PLANNING FOR A PIVOTAL SCHOOL YEAR

Personalized Learning & Pandemic Recovery: 6 Big Considerations

1. **Software alone can’t fix what’s broken with America’s schools.**
   When the pandemic hit, ed tech helped keep public schools afloat. Over time, though, software wasn’t enough to keep students engaged and learning. With billions of federal stimulus dollars now flooding schools, K-12 leaders face difficult decisions about what technology to expand and what to jettison.

2. **Relationships and repair will be key.**
   More than 605,000 Americans have died from COVID-19, leaving millions of children to deal with trauma, grief, and insecurity. The K-12 field’s recent shift to “whole-child” personalization could help, especially if schools can find ways to be flexible with time, schedules, and non-academic supports to make sure kids have access to caring adults focused on helping them heal.

3. **Belonging and cultural affirmation are part of personalization, too.**
   At its heart, personalized learning is about loving each child for who they are. For many families, though, remote learning made plain that some educators view their children more as problems to be controlled than as learners to be nurtured. To personalize the pandemic recovery, schools will have to do a better job recognizing and supporting the cultural and personal identities that children bring to their classrooms.

4. **Popular new forms of schooling could open new possibilities.**
   From learning pods to homeschooling, full-time virtual schools to hybrid instruction and new tutoring models, the pandemic forced people to get creative. To reengage families, many districts are now looking at offering a menu of customized options.

5. **Data and evidence are in flux.**
   There’s little doubt that millions of children lost academic ground during the pandemic. But with state tests in flux, schools using all manner of different diagnostic tools, changing beliefs about what measures of student growth matter most, and a K-12 system that remains resistant to experimental evaluation, figuring out what kids need and how to best get it to them is going to be more difficult than ever.

6. **The policy environment still hasn’t caught up.**
   Despite the hopes of some personalized-learning proponents, states have so far done little to loosen requirements around policies like seat-time mandates and graduation requirements—but the few-strings attached nature of much of the federal stimulus funding could allow for future flexibility.

Icons: Getty

SOURCE: Education Week reporting