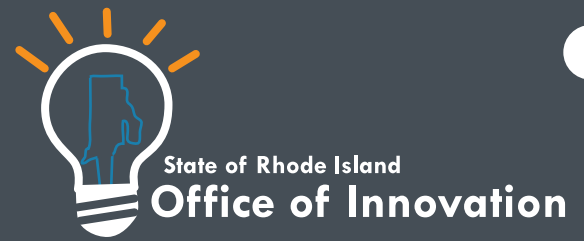


DEFINITIONS OF PERSONALIZED LEARNING



There are a variety of definitions of personalized learning currently in use. This appendix provides the most commonly used definitions as well as comments highlighting the similarities or differences among the definitions. As seen below, key phrases are seen throughout most definitions.

Legend

Competency-based progression	Student interests	Formative assessments
Student needs	Student ownership	Flexible learning environments
Standards-aligned	Socially embedded	

U.S. Department of Education - Personalized Learning Definition:

Personalized learning is a student experience where the **pace of learning** and the instructional approach are **optimized for the needs of each student**. **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**.

KnowledgeWorks - Personalized Learning Components:¹

- **Instruction is aligned to rigorous college- and career-ready standards and the social and emotional skills students need to be successful in college and career.**
- Instruction is customized, allowing **each student to design learning experiences aligned to his or her interests.**
- The **pace of instruction is varied based on individual student needs**, allowing students to **accelerate or take additional time based on their level of mastery.**
- Educators use **data from formative assessments** and student

feedback in real-time to differentiate instruction and provide robust supports and interventions so that every student remains on track to graduation.

LEAP Innovations - Learning Framework:²

“The fundamental elements of personalized learning” are:

- **Learner Focused:** Empower learners to understand their needs, strengths, interests, and approaches to learning.
- **Learner Demonstrated:** Enable learners to progress at their own pace based on demonstrated competencies.
- **Learner Led:** Entrust learners to take ownership of their learning.
- **Learner Connected:** Anytime, Anywhere, and Socially Embedded: Learning transcends location in relevant and valued ways, connected to families, communities, and caring networks.”

Nellie Mae Education Foundation—Student-Centered Learning Components:³

“Student-centered learning comprises four parts, of which personalization is one:

- **Learning is Personalized:** Personalized learning recognizes that students engage in different ways and in different places. Students benefit from individually-paced, targeted learning tasks that start from where the student is, formatively assess existing skills and knowledge, and address the student’s needs and interests.
- **Learning is Competency-Based:** Students move ahead when they have demonstrated mastery of content, not when they’ve reached a certain birthday or endured the required hours in a classroom.
- **Learning Happens Anytime, Anywhere:** Learning takes place beyond the traditional school day, and even the school year. The school’s walls are permeable--learning is not restricted to the classroom.
- **Students Take Ownership Over Their Learning:** Student-centered learning engages students in their own success—and incorporates their interests and skills into the learning process. Students support each others’ progress and celebrate success.”

iNACOL—Personalized Learning Definition:⁴



“Tailoring learning for each student’s strengths, needs and interests—including enabling student voice and choice in what, how, when and where they learn—to provide flexibility and supports to ensure mastery of the highest standards possible.”

Gates Foundation and other philanthropies and partners – Personalized Learning Components:⁵



- Competency-based progression
- Flexible learning environments
- Personal learning paths
- Learner profiles

Next Generation Learning Challenges—Personalized Learning Definition:⁶



Approaches that individualize learning for each student based on specific strengths and needs, student interests, and/or individualized goals.

Great Schools Partnership (Ed Reform Glossary)—Personalized Learning Definition:⁷



“The term personalized learning, or personalization, refers to a diverse variety of educational programs, learning experiences, instructional approaches, and academic-support strategies that are intended to address the distinct learning needs, interests, aspirations, or cultural backgrounds of individual students.”

Education Reimagined—Personalized Learning Components:⁸



- Competency-based
- Personalized, relevant, and contextualized
- Learner agency
- Socially-embedded
- Open-walled

William and Flora Hewlett Foundation—Deeper Learning Competencies:⁹

“Master core academic content, think critically and solve complex problems, communicate effectively, work collaboratively, learn how to learn, develop academic mindsets.”

Note:

This is by no means an exhaustive list of the definitions used for personalized or student-centered learning. It is meant to be a representative sample of some of the widely used definitions available to offer a comparison and to be able to showcase the strong linkages and overlaps between them all.

¹ The components provided by KnowledgeWorks are derived from interviews with teachers, instructional coaches, and principals and directly align with the definition of personalized learning from the US Department of Education. The focus on the use of data in the last component aligns with the call for ongoing formative assessments, as mentioned in this document.

² The LEAP framework is an iterative definition, most recently revised in October 2016. It centers personalized learning around the learner and thus connects in to the definition offered by the US Department of Education in multiple ways, namely around the pace of instruction, student need, relevancy of learning, and the ability for students to self-initiate or take ownership over their own learning.

³ The Nellie Mae Education Foundation includes personalization as one of four components of what they term student-centered learning. This differs from other definitions that consider the elements of student-centered learning to be part of personalized learning instead of the other way around; in order for personalization to be effective, it must be competency-based, happen anytime, allow students to take ownership of their learning, etc. In a nutshell, Nellie Mae definition of student centered learning is roughly equivalent to the US Department of Ed definition of personalized learning.

⁴ Comparatively succinct, iNACOL's definition is based on practitioner feedback. It links directly to the core tenets of personalized learning discussed in this document: tailored and relevant learning, student agency, and mastery-based progression through content. For more on iNACOL's scans of the definitions of personalized learning used across the nation, see here.

⁵ These components are further fleshed out in the broader linked definition, but directly connect to the components of personalized learning identified in this white paper (learner profiles, flexible learning opportunities, and competency-based progression). Personal learning paths are also a theme that cross-cuts the paper, building off of Rhode Island's new secondary-school regulations. The definition was constructed by the Gates Foundation, Afton Partners, the Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation, CEE Trust, the Christensen Institute for Disruptive Innovation, Charter School Growth Fund, EDUCAUSE, iNACOL, the Learning Accelerator, the Michael & Susan Dell Foundation, Silicon Schools, and educators.

⁶ NGLC's definition is quite general; other definitions encompass these broad principals and add more clarity.

⁷ This definition, which extends for another 10-plus paragraphs, illustrates how broad the definition of personalized learning has become—and lends credence to why further articulation for the Rhode Island context was necessary through this document. The Ed Reform Glossary is a publication from the Great Schools Partnership.

⁸ Education Reimagined is a branch of the work done through the Convergence Center for Policy Resolution, which brings diverse stakeholders together to tackle entrenched policy issues. Though the terms used vary (“open-walled” instead of “anytime, anywhere” as one example), the concepts behind each of the components thread throughout this document.

⁹ The Hewlett Foundation has coined the term “deeper learning”—an umbrella for the skills and knowledge that students must possess to succeed in the twenty-first century. The framework is a parallel to personalized learning in that it helps to define the end-goals for students while personalized learning articulates how students are meant to reach those goals and others.

Let us know what you think

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