

Personalized Learning FAQ's (as of Sept. 3, 2015)

"Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn."

--Benjamin Franklin

How are my student needs being met?

1. How are high achieving (advanced learner) student needs met?

Answer: Personalized learning takes into account students who need acceleration or enrichment. Instead of being held back, students who have demonstrated mastery will be able to move forward in their learning, which may mean enrichment opportunities within the grade level standards or moving to the next set of standards. The District is currently evaluating the Talents and Passions (TAP) program to ensure the needs of advanced learners are being met as personalized learning is implemented.

2. What is Personalized Learning?

Answer: The term personalized learning, or personalization, refers to a variety of educational programs, learning experiences, instructional approaches, and academic-support strategies that are intended to address the distinct learning needs, interests, aspirations, and cultural backgrounds of each student. Personalized learning may also be called student-centered learning, since the goal is to make individual learning needs the primary consideration in educational and instructional decisions.

One of the key areas in a personalized learning environment is to nurture and develop students, teaching them they can accomplish difficult work and meet complex challenges. Students use strategies, apply available resources, and persevere to be successful. Ultimately, we want all students to graduate prepared for their next steps, whether this includes further education or career.

3. In a personalized learning environment, why will we often see our student or child called a "learner" rather than student?

Answer: "Learner" implies a more active role in the personalized learning environment, versus "student" which can imply a more passive role (being schooled instead of "learning.")

4. When did Verona get involved with Personalized Learning?

Answer: After a year-long study involving the board, staff, parents, business leaders, and other community members, the board approved the following belief statements in April of 2013:

- 1. Every student in VASD has a Personalized Learning plan that provides a path to discovery and achievement and that plan is reviewed and changed at least annually based on the student's needs.*
- 2. Every student's parent, guardian or advocate participates directly in the design, implementation, and outcomes of that student's Personalized Learning plan.*
- 3. Every student meets or exceeds the goals of his or her Personalized Learning plan every school year*

4. *Every VAHS student graduates.*
5. *Every VAHS graduate achieves their choice of college and career path, as detailed in their Personalized Learning plan.*

5. What does the Verona Personalized Learning Plan look like?

Answer: The Verona Personalized Learning Plan has four elements:

- **The Profile** which encompasses who the learner is and captures learning styles, skills, strengths, barriers, struggles, interests, and aspirations.. The profile may include: personal, academic, language development, postsecondary, and career goals, as well as attitudes about learning (mindsets) and behaviors. It may also include people in the learner's network of support.
- **The Path** which encompasses what the learner does. The learner is held to clear, high expectations of grade level standards and beyond. Each learner co-develops with parental and school involvement, a customized path that responds and adapts to the learner's needs. The learner has opportunities to pursue areas of interest, talents, and passions.
- **The Evidence** encompasses how the learner is progressing. The learner's progress is formatively and summatively assessed using clearly defined standards, goals, assessments, rubrics, and self-assessment tools.
- **The Reflection** encompasses where the learner goes next. The learner, with support from teachers and families, revisits and revises the plan based on evidence collected and learner voice.

6. How will Personalized Learning be evaluated?

Answer: As Personalized Learning is implemented district-wide, multiple data points will be collected and used to evaluate the effectiveness. These data points will include student achievement data, as well as student, family, and VASD staff perception data.

Personalized Learning in the Classroom

7. What may Personalized Learning for my child look like on any given day?

Answer: On any given day, instructional methods and learning will vary. Over the course of the day, there may be whole class instruction, and then students may work in small groups or one-on-one with the teacher if they need additional support or enrichment on a particular concept or skill.

As an example, A teacher may decide to frontload a new science unit on force and motions with direct instruction to the entire class, and then students may work alongside the teacher and with each other in small groups. To demonstrate their learning, students might put together some kind of a model, or conduct a simulation.

8. What does Personalized Learning look like for the elementary students when they are not independently working on their own yet?

Answer: Even our youngest students can begin to identify the ways they learn best and set goals for themselves, but we know they will need additional support. Teachers will work alongside students to provide training and resources on making good choices and decisions as part of the personalized learning process.

9. How do I help my child at home?

Answer: Communication with families is an essential part of the Personalized Learning process, and families can expect to have a regular communication loop with the teacher(s) about what is happening in the classroom, and how to support the student at home.

10. If students are left to proceed at their own pace, should there be concern they could fall behind?

Answer: In a personalized learning environment, students are frequently monitored and instruction adjusted to meet their needs so they continue to make progress. Because of this, students are less likely to fall behind in a personalized learning environment than in a traditional classroom.

11. How will I know what my child is working on?

Answer: At the beginning of the 2015/2016 school year, a syllabus for each course will be shared with middle and high school families to articulate the major learning topics. As a longer-term goal, the District is working on a K-12 scope and sequence in each subject area.

All learning expectations will be clearly and consistently communicated to students and families, including long-term expectations (such as graduation requirements and graduation standards), short-term expectations (such as specific learning objectives for a course or other learning experience), and general expectations (such as the performance levels used in the school's grading and reporting system)

Just as in a traditional learning system, all students are expected to reach grade level proficiency or beyond in the identified standards. What is different are the ways learners may demonstrate their learning and how they may receive instruction to meet their needs.

12. What will the role of the teacher be in a Personalized Learning environment?

Answer: Teachers will continue to provide instruction in a variety of ways, including whole class, small group, and one-to-one conferencing. The focus of personalized learning is driven by goals JOINTLY identified by the learner, teacher, and parents and aligned to challenging standards. The relationship between the teacher and the student is even more important in a personalized learning environment.

13. Does Personalized Learning lower expectations of the students or make them less accountable?

Answer: Personalized learning makes students more accountable than ever to reaching their learning goals. Because students are setting individual goals and their progress is being monitored on a consistent basis, it is much less likely for them to “fade into the background” which might be the case in a traditional learning environment.

14. My child is an advanced learner...won't the students learning at a slower pace hold my child back in his/her mastery skills?

Answer: No. Personalized learning takes into account students who need acceleration or enrichment. Instead of being held back, students who have demonstrated mastery will be able to move forward in their learning, which may mean enrichment opportunities within the grade level standards or moving to the next set of standards.

15. Do we, as parents, have a voice in our child's plan?

Answer: Yes. One of the five belief statements the Board of Education released in 2012 directly states “EVERY parent or guardian participates directly in the design, implementation and outcomes of their child's Personalized Learning plans.

16. Are other Districts implementing Personalized Learning?

Answer: Personalized learning is taking off in Wisconsin and beyond. Some WI schools that are implementing PL include: Pewaukee, Kettle Moraine, Waukesha, Elmbrook, Oconomowoc, West Allis/West Milwaukee, and Oregon. The Institute at CESA 1, a regional agency that is supporting school districts in these efforts, is expanding to other parts of WI as well as districts in other states.

17. Are all students in district getting their own mobile device?

Answer: Yes. The Verona Area School District is providing devices in a phased approach and has already begun this process.

18. Are students simply working online or on laptops or iPads all day?

Answer: Just as in traditional learning, a variety of high quality technology resources and tools will be available on devices to support learning goals. Technology is ever-changing and students deserve to be introduced to technology as part of their education. That being said, students will not be working online all day, as they will also be engaged in traditional modes of instruction, collaborative groups and hands-on learning experiences.

19. How will Personalized Learning Plans be managed?

Answer: With each student in the district developing a PLP, the district needs a system to securely provide access, management and storage of PLPs. VASD participated in a pilot program with a company called Epiphany Learning. Epiphany Learning is a web-based personalized learning application where

students create their profile and learning paths to make personalized learning a reality for every student.

20. My child really likes Art. What if she decides she wants to do Art for all her projects? I want her to have a well-balanced program.

Answer: Personalized learning will certainly allow for a student to tap into a particular passion or interest, but part of the process will be for students to identify areas of challenge and work on strengthening these areas as well. In the art example, there may be times when the student can demonstrate learning through an art project. There are other times, however, when the student will need to demonstrate learning through writing, speaking, listening, etc. This is why the partnership with the student, teacher, and family is so critical. Through this partnership, appropriate goals can be set so the student has a well-rounded educational experience, while still being able to explore interests.

Assessment and Grading

21. In what ways will my child be assessed on whether or not they are achieving standards?

Answer: In a personalized learning environment, frequent classroom assessments are necessary to provide feedback to the teacher and learner about next steps. VASD also uses district-wide benchmark assessments (such as MAP and STAR) along with state standardized tests as other indicators of student progress. These measures, along with classroom assessment data, will be used to measure how students are progressing. Just as in traditional learning system, all students are expected to reach grade level proficiency or beyond in the identified standards.

22. Is Verona Area High School going to a pass/fail grading system and moving away from letter grades?

Answer: There are no plans in the works to move away from letter grades to a pass/fail system at Verona Area High School.

Exploration Academy, a charter school located in Verona Area High School, does use a competency-based grading approach.

23. How will Personalized Learning impact standardized testing scores?

Answer: In a successful personalized learning environment, the needs of all students are being met. As a result, we should see an increase in standardized achievement measures. Standardized achievement results will be used as part of the evaluation of the effectiveness of personalized learning in our District.

Key Vocabulary and Terminology

Assessment: The wide variety of methods that educators use to evaluate, measure, and document the academic readiness, learning progress, and skill acquisition of students

Standards: Written descriptions of what students are expected to know and be able to do at a specific stage of their education. Standards describe what students should have learned by the end of a course, grade level, or grade span.

Mindset: The concept of **mindset** was developed by psychologist Carol Dweck and popularized in her book, *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*. A *mindset*, according to Dweck, is a self-perception or “self-theory” that people hold about themselves. In a fixed mindset, people believe their basic qualities, like their intelligence or talent are simply fixed traits. In a growth mindset people believe their most basic abilities can be developed through dedication and hard work.