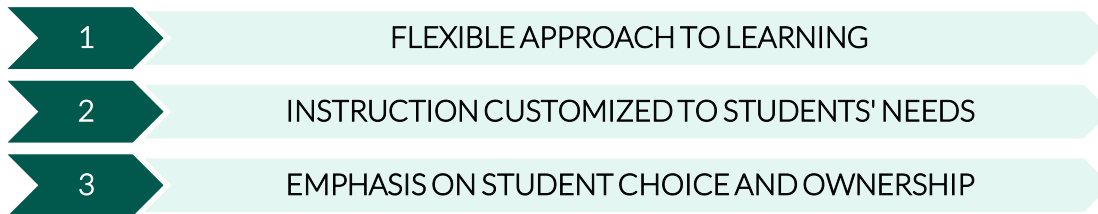


Introduction

Many education organizations and agencies¹ have developed definitions of personalized learning that are “similar yet distinct,”² identifying anywhere from three to 12 essential components.³ Hanover Research’s review of the personalized learning literature identified three common themes across these varied definitions. **Personalized learning is characterized by:**



Flexible Pacing

In personalized learning, pacing and time allocation are fluid. Learning time and the pace of instruction are structured in ways that respond to students’ needs. For example, learning time may be structured so that students have independent learning blocks (either partial or whole class periods) where they can:⁴

Work on their own projects.

Receive additional one-on-one support

Accelerate or spend additional time on content as needed.

Students should progress through content at their own pace if they are meeting minimum performance expectations or deadlines. Often, progression in courses is based on mastery rather than time spent on a topic—students advance to new content once they have demonstrated mastery of specific concepts and skills.⁵ Students working through online learning modules may require differing levels of one-on-one virtual supports or supplemental resources for mastery. For students struggling, they may require one-on-one video conferences with their teachers. For students who are more advanced or not being challenged, they may require additional modules or reading materials. These varying levels of individualized support are likely to impact the pace at which a student works through their online lessons.⁶

In personalized learning, teachers use varied instructional materials and tools to help students learn, and regularly adjust content based on learning objectives and student needs and interests.⁷ In practice, this may involve developing or providing instructional materials that are “foundational” as well as adaptive:⁸

Foundational Content

All students receive fixed content through an online set of lessons. Students may move through the content at varied paces, but the learning objectives and resources are the same.

Example

- Teachers identify a set of key readings and other background materials, providing students with a wide range of topics and formats (print books, source documents, speeches) to choose from.
- Activities and module materials are pre-set and relate to the specific “backbone” of the course, e.g., the textbook, with nearly identical experiences and expectations for all students.



Adaptive & Highly Customizable Content

Adaptive content is provided through digital platforms that adjust students’ learning paths and pace. Customizable content is curated by teachers based on students’ needs and interests.

Example

- Students choose which historical figures and topics they will learn about and compare and contrast the multiple interpretations they encounter across sources.
- All students fulfill a written requirement as a final product during the project, but choice is offered for additional means of demonstrating knowledge (thesis defense, oral presentation to classmates, video documentary, etc.)

Customizable Supports

Teachers can work with students to develop short- and long-term [personal learning goals](#) and [customized learning paths](#) that can support online learning. In an online setting, it is important that students remain engaged and motivated. Emphasizing personalized goals and progress markers for each student helps to keep them engaged and well-paced by honoring their specific needs. Teachers work with students to develop short- and long-term personal learning goals and personalized learning plans, and help students learn how to reflect on their goals and progress. ⁹ Student learning goals may address the following (please [click here](#) for additional examples):¹⁰

Goal Type	Description
Short-Term Goals	Small milestones. Set the stage for accomplishing goals over a longer term or throughout the year.
Long-Term Goals	Goal for the school year or a semester. Require multiple steps and check-ins along the way to ensure that student is on track.
Work Habit Goals	Goals related to <i>how</i> the student is working remotely.
Subject Area Goals	Identification of a subject area or work process that requires the most extra attention.
Behavioral Goals	Goals related to staying engaged in remote learning, practicing patience, meeting deadlines, etc. May apply to individual student or whole class.
Specific Knowledge Goals	Goals related to learning more about a subject, refining a skill, or becoming familiar with a new concept. Can be set at any time.

There are four steps to customizing learning paths that “allow learners to co-design with educators their learning rather than simply comply with the directions and expectations...” and can apply to online learning:¹¹

STEP 1 Develop personal learning goals	STEP 2 Select activities and resources to support learning	STEP 3 Identify progress markers	STEP 4 Define how learning will be demonstrated
The educator and the learner work to develop personal learning goals with specific and aligned expected outcomes.	Both the educator and the learner collaborate to identify resources and strategies for learning.	Markers are based on formative assessment data and help learners to focus on learning progress rather than simply what tasks they are completing.	As learners commit to their personalized goals, they are likely to identify learning demonstrations and other representations of progress.

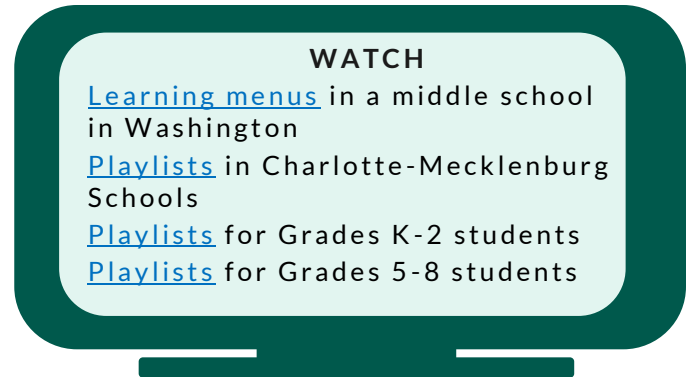
In working with students to create customized learning paths, teachers must fully understand the specific needs of each student. Using this background knowledge, teachers can monitor students as they develop their own goals for their learning, along with a timeline for accomplishing these goals. Teachers can then support their students’ goals with their customized learning paths.¹²

Additional Resources:

- [Customized learner pathways](#) at a middle school in Georgia
- [Learner pathways](#) at an elementary school in Colorado
- Student [choice of learning pathway and pace](#) at an elementary school in Rhode Island
- [Graduated student autonomy](#) at a high school in New York
- Monitoring [learning progress and goal-setting](#) at a junior high school in Texas

Student Choice

Student choice is a key component of personalized learning that keeps students engaged while receiving differentiated instruction based on their preferences. [Learning playlists](#), [menus](#), and [choice boards](#) are examples of structured opportunities for students to make choices about how to learn and how to demonstrate that they have met learning standards. Learning playlists, menus, and choice boards are created by teachers and outline a variety of independent instructional tasks or activities that students may complete in order to meet learning goals. Students have choices of which activities to complete and in which order to proceed through these activities.¹³



These three tools are characterized by the following definitions and descriptions:¹⁴

Choice Tool	Definition/Description
Learning Playlists	Rather than planning and executing a whole unit of instruction, teachers map out lessons and assignments for students to complete on their own in the set sequence. Individual tasks in each playlist should be customized to each student.
Learning Menus	Students have choice options within different categories of learning, e.g., reading comprehension, argument writing, that help them become familiar with different learning strategies while learning the same information.
Learning Choice Boards	These typically take the shape of a Tic-Tac-Toe board, where there are nine different learning or activity options in a three-by-three table. Students must complete three activities to create a Tic-Tac-Toe, and teachers can plan these three-in-a-row activities to activate different skills or topics.

Playlists, menus, and choice boards can be used for parts of a class period or for a whole day or week, and may provide content for one particular skill or for multiple skills in a lesson or unit.¹⁵ While playlists, menus, and choice boards are different tools, these mechanisms for student choice all require teachers to consider the following:¹⁶

- **Provide students all the resources and activities to choose from up-front.** Offer multiple different options, readings, activities, or assessments on the same topic or skill.
- **Structure the tool in the proper order based on the curriculum sequence.** Consider the logical order of operations required to complete each task and develop meaningful and knowledge scaffolding.
- **Distribute personalized individual playlists, menus, and choice boards based on each student's needs.** Work with students to set goals and checkpoints to ensure they are at a minimum set pace or competency.

The following conditions may apply to these online choice mechanisms:¹⁷

- **Level of Choice:** Just how much choice do students have? Consider assigning “need-to-have,” mandatory activities to supplement their chosen activities.
- **Incremental Checkpoints:** These choice mechanisms can include built-in checkpoints, e.g., quizzes, one-on-one conferences, or journal entries, where students must demonstrate their progress before moving onto the next activity in their playlist, menu, or choice board.
- **Points accumulation:** You may want to assign point values to playlist items, with lower points assigned to less critical items. Challenge students to accumulate a minimum number of points.
- **Minimum pace:** Build target deadlines for the entire class, groups of students, or individual students as you begin to introduce these choice mechanisms.

Endnotes

- ¹ E.g., Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, Council of Chief State School Officers, Education Elements, EDUCAUSE, Gates Foundation, iNACOL, Institute for Personalized Learning, Knowledge Works, LEAP Innovations, Next Generation Learning, and the U.S. Department of Education.
- ² Groff, J.S. "Personalized Learning: The State of the Field and Future Directions." Center for Curriculum Redesign, April 2017. p. 4. https://curriculumredesign.org/wp-content/uploads/PersonalizedLearning_CCR_May2017.pdf
- ³ [1] Ibid. [2] "Personalized Learning Guide." Education Elements. pp. 3-5, 23. <https://www.edelements.com/hubfs/Personalized%20Learning%20Pillar/EE%20Personalized%20Learning%20Guide%2011%2F2018%20Pillar.pdf?hsCtaTracking=a0b7ad68-3058-493a-9320-f5136a09ced0%7C6ddfdcb7-dced-4f02-829c-788ae39760a5> [3] Abel, N. "What Is Personalized Learning?" INACOL, February 17, 2016. <https://www.inacol.org/news/what-is-personalized-learning/> [4] "LEAP Learning Framework for Personalized Learning - Spring 2017 Edition." LEAP Innovations, 2017. <https://www.leapinnovations.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/leap-framework-2.pdf> [5] Vogt, K. "3 Must-Use Personalized Learning Strategies & Practices." Next Generation Learning Challenges, January 22, 2016. <https://www.nextgenlearning.org/successes/3-must-use-practices-in-successful-personalized-learning-schools> [6] "Our Model." The Institute for Personalized Learning. <http://institute4pl.org/index.php/our-model/> [7] "Personalized Learning: A Working Definition." Education Week, October 20, 2014. <https://www.edweek.org/ew/collections/personalized-learning-special-report-2014/a-working-definition.html> [8] "Cracking the Code: How Practitioners Conceptualize and Implement Personalized Learning." EdSurge, November 2017. p. 9. https://d3e7x39d4i7wbe.cloudfront.net/static_assets/pl/EdSurge_PL_Report_103117A.pdf
- ⁴ [1] "LEAP Learning Framework for Personalized Learning - Spring 2017 Edition," Op. cit., pp. 13-16. [2] Pane, J.F. et al. "Continued Progress - Promising Evidence on Personalized Learning." RAND Corporation, November 2015. p. 23. https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR1300/RR1365/RAND_RR1365.pdf [2] Vogt, K. "5 Personalized Learning Practices in NGLC Grantee Schools." Next Generation Learning Challenges, December 18, 2015. <https://www.nextgenlearning.org/successes/5-personalized-learning-practices-in-nclc-grantee-schools> [3] Johns, S. and M. Wolking. "The Core Four of Personalized Learning: The Elements You Need to Succeed." Education Elements. p. 12. https://www.edelements.com/hubfs/Core_Four/Education_Elements_Core_Four_White_Paper.pdf?hsCtaTracking=904de74f-1f13-40d7-b20d-f8809510cded%7C78e4c508-0a05-4c80-933e-d58e263e77f9
- ⁵ [1] "LEAP Learning Framework for Personalized Learning - Spring 2017 Edition," Op. cit., pp. 13-16. [2] Pane et al., Op. cit., p. 23. [3] Vogt, "5 Personalized Learning Practices in NGLC Grantee Schools," Op. cit. [4] Johns and Wolking, Op. cit., p. 12.
- ⁶ Pappas, C. "Differentiated Instruction In ELearning: What ELearning Professionals Should Know." ELearning Industry, 2015. <https://elearningindustry.com/differentiated-instruction-in-elearning-what-elearning-professionals-should-know>
- ⁷ Johns and Wolking, Op. cit., p. 7.
- ⁸ Quoted with adaptations to wording and syntax from Ibid., pp. 10-11.
- ⁹ [1] "Learner Profiles." The Institute for Personalized Learning. <http://institute4pl.org/index.php/our-model/core-components/learner-profiles/> [2] Pane et al., Op. cit., p. 16. [3] "Personalized Learning: A Working Definition," Op. cit. [4] "Customized Learning Paths." Institute for Personalized Learning. <http://institute4pl.org/index.php/our-model/core-components/customized-learning-paths/>
- ¹⁰ Table content quoted verbatim, with adaptations for relevance, wording, and clarity, from Williams, M. "6 Types of Learning Goals for Students." Classcraft, February 20, 2019. <https://www.classcraft.com/blog/features/learning-goals-for-students/>
- ¹¹ Figure contents quoted verbatim with modifications from "Customized Learning Paths," Op. cit.
- ¹² Ibid.
- ¹³ [1] Putman, M. "Using Playlists to Personalize Learning." International Literacy Association, June 8, 2018. <https://www.literacyworldwide.org/blog/literacy-daily/2018/06/08/using-playlists-to-personalize-learning> [2] "Choice Menus." University of Virginia. http://curry.virginia.edu/uploads/resourceLibrary/nagc_choice_menus.pdf [3] "Personalized Schooling and Personal Learning." Teaching in the 21st Century. <http://www.teach21.us/personalized-learning.html>
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¹⁵ “Playlist Building 101.” Education Elements. p. 1.

https://www.edelements.com/hubfs/Blog_Files/How%20to%20Pick%20the%20Right%20Instructional%20Model%20for%20Your%20Classroom/Playlist%20Building%20101%20Guide.pdf?hsCtaTracking=5b870616-b62d-4e71-8852-6c58126f8086%7C53107035-4c4a-4892-9014-44f05e018ea7

¹⁶ Bulleted text adapted from [1] “Playlist Building 101.” Op. cit., pp. 2-3. [2] Westphal, L. Op. cit.

¹⁷ Bulleted text adapted from [1] “Playlist Building 101.” Op. cit., pp. 2-3. [2] Westphal, L. Op. cit. [3] “Dok Choice Board.” Op. cit.