INTRODUCTION: PERSONALIZED LEARNING AND EQUITY

Twenty-first century developments in pedagogy, technology, and research have helped create new opportunities for schools and districts to redesign schooling in ways that better ensure that all students graduate with the skills and knowledge to succeed in college, career, and life. This kind of equity—where all students achieve at high standards regardless of background or zip code is both a central mission of the U.S. Department of Education (the Department) and a focus on the Department’s Race to the Top—District (RTT–D) program. These new school designs are taking hold in classrooms and schools nationwide and have the potential to produce outstanding results for historically-underserved students by enabling teachers to tailor instruction to each student’s strengths and needs. Achieving equitable outcomes through personalized learning requires commitment from educational leaders at all levels of the school system, new tools and resources, and high-quality implementation.

Through the Race to the Top–District (RTT–D) initiative, the Department has awarded a total of $510 million to two cohorts of 21 grantees serving 68 districts and consortia of districts to implement innovative local approaches to personalized learning. The Department made awards to 16 grantees in 2012 and 5 grantees in 2013 to design and implement personalized learning approaches with “instruction that is aligned with rigorous college- and career-ready standards so that the pace of learning and the instructional approach are tailored to the needs of individual learners. Learning objectives and content, as well as the pace, may all vary depending on a learner’s needs.” RTT–D awards focused on supporting grantees in developing and implementing new approaches for empowering students, training and developing educators, and using data to drive improved outcomes; although technology plays an important role in supporting these efforts, RTT–D grants intentionally focused on the long-term systemic efforts that underpin successful personalized learning efforts. The widespread reach of the RTT–D initiative involves more than 30,000 educators and approximately 440,000 public school students.

Over the course of the past few years, RTT–D grantees have learned what it takes to implement personalized learning, and their work and experiences can inform, enable, and inspire other district leaders and educators seeking to advance students’ achievement through personalized learning. Implementing personalized learning is a challenging endeavor and in the spirit of sharing lessons learned, in June 2016, grantees convened in Denver, Colorado at a Department of Education-hosted gathering, with other like-minded district leaders, experts, and thought leaders to engage in strategic conversations about the future of personalized learning (See participant list in the Appendix).

This paper is an outgrowth of this convening. The Department’s vision for this event was to bring together RTT–D grantees and stakeholders to achieve two main objectives: first, to begin to build a national network for personalized learning beyond RTT–D grantees inclusive of other innovative approaches that seek to create equitable educational opportunities and outcomes; second, to have the group answer the question, “What will it take to scale personalized learning equitably in a critical mass of districts and schools across the nation?”

This paper is organized into three sections. The first section shows where and how this work is taking place by highlighting districts and networks across the nation that are using personalized learning both within and beyond the RTT–D cohorts. The second section describes a framework for scaling that is intended to provoke thinking about how this work can achieve educational equity. The section is organized by the four dimensions of the framework: Spread, Depth, Sustainability, and Ownership. Each dimension is described with a summary, two examples of what the dimension looks like in districts or networks using personalized learning, and a set of guiding questions to help the reader reflect on his or her own scaling efforts and results. The final section details actionable opportunities for increased equity in scaling personalized learning that were generated from conversations between RTT–D leaders and experts in community-based partnerships, dynamic teaching and learning, and competency-based education.

I. IT’S HAPPENING: PERSONALIZED LEARNING

Personalized learning is taking hold across the nation, and the number of students in schools, districts, and charter school networks is growing. A common theme across the diverse approaches to personalized learning is a commitment to ensuring that the benefits of personalized learning have the widest possible reach, engaging all students in their learning. The growing use of personalized learning across the nation translates into more students with more equitable access to rigorous content and deeper learning.

This section highlights a handful of networks that are using diverse approaches to implementing and scaling personalized learning across the nation in unique contexts: Race to the Top–District grantees, the League of Innovative Schools, the Deeper Learning Network, and Next Generation Learning Challenges Breakthrough Schools. These networks are intended to exemplify the current personalized learning landscape. They are not representative of all of the schools and districts using personalized learning and do not include all the leaders and experts present at the Denver convening.

As shown in Figure 1 on the following page, this representative group of networks illustrates the widespread use of personalized learning, which in these networks alone now reaches a total of nearly four million students in public, charter, and independent K–12 schools and districts across 48 states and the District of Columbia.

- **Race to the Top–District (RTT–D):** Through the Race to the Top–District program, the Department invested approximately $500 million dollars in a network of 21 districts and consortia of districts to implement personalized learning as part of a strategic effort to advance educational equity and to prepare each student to master the content and skills required for college- and career-readiness. RTT–D grantees serve more than 440,000 students from 821 schools in 68 districts across 13 states and the District of Columbia.

- **The League of Innovative Schools (LIS):** The LIS is a network of member districts that are using or are interested in using technology to improve student outcomes. The LIS’s network brings together district leaders, entrepreneurs, researchers, and leading thinkers and serves more than 3.2 million students in 73 member districts across 33 states.

- **The Deeper Learning Network (DLN):** The DLN focuses on “creating dynamic learning environments that enable students to develop a deep understanding of core content and…use that knowledge to solve problems, think critically, communicate effectively, and be self-reflective about their learning.” The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation,

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supporter of the DLN, has set an explicit goal of spreading deeper learning to eight million students by 2017 through strategic grant making. The DLN serves over 227,000 students, mostly from minority and low-income backgrounds, in 10 school networks across 41 states.5

- **Next Generation Learning Challenges (NGLC):** Among a variety of investments centered on improving college- and career-readiness, the NGLC network funds K-12 Breakthrough Schools to design learning that includes personalized learning attributes for all students, such as learner profiles, personal learning paths, competency-based progression, and flexible learning environments.6 NGLC serves 24,000 students in over 90 schools across 26 states and the District of Columbia.7

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While these four networks cover significant ground, together serving nearly four million students, their collective reach is less than 10 percent of the nation's 50.1 million8 K-12 public school students. Their momentum is exciting, and their experiences provide great insight into how to plan, implement, and scale personalized learning; still, there is much more work to be done and many more students to reach. With a number of networks, schools, and individuals already committed to ensuring that all students have the opportunity to experience innovative instructional practices, now is the time to deepen and expand the reach of personalized learning. Together, we can take a giant step forward in promoting educational equity across the nation.

II. SCALING PERSONALIZED LEARNING TO CREATE EQUITY: MOVING BEYOND NUMBERS

Increasing the number of students reached by personalized learning practices is essential, but will not by itself make significant gains in advancing educational equity. Ensuring that each student, regardless of zip code, is in a school and district where s/he has equitable access to an excellent education calls for moving beyond numbers.

Cynthia E. Coburn, a nationally recognized educational researcher,9 offers a useful framework for rethinking traditional notions of scaling: four dimensions that can help innovations like personalized learning have lasting impact—Spread, Depth, Sustainability, and Ownership.10 The dimensions in Coburn's framework are integrated and not intended to be used in piecemeal fashion. The Framework’s design implicitly supports equity; however, using it to scale personalized learning requires more than simple application. Scaling personalized learning requires explicit attention to equity within and across the four dimensions to mitigate the risk of unintended consequences, such as maintaining the status quo or inadvertently increasing inequitable outcomes.

This section focuses on the four dimensions of scaling noted above. Each dimension is summarized below with examples to illuminate what it looks like in practice as well as a set of guiding questions for reflection and new ways of thinking about scaling personalized learning to achieve equity.

SPREAD

One way to achieve scale is through Spread, a dimension of scaling conventionally defined by the number of students who receive personalized learning. Spread by numbers is essential, but numbers alone aren't enough to help initiatives reach scale. In other words, it is not just how widely we scale or spread this work, but how that spread occurs that are important. Coburn's conceptualization of spread moves beyond the numbers of students who engage in a particular innovation to include the spread of norms, beliefs, and principles that are integrated into district policies, procedures, and professional development.11 This conception describes enabling conditions needed for personalized learning to become “business as usual.” For example, it is incumbent to evaluate and then address inequities that may arise as norms, beliefs, and principles spread with uneven consistency. Without these conditions in place, personalized learning and gains made in achieving equitable outcomes are vulnerable to changes, such as leadership turnover.

9 Cynthia E. Coburn is a professor at the School of Education and Social Policy, Northwestern University. Coburn studies the relationship between instructional policy and teachers' classroom practices in urban schools. To date, Coburn has investigated this issue in a series of studies that tackle critical issues facing public schools: the relationship between reading policy and teachers' classroom practices, the scale-up of innovative mathematics curricula, data use at the district level, and the relationship between research and practice for school improvement. http://www.sesp.northwestern.edu/profile/?p=22278.
Spreading Personalized Learning in IDEA Public Schools One Campus Leader at a Time

IDEA Public Schools (IDEA) in Texas is expanding 20 percent per year, doubling in size in the last three years. Now, with 51 schools and new school leaders coming on board each year, they are managing growth to ensure fidelity to its individualized learning model, which is guided by consistent beliefs, values, and practices. With this in mind, IDEA has invested heavily in school leadership and its Individualized Learning Playbook to communicate the core values of the model, which is available to teachers and others on IDEA’s intranet known as “The Hub.” The Playbook is divided into action sections: Learn (what Individual Learning really is in IDEA), Discover (what a teacher, facilitator, or school leader should do month by month), and Track (monthly student progress goals aligned to the charter school network benchmark of 1.5 years annual growth on the Renaissance STAR Assessment). Knowing that principals are critical to student success, IDEA uses the Playbook to communicate to leaders what they should focus on month to month. This effort includes ongoing webinars and regular course collaboration sessions for leaders, as well as teacher-led webinars for other teachers. The Playbook has helped to move responsibility for the change from the central office team to campus leaders. In the words of IDEA’s Senior Director of Individualized Learning Pablo Mejia, “Campus leaders are the biggest change agents, and when we successfully invest in them, everything else follows.”

“Meshworks” in the Big Picture Learning Network

At the heart of the Big Picture Learning Network (BPL), which serves over 5,000 students in 48 schools across 21 states as part of the Deeper Learning Network, is an educational culture that spreads to the broader community. The network is motivated by students’ ability to pursue their own interests and then establish connections with adult mentors around those interests within their community. Elliott Washor, one of the BPL co-founders, describes the network’s personalization design as organic, because no single learning style, strategy, or pathway fits two people identically. BPL’s underlying, driving belief is that, in order to learn deeply, students and adults must own their own learning. Part of BPL’s secret to spread and student ownership is its local and national “meshwork,” something the organization describes as “a windy and intertwined set of connections to the adult social and professional world.” Within these “meshworks,” students operate as agents, not only earning certifications that show their work is genuine but also reaching out to adult mentors to have their work professionally validated.

Guiding Questions to Consider for Spread

- To what extent are the norms, beliefs, and principles of your initiative integrated across the system (i.e., classrooms, school, districts, or regions)?
- How well is your innovation reflected in your district policies, procedures, professional development, and plans to support equitable outcomes?
- In your teachers’ classrooms, how prevalent are the principles and norms that are central to your innovation/model?
- How consistent and equitable are the ways teachers manage their classrooms and interact with peers, students, and families with the prevailing principles and norms of your initiative?

DEPTH

Depth is about moving beyond changing practices to transforming what educators believe about their students and includes rethinking social interactions between students and educators. Coburn advocates what she calls “deep change,” or “change that goes beyond surface structures or procedures…to alter teachers’ beliefs, norms of social interaction, and pedagogical principles as enacted in the curriculum.” Simply put, innovations need to be deeply rooted in the individual system’s actors if they are to be durable enough to survive the inevitable changes that confront school systems, both

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12 IDEA Public Schools in Texas, serves over 12,000 K-12 students across 28 schools. IDEA Public Schools was awarded a U.S. Department of Education Race to the Top–District grant in 2012.
13 Elliott Washor (co-founder), telephone interview with author, August 5, 2016.
internally and externally. Depth has major implications for equity, as educators who serve students from backgrounds unlike their own must confront and address a range of potential biases they may have in relation to their students.\textsuperscript{15} Without understanding and achieving depth, innovations can become simple, surface-scratching activities that run the all-too-familiar risk of becoming another great initiative that fails to stick.

Deepening Learning at Kentucky Valley Educational Cooperative

Changing mental models is challenging work. Imagine trying to shift the mindset of 2,860 educators to personalized learning in over 101 schools across 17 districts. The Kentucky Valley Educational Cooperative (KVEC)\textsuperscript{16} is addressing that challenge as part of their personalized learning approach. Within their RTT–D consortium, KVEC is creating strategic pockets where teachers who were early adopters of personalized learning are beacons for others. Each year, KVEC grants over 100 action research mini-grants—small awards to teachers who propose implementing innovative approaches to learning that empower students as capable, active, and invested agents in their own learning. Those selected share their results at an annual Action Research Summit, where approximately 1,000 people gather to honor teachers, recognize their work, and benefit from shared learning. They also stream this Summit, and in spring 2016, nearly 6,000 people from six countries and 12 states attended virtually. KVEC knows that not everyone will buy into innovation at the same time and with the same passion, but the right champions are leading a contagious campaign/drive/effort to implement personalized learning practices. Many teachers want to try personalized learning, but they need to see other believers in action to imagine the possibilities and practical application for their own practice. KVEC is doing just that, and their work shows the unmistakable value of cultivating strong teacher ambassadors who are invested and eager to build bottom-up support to sustain this work.

Seeing is Believing in Carson City School District

Is it better to focus on changing beliefs or to try to change practices that help to reshape beliefs? Carson City School District\textsuperscript{17} in Nevada found its answer through the implementation of their RTT–D grant. They are seeing dramatic changes in teachers’ interactions with students, where teachers are shifting from directing instruction to partnering with students to improve learning based on focused assessment data collected every three weeks. Carson’s Transformation Office Director, Dr. Steven Pradere, attributes the changes in teachers’ beliefs about students to the effective use of data and feedback based on learning target-aligned formative assessments: “Teachers are seeing real growth in real time; that success is possible for every student; and that what they are doing every day has an impact on their students’ learning.”\textsuperscript{18} One notable data point is the percentage of Carson’s 1,755 students in grades 6, 7, and 8 who are passing 100 percent of their courses. From 2012 to 2016, this figure rose from 75 percent to 93 percent.

Guiding Questions to Consider for Depth

- To what extent do the educators in your system truly believe in the initiative you are implementing and trust that it will lead to equitable outcomes?
- To what extent do they believe that every child can be empowered to be an agent in realizing his or her full potential?
- To what extent do school leaders, teachers, and students understand how biases may be influencing their social interactions?


\textsuperscript{16} This KVEC initiative involves 17 member districts comprising 100 schools in a rural setting in eastern Kentucky, representing 42,256 students. KVEC was awarded a U.S. Department of Education Race to the Top–District grant in 2013.

\textsuperscript{17} Carson City School Districts is in Carson City, Nevada, and serves approximately 8,000 K-12 students across 10 schools. Carson City was awarded a U.S. Department of Education Race to the Top–District grant in 2012.

\textsuperscript{18} Dr. Steven Pradere, (Transformation Office Director), phone interview with author, August 12, 2016.
SUSTAINABILITY

*Sustainability* requires that educators have a depth of knowledge about educational initiatives. It also requires that there are systems in place that provide the tools, resources, and support for educators to implement initiatives as designed and to sustain them over time. As Coburn notes, “Sustainability may be the central challenge of bringing reforms to scale.”\(^{19}\) By extension, sustainability is critical for achieving lasting equity; it is about implementing new initiatives in meaningful and lasting ways, not simply adopting them at a superficial level. Personalized learning must be fully implemented and sustained to make the deep, systems-level changes needed to attain educational equity.

Sustaining Change in the Metropolitan School District of Warren Township

In early education, learning spaces and environments are recognized as the “third teacher,” enabling and supporting learning.\(^{20}\) Leaders in the Metropolitan School District of Warren Township in Indiana,\(^{21}\) an RTT–D grantee, realized the importance of the learning environment and the need to create learning spaces that enable specific learning approaches. They decided that desks in traditional rows were not conducive to personalized learning. Students and educators needed flexible and open learning spaces to collaborate, experiment, and create. Warren partnered with an educational consulting group to create enabling conditions to support and promote personalized learning – a district-wide redesign of its learning environment, fundamentally changing what classrooms, libraries, and teacher workspaces look like. Now, instead of desks, Warren’s 12,300 students and educators enjoy learning and teaching in intimate small-group learning nooks, 1:1 learning stations, creative galleries, large-group collaboration spaces, and mediaplexes.

Vista Unified School District’s Blueprint for Educational Excellence and Innovation

What makes a blueprint more than a piece of paper? Vista Unified School District\(^{22}\) in California is turning its Blueprint into a dynamic platform for scaling personalized learning district-wide. Vista Superintendent Dr. Devin Vodicka initiated the development of the district’s Blueprint because he realized that Vista was asking staff to “do too much with too little; rather, the district needed to rebuild the house.”\(^{23}\) In collaboration with staff and community members, Vista designed and is implementing eight key strategies in the Blueprint\(^{24}\) to create the conditions for personalized learning at all levels. Leaders and learners within the Vista community place people at the core of their success. Using an “opt–in” model, Vista began by focusing on five schools to generate energy and a vision for personalized learning. This approach is working, sparking great momentum and guidance for the new school sites as they adopt personalized learning; teacher turnover is at an all-time low (one of the eight strategies), student achievement is on the rise, and last year’s graduating seniors received more than $5 million dollars in college scholarships. All of this can be attributed to the creation of conditions that enable people to do their work at the highest possible levels of effectiveness.

Guiding Questions to Consider for Sustainability

• How well does your district or school include the necessary tools, resources, and support to assist teachers in the effective implementation of the initiative?

• What organizational capacity and know-how does your school or district have to implement your initiative effectively and over time?

• How well have you ensured that systems-level inequities are addressed?


\(^{20}\) The learning environment is considered so important to the learning that the Reggio Emilia schools in Italy consider it to be a third teacher. Parents are considered the first teacher, and school teachers are the second.

\(^{21}\) The Metropolitan School District of Warren Township is located in Indianapolis, Indiana. The District serves approximately 11,711 students in preschool through grade 12 across 16 schools. Warren was awarded a U.S. Department of Education Race to the Top–District grant in 2012.

\(^{22}\) Vista Unified School District is located in Vista, California. The District serves approximately 25,000 students in K-12 across 32 schools. Vista is a member of the League of Innovative Schools.

\(^{23}\) Dr. Devin Vodicka (superintendent), in-person interview with author, July 6, 2016.

\(^{24}\) Visit the Vista Unified School District website to learn more about the VUSD Blueprint: [http://www.vistausd.org/cms/page_view?d=x&pid=&vpid=1389098574086&no_controls=t](http://www.vistausd.org/cms/page_view?d=x&pid=&vpid=1389098574086&no_controls=t).
OWNERSHIP

Scaling requires that innovations are owned by those engaged in change: district and school leaders, teachers, support staff, parents, and students. Ownership hinges on authentic engagement and a true combination of what experts refer to as “grass tops” and “grass roots,” a metaphor that illustrates the need for commitment to change from all levels of the educational system. Fundamentally, this is a ‘shift of authority’ to include those who are doing the work. When ownership is shared throughout an educational environment, there are more opportunities for stakeholders to work together to achieve results for every student. Ownership is particularly important to ensure that students are empowered to lead their own learning; educators can lead and shape teaching conditions and work to ensure that as students personalize their learning experiences, patterns of inequality do not develop.

Taking Ownership of Personalized Learning in St. Vrain Valley School District

What would happen to personalized learning if your entire district leadership team left? The leaders of RTT–D grantee St. Vrain Valley School District in Colorado believe that personalized learning would continue unabated. Here’s why: District leaders have broadened their ownership of personalized learning to include parents, students, staff, and community partners, and the district is seeing great results. Teachers own what they teach and have shifted away from using pre-packaged curriculum, saying, “we don’t want to adopt an ‘off the shelf’ science curriculum; we want to design it ourselves based on our students’ interests and needs.” For example, secondary students stepped up to help Denver Zoo support the Lake Titicaca National Reserve (LTNR) in Lima, Peru collect environmental data from Lake Titicaca, home of a frog on the endangered species list. They are working directly with LTNR and the University of Peru, assisting them in the operation of a robot and environmental data collection and analysis. Parents have also become increasingly vocal about what they think their children need in terms of curriculum and overall educational experience, and schools are making changes based on their feedback.

“Top-Down Support; Bottom-Up Innovation”: A Culture of Ownership at Kettle Moraine

What does shared leadership look like? In the words of Kettle Moraine School District Superintendent Dr. Patricia Deklotz, it is “top-down support for bottom-up innovation.” Deklotz explains, “We try to listen large, which means actively seeking out those who are closest to the issues and understanding the problems and the potential solutions.” Kettle Moraine School District in Wisconsin is using a unique approach to ownership in its implementation of personalized learning: each school has a unique design created by teachers and leaders. For example, teachers and leaders redesigned one school as a performing arts school, based on teachers’ observations of their students’ love of performing arts and their understanding of the arts as a powerful way to learn traditional content in creative ways. But it doesn’t stop there. When results came back from a comparative international test showing that the performing arts school had underperformed on its own expectations in science and math, the school owned the problem and the solution. Did they add more science and math requirements? No. Instead, the principal, teachers, and students looked at the data together and asked, “How can we do better?” They answered the question by integrating more science and math content into their existing thematic learning projects.

Guiding Questions to Consider for Ownership

- Who owns your initiative/innovation? Who is driving the initiative and is responsible for shepherding the work?
- To what extent are teachers, parents, and students engaged in decision-making and leadership related to your innovation?
- How can you better facilitate their buy-in so they feel engaged, prepared, and capable of putting vision into practice?

26 St. Vrain Valley School District is located in Longmont, Colorado. As the educational home of more than 32,000 of Colorado’s students, St. Vrain is the seventh largest school district in the state. It operates 55 schools spread over 411 square miles. St. Vrain was awarded a U.S. Department of Education Race to the Top–District grant in 2012.
27 Dr. Patricia Deklotz (superintendent), telephone interview with author, August 4, 2016.
28 Kettle Moraine School District is located in Waukesha County, Wisconsin, and serves 4,117 students in 5 elementary schools. The district spans 90 square miles. Kettle Moraine is a member of the League of Innovative Schools.
• What level of coherence and commitment do you have for your innovations across vertical levels of authority in your district or school?

As Coburn points out, the “tension between breadth and depth” is one that “may grow increasingly acute the more the reform diverges from existing practice and the more complex or comprehensive the reform’s approach and goals.”

Schools, districts, and networks engaged in scaling, implementing, or simply considering personalized learning can use the four dimensions of scaling to get started, stay the course, and go the distance on scaling personalized learning for equity.

IIIIII. OPPORTUNITIES FOR SCALING PERSONALIZED LEARNING FOR EQUITY

Scaling personalized learning for lasting change—so that every student, regardless of zip code, has equitable access to an excellent education—is a responsibility shared across multiple stakeholders, including those who are scaling, implementing, or interested in using personalized learning and those who work with schools and districts. By understanding how each stakeholder can support and promote the scaling of personalized learning, we harness the momentum built by schools, districts, and networks featured in this report (as well as many others using personalized learning across the nation) and continue to level the playing field of educational opportunities and outcomes for all students.

This section organizes and highlights key action steps for schools, districts, and networks to consider in their personalized learning journey. These action steps were identified by asking Race to the Top–District leaders and experts from non-profits, higher education, and philanthropy the following question: What will it take to scale personalized learning equitably in a critical mass of districts and schools across the nation?

The actions are organized into three stages of the personalized learning journey—Getting Started, Staying the Course, and Going the Distance—to support you where you are in the process. They are not intended to be an exhaustive to-do list; rather, they are a key set of targeted, impactful, and achievable actions that each of us can take to help scale personalized learning.

Getting Started

Whether you are exploring, investigating, or in the initial implementation phase, these steps will help you to “ready, set, and aim.”

• Join a personalized learning network. Check out the League of Innovative Schools application to see if membership works for your district. Take a look at Summit Basecamp to see if it could be helpful for any of your grade 6-10 teachers.

• Focus on implementation early. The National Implementation Research Network (NIRN) has a variety of tools and resources that districts and schools can use to implement personalized learning approaches effectively. NIRN emphasizes the importance of two early implementation actions: creating implementation teams and guiding your work using implementation stages. To learn more about implementation stages, check out NIRN’s Stages of Implementation Analysis: Where are we? NIRN also emphasizes the critical need for implementation teams comprised of a core group of leaders with deep know-how about the initiative and implementation to provide deliberate, purposeful, and transparent leadership. For more information, check out Establishing Implementation Teams.

• Design and use district frameworks for coherence and transparency. Using a coherent teaching and learning framework to guide strategic actions, decisions, and continuous improvement can help ensure you define the work, promote effective implementation, and increase the likelihood of achieving outcomes. Check out how Carson City School District, a RTT–D district, redesigned district-wide teaching and learning to align with its learning targets: Getting to the Heart of the Matter: A Glimpse into How Carson City School District is Using Learning Targets to Personalize Learning. Get started with Education Elements’ Personalized Learning Implementation Framework.

• Create conditions that support your personalized learning approach. Successful implementation requires effective innovation and implementation as well as enabling conditions in which innovative work, like personalized learning, can achieve results. Check out KnowledgeWorks’ District Conditions for Scale: A Practical Guide to Scaling Personalized Learning.

• Bring in key community partners, including parents, at the very beginning and maintain their "voice." Partnerships engage a broad array of community voices by building awareness and shared information, involving and mobilizing the community towards improvement, and co-developing solutions and strategies with community members. Get started with Strive Together Theory of Action 2015.

Staying the Course
These key action steps can help schools, districts and networks that are well into implementation do everything possible to stay on track with a close eye towards achieving equitable outcomes for all students across socioeconomic, racial/ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds.

• Create and use a logic model to measure changes in educators’ beliefs, as well as system-level changes. Logic models can help define and streamline complex innovations and align strategies to measurable outcomes. They can also help to define a few key measures that really matter (at the student and system levels) and offer a consistent data collection and evaluation plan. Logic models can be especially helpful when your district is trying to institutionalize the change while getting ready to pivot to stage three. Check out AEM’s Logic Model Toolkit.

• Build partnerships among researchers, districts, and schools to develop tools. Create partnerships with districts and researchers early in the process to establish and calibrate reporting and evaluation expectations and activities. Create a shared understanding of what the innovation is and looks like in practice. Partner for data collection, accountability, and sustainability. Check out REL Midwest’s public television feature, Building Partnerships for Improvement in Education.

• Create leading indicators to monitor and measure personalized learning approaches. Identify indicators of interim progress that will signal that implementation is on track to yield intended effects. Check out Getting Ahead of the Curve: How Race to the Top Districts Use Leading Indicators to Promote, Support, & Sustain Personalized Learning.

• Measure small changes to leverage big impact. Starting lean by piloting innovations prior to full implementation is a sensible and practical approach to investing in innovations. You can find out if something works quickly through Rapid Cycle Evaluation (RCE), a rigorous short-term evaluation (often completed within several months) that provides evidence of the effectiveness of an innovation before going to scale. Check out a primer on rapid cycle evaluation and lessons learned from two RTT–D grantees’ pilot RCEs.

• Use research-based practices to improve student achievement. Not all students learn at the same rate or in the same way. Achieving equitable outcomes is about providing each and every student what they need to meet grade-level expectations. Rigorous educational research can support the use of evidence-based practices to address inequities in academic achievement. Check out the Institute of Education Science’s Practice Guides.

• Translate results into success stories to inform, involve, and inspire others. Sharing success is critical for building support, spurring and maintaining momentum, and showing evidence of progress and success. The Centers for Disease Control has an extensive success story writing initiative. For more information, see Tips for Writing an Effective Success Story.

Going the Distance
For schools, districts, and networks in full implementation, these key action steps can help to ensure that personalized learning initiatives stick.
• Consistently implement high-quality, standards-based professional development for culturally competent teaching. To help prepare our students in increasingly diverse classrooms, with a teaching and administrative population that does not match the student population’s diversity, teachers must receive high-quality professional supports grounded in cultural competence. Experts agree that high-quality professional development is based on established standards for professional learning, mirrors what happens in the classroom, and emphasizes cultural responsiveness as a core competency. At this stage, professional development should be fully teacher- or staff-led and based on data-proven district strategies that ensure that the best teaching and learning strategies are implemented evenly across schools and classrooms. Learning Forward’s Standards for Professional Learning include all of these essential elements. Additionally, the Equity Alliance identifies culturally-responsive teaching in Culturally Responsive Teaching Matters!

• Now, more than ever, stay focused on what matters most. Leadership matters at all stages, especially when moving to the most advanced stage of personalized learning when students and staff need to be in charge of continuing innovation. Keeping the “main thing the main thing,” as Steven Covey notes, is essential to making innovation stick and deepen. The New England Secondary School Consortium’s Leadership in Action Series delivers e-mail briefings about key leadership matters related to personalized learning to subscribers’ inboxes.

• Double down on making student voice and agency the key driver for ensuring that all students in all schools are receiving what they need to succeed regardless of individual differences. Student voice and choice empower students to take responsibility for and ownership of their own learning. Check out Students at the Center’s Motivation, Engagement & Student Voice Toolkit.

By nature, personalized learning is a locally driven approach to teaching and learning. The drive and impetus to embrace personalized learning in your school or district will come from education and community leaders, teachers, parents, and, of course, the students who are at the center of this work. If you are ready to help every student but you need some help getting started or are looking to hear more about lessons learned and best practices, we encourage you to connect with the innovators who have successfully brought personalized learning to their own schools. For more information, please explore the personalized learning resources archived by the RTT-D program or contact the RTT-D team at the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Innovation and Improvement.

APPENDIX: RACE TO THE TOP – DISTRICT 2016 PERSONALIZED LEARNING SUMMIT PARTICIPANTS

RTT-D GRANTEES
• Carolina Consortium for Enterprise Learning
• Carson City School District
• Clarksdale Municipal School District
• Galt Joint Union School District
• Green River Regional Education Cooperative
• Guilford County Schools
• Harmony Public Schools
• Houston Independent School District
• Iredell-Statesville Schools
• Kentucky Valley Educational Cooperative
• KIPP DC
• Lindsay Unified School District
• Metropolitan School District of Warren Township
• Miami-Dade County Public Schools
• New Haven Unified School District
• Puget Sound Educational Service District
• Springdale School District
• St. Vrain Valley Schools

OTHER LEADING DISTRICTS
• Coachella Valley Unified School District
• High Tech High
• Indian Prairie School District 204
• Kettle Moraine School District
• New Haven Public Schools (CT)
• Vista Unified School District

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS EXPERTS
• Great Schools Partnership
• Nellie Mae Education Foundation
• StriveTogether
• Annenberg Institute

DYNAMIC TEACHING AND LEARNING EXPERTS
• Matchbook Learning
• Learning Forward
• Jobs for the Future

COMPETENCY-BASED EDUCATION EXPERTS
• Boston Day and Evening Academy
• New Hampshire Department of Education
• Competency Works

OTHER THOUGHT LEADERS
• Owl Ventures
• Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation
• EDUCAUSE
• Charter School Growth Fund
• Chan Zuckerberg Initiative
• Collaborative for Educational Services
• International Society for Technology in Education
• International Association for K-12 Online Learning
• The Barr Foundation
• KnowledgeWorks
• Charter School Growth Fund
• Consortium for School Networking
• Metiri Group
• Donnell-Kay Foundation
• The Learning Accelerator
• Mathematica Policy Research
• Woodrow Wilson Foundation
• Washington MESA of UW Office of Minority Affairs and Diversity
• Facebook
• International Society for Technology in Education
The District Reform Support Network (District RSN) offers technical assistance and resources to grantees of the Race to the Top–District education reform initiative funded by the U.S. Department of Education. The District RSN’s purpose is to support the Race to the Top–District grantees as they implement reforms in education policy and practice, learn from each other, and build their capacity to sustain these reforms.

The District RSN is also committed to sharing lessons learned and promising practices from the Race to the Top–District program with all districts, especially those implementing similar education reform initiatives.

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