

CORE FUNCTION	EFFECTIVE	INDICATOR
Dimension C	Professional Capacity	The district implements and measures the effectiveness of personalized professional development to build the capacity of all educators through coaching, modeling, and networks of support. (6833)

Explanation: Professional development in districts implementing personalized learning must help educators acquire the expanded competencies needed to implement these models with fidelity. Districts will need to provide and assess the effectiveness of personalized professional development that enables educators’ control and flexibility over selecting experiences that meet their needs and goals, and that offer job-embedded, competency-based, learning progressions. Professional development must include models and modeling of effective practice, and substantial time for teacher planning and collaboration within active professional communities. Districts should further encourage and support educators as they innovate by providing embedded coaching supports and cross-school networks that allow teachers to develop, test, and refine personalized learning strategies within supportive professional communities. They must also develop and support principals as change leaders and create methods to collect and share effective personalized learning strategies across the district.

Questions: *What evidence does the district have that educators have the competencies they need to implement personalized learning? What professional development has already been offered to support personalized learning, and what evidence does the district have regarding its effectiveness? Does PD need to be restructured to better personalize professional learning for educators? How much control do educators have regarding the place, timing, and content of their PD? How can the district incorporate competency-based progression into PD systems? How can the district work with schools to create sufficient planning time and develop active professional communities? How can the district develop and support teachers’ capacity for innovation as they test out new PL strategies? Are processes in place to support cross-school collaboration and communities of practice? How will the district collect and disseminate effective PL strategies? What development do principals need to help them lead and manage the changes necessary for PL implementation?*

Student-centered instructional approaches individualize instruction to meet each student’s strengths and challenges, while continuing to hold high expectations for all learners and preparing them with 21st century competencies (Friedlaender et al., 2014; Le, Wolfe, & Steinberg, 2014). Personalized Learning (PL) is based on enhancing the degree to which K-12 education is student-centered to ensure positive and equitable learning outcomes for all students. North Carolina’s conception of student-centered learning rests on four pillars of PL: learner profiles, individualized learning paths, competency-based progression, and flexible learning environments (see Glowa & Goodell, 2016). Educators working to personalize learning for students will likely need significant professional development (PD) to build their capacity to implement PL models and strategies. Districts must provide PD that is personalized to meet educators’ needs and include coaching, modeling, and networks of support to help them implement PL with fidelity within their school setting.

What Competencies Do Educators Need to Implement Personalized Learning?

Implementing PL strategies requires expanded professional competencies and often significant changes to most teachers’ practices (SRI International, 2018). For example, teachers may become instructional designers as they “work with learners and colleagues to design and manage personalized learning pathways aligned to competencies and learning progressions” or they may serve as learner guides by “engaging learner voice and choice to foster students’ intrinsic motiva-



tion” (Casey, 2018, p. 11). Jobs for the Future and CCSSO (2015) organized PL educator competencies¹ into the following domains:

- **Cognitive:** What teachers need to know to develop personalized, student-centered environments: e.g., using in-depth understanding of content and student data to guide learning progressions to engage and lead learners towards mastery;
- **Intrapersonal:** The internal capacity processes teachers need for PL, including habits of mind, expectations for students, and assumptions about the teaching profession: e.g., engaging in intentional practices of adapting and modeling persistence and a growth mindset;
- **Interpersonal:** The ability to relate to others including the social, personal, and leadership skills that foster beneficial relationships with students, colleagues, and community members: e.g., seek individual or shared leadership roles to continue professional growth and advancement;
- **Instructional:** What teachers need to do to implement learner-centered pedagogy in the classroom, including using instructional approaches and methods that build toward and assess student mastery, and creating relevant and engaging curriculum.

Several studies of PL implementation suggest teachers’ competencies are not being adequately developed, and that they lack clear definitions, best practices, and exemplars of teaching in student-centered environments, and are often “left on their own” to figure out how to implement PL (Bingham, Pane, Steiner, & Hamilton, 2018; Gross & DeArmond, 2018). Principals also report inadequate preparation for PL implementation (Gross & DeArmond, 2018). Changes to teacher/principal preparation as well as to in-service PD models and supports are needed to equip educators with the professional competencies that will enable them to provide high-quality PL experiences for their students.

How Can Districts Build Educators’ Capacities to Implement Personalized Learning?

Educators incorporating personalized learning need to understand their students’ experiences as learners within these systems, and personalized, competency-based professional learning plans offer a way for teachers to set goals for improved competencies and chart a course for professional growth (Pape & Vander Ark, n.d.; SRI International, 2018; U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). Cator, Schneider, & Vander Ark (2014) suggest that high quality ongoing professional learning opportunities should offer:

- Some degree of teacher control over time, place, path, and/or pace;
- Balance between teacher-defined goals, goals developed through teacher evaluation efforts, and school/district goals;
- Job-embedded and meaningful integration into classroom instruction; and,
- Competency-based progression.

Offering micro-credentials, or badges that display teachers’ demonstration of competencies in various areas is consistent with what is known about effective PD (Berry & Byrd, 2019), and allows teachers to personalize their learning to address their professional needs (Cator et al., 2014). For example, micro-credentials and PD opportunities on working with certain special needs populations could include rubrics and ways teachers can demonstrate their competencies, through videos demonstrating the teaching competency or portfolios of teaching resources created for that specific population. Educators also need to see models of best practices within PL environments as part of their development (Bingham et al., 2018), and adequate school time for planning, access to learning sciences research, and networks of supportive colleagues who address challenges, strategies, and lessons learned through PL implementation (Pape & Vander Ark, n.d.). Active professional communities are essential supports for teachers navigating the steep learning curve that occurs when implementing PL (SRI International, 2018).

After reviewing the practices of PL schools funded through the Breakthrough Schools Initiative, Gross and DeArmond (2018) concluded that schools needed extra support beyond traditional PD to develop educators’ capacity for innovation. Innovation involves “a systematic and cyclical process of experimentation, testing, evaluation, and monitoring and refinement” (Gross & DeArmond, 2018, p. 26). Teachers needed support in building their capacity to create PL instructional

¹ For another competency framework for blended learning teachers see Powell, Rabbitt, & Kennedy (2014): <https://www.inacol.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/iNACOL-Blended-Learning-Teacher-Competency-Framework.pdf>



models and test their effectiveness (e.g., through short-cycle Plan-Do-Study-Act approaches). One school had developed such a systematic approach:

Teachers in this school worked in teams to map out their strategies and approaches. When a team identified a problem, its members collectively considered data on the problem and potential strategies to address it. Together they decided on one or more strategies that they would test independently. After testing the strategies, the team reconvened to reflect on the new strategy, its feasibility, and any data that showed how well the strategy worked. If any strategies proved worthwhile, the team would agree on what and how to implement them across the team. In addition to bringing coherence and a systematic process for problem solving, we noted that this deeply collaborative and reflective approach helped to quickly onboard new teachers to the school and team and created a strong professional culture. (Gross & DeArmond, 2018, p. 26)

Networks of support can be developed and extended across schools to aggregate and disseminate effective PL practices throughout the district, and educators can work together to design, implement, evaluate, and revise PL units of instruction. The researchers offered the following recommendations for districts and regional partners working to incorporate effective PD within PL systems:

1. Build embedded coaching supports for teachers developing and testing PL strategies by bringing in expertise in improvement systems such as Plan-Do-Study-Act;
2. Create structured support systems for principals to lead and manage change by developing a vision, the case for change, leveraging resources, and developing and communicating strategic plans for action; and,
3. Develop and implement a plan to get knowledge into the hands of many educators across the district, through initiatives such as cross-school networks, and strategies to distribute lessons and strategies that have been proven effective.

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