing support.
- Determine a strategy for dissemination of information that fits existing district structures.
- Define equity and how personalized, competency-based learning will support equitable student outcomes.

Panel Discussion: What are some other lessons that you would share on how to implement and scale personalized, competency-based learning?



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Thank you for joining us!

Share Your Thoughts

Participate in our one-minute poll (link in chat box)

