EDUCATION WEEK ONLINE SUMMIT

Personalized Learning: What Works

Thursday, November 21, 2019 • 1–3 PM ET

New Teaching Approaches, Technological Advances Raise Questions About What Works Best

The use of personalized learning approaches in K-12 schools is expanding, fueled by new teaching approaches and technological advances. But making personalized learning work in the classroom is easier said than done. That reality is in clear view based on the results of a nationally representative survey of teachers on personalized learning, conducted by the Education Week Research Center. It examined teachers' perspectives on the power of new learning technologies to personalized learning, what they think of students setting their own learning goals, the role of adaptive curricula and assessments to empower students to learn at their own pace and to provide remediation or enrichment experiences for students, and more.

This online summit helps keep Education Week readers ahead of the curve in an edgy, critical, and useful way by staying on top of how technological advances are changing personalized learning, what school/classroom practices (non-tech as well as tech-oriented ones) are showing the greatest impact on student learning, and what balance needs to be achieved between too much use of technology and not enough.

Thank you to those who joined us for this event, which took place on Thursday, Nov. 21, 2019. Below, you can get all the key reporter takeaways. Additionally, for those who registered ahead of the event date, you can watch the event livestream where the reporters break it all down for you.
www.edweek.org/go/PLSummit19

Personalized Learning Is Hard to Do. Teachers Tell Us Why

Using the results of a nationally representative survey of teachers on personalized learning topics as a starting point, this discussion examined teachers' perspectives, such as why it is difficult for them to make personalized learning work, what improvements in student learning educators have seen from personalized learning efforts, and how classroom practices are shifting to support these new approaches. The discussion examined specific survey results on practices such as allowing students to set their own learning goals, the use of multi-age classrooms, and the effectiveness of adaptive curricula and assessments.

Moderator: Alyson Klein, Assistant Editor, Education Week
Guests: Sterling Lloyd, Assistant Director, Education Week Research Center; **Dria Setter**, Professional Development Specialist, Institute for Personalized Learning; **Kate Sommerville**, Personalized Learning Professional Development Specialist, Institute for Personalized Learning

Key Takeaways:

- Teachers generally see personalized learning as a promising approach. But that doesn't mean that it's easy.
- High-quality personalized learning is happening in pockets, but it is difficult to scale up, participants noted. Dria Setter, a professional development specialist from the Institute for Personalized Learning in Wisconsin, suggested that districts start small. Growth, she said, will spread after educators see results from the strategy.
- Some of teachers' biggest concerns with personalized learning include kids spending too much time on screens and that using technology for personalized learning could mean students are working alone too often, said Sterling Lloyd, director of the Education Week Research Center, which conducted a nationally representative survey of about 600 teachers on personalized learning issues.
- It can be tough to balance tailoring instruction to students individual learning needs with state demands for standardized testing, participants said. That concern showed up in the Education Week Research Center survey too. Sommerville suggested considering how

students perform on soft skills such as creativity and collaboration, not just pure academic knowledge on standardized tests.

- It's important to bring parents on board with personalized learning so that they understand the why, the what, and the how of the approach, Sommerville said. She suggested podcasts, a notice on the school website, FAQ documents, and live events to help with communication.

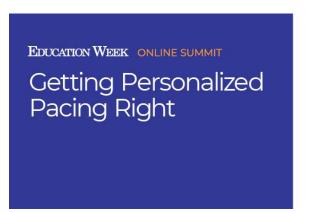**Principals and Teachers: Are They on the Same Page?**

Teachers and principals appear to have different takes on the effectiveness and potential of personalized learning. That came through loud and clear when the Education Week Research Center conducted a comparison of a 2018 national survey of principals on technology issues and a 2019 survey of teachers on personalized learning. Teachers tend to be more critical and skeptical about these approaches compared with principals. Why is that the case? And how do they need to work better together to make personalized learning initiatives work?

Moderator: Kevin Bushweller, Assistant Managing Editor, Education Week
Guests: Michael DeArmond, Senior Research Analyst, Center on Reinventing Public Education;
Troy Paradee, Director, Nexus Program, Champlain Valley Union High School, Hinesburg, Vt.;
Michelle Wheatfill, Assistant Principal, C.C. Ronnow Elementary School, Clark County Schools, Nev.

Key Takeaways:

- Principals tend to have a more optimistic view of personalized learning than teachers do. Some guests and participants in the discussion suggested that might be the case because personalized learning initiatives are often pushed from the top down, forcing teachers to take classroom approaches they do not feel prepared to use or simply do not believe in. To

get teacher buy-in, guests suggested involving teachers in crafting district or school strategies for personalized learning.

- Many principals skip important steps when putting in place personalized learning programs. One of the biggest ones they skip is helping teachers define what a school or district means by "personalized learning." As a consequence, teachers are left to define it themselves. That creates a lot of inconsistency about what personalized learning looks like from classroom to classroom, making it hard to evaluate its impact. But some principals are trying their best to better understand what teachers need to make personalized learning work. One principal from a high school in Vermont, for instance, taught a personalized learning class at the end of last school year to identify and appreciate those challenges.

- One question that arose during the discussion: what is the difference between personalized learning and differentiated learning? Both approaches try to customize learning to the academic strengths and weaknesses of individual students. But personalized learning takes it a step farther, trying to integrate students' personal interests and passions into teaching and learning.

- In addition to principals better communicating to teachers "why" a school is doing personalized learning, some participants suggested that district leaders also need to have a clear understanding of why educators would move in this direction. That is especially helpful when a district wants to move in this direction and district leaders will be communicating with teachers about how it will work and how it will change their jobs.

Getting Personalized Pacing Right

Personalized learning dictates that students should have control over pace—how much time they spend on new material, and when they move on. But how does this practically work in a classroom of 30 students, all on the same academic schedule? In our national survey of

teachers, the most commonly cited barrier to personalized learning related to pacing. What steps can schools take to overcome those barriers?

Moderator: Sarah Schwartz, Staff Writer, Education Week
Guests: Caroline Bailey, Middle School Teacher, Pioneer Ridge Middle School, Chaska, Minn.; **Jennifer Larson**, Middle School Teacher, Pioneer Ridge Middle School, Chaska, Minn.; **Dana Miller**, Principal, Pioneer Ridge Middle School, Chaska, Minn.; **Dan Thompson**, Middle School Teacher, Pioneer Ridge Middle School, Chaska, Minn.

Key Takeaways:

- Personalizing pacing doesn't mean turning students loose to work on whatever they want, whenever they want. Teachers still play an important role, in assessing what students know and need. Teachers and students should work together to decide how students should progress.
- Technology doesn't need to drive learning. Tech can be necessary to take personalized pacing to scale—it's hard to schedule hundreds of students individually without some sort of management system. But students don't need to be working on adaptive software all day.
- Students need soft skills to do this well. If kids are setting their own goals and making their own timelines, they need to be taught time management skills.

Letting Students Take the Lead Through Genius Hour

Genius hour, in which teachers set aside time for students to work on a research project of their choice, is a chance for students to explore their interests, hone their creativity, and become an expert in a given field. In this session, Denise Krebs, the co-author of The Genius Hour Guidebook, shared best practices.

Moderator: Madeline Will, Staff Writer, Education Week
Guest: Denise Krebs, Teacher, Al Raja School, The Kingdom of Bahrain

Key Takeaways:

- Genius hour is a great tool for all learners, Krebs said, since students are learning and working at their own level. It's a great opportunity for students who might not always be academic leaders to teach their peers something in their genius hour presentation, she said.
- It can be challenging for teachers to manage so many different things going on in the classroom at one time, Krebs said. Her main advice: Trust your learners. Another teacher offered a practical tip, too: Recruit teaching assistants, parent and community volunteers, administrators, and other teachers to serve as "mentors" for students working on genius hour projects. That can make the range of topics more manageable.
- Students don't necessarily need grades on their final genius hour projects, Krebs said. Instead, teachers can help hold students accountable by asking them to keep a journal of their progress, as well as hold regular check-ins.
- Teachers can align genius hour with the standards, Krebs said. Students are researching, reading, writing, and presenting. And as one teacher noted, many students dread public speaking – genius hour can make it a little more appealing, since students are talking about something they're passionate about.

Artificial Intelligence for Personalized Learning: Dynamic Duo or Big Problem?

Artificial intelligence is a hot topic of conversation in educational technology and a trend that will likely have a big impact on K-12. This discussion examined whether intelligent tutors can really help students master material in new ways and end up being helpful partners to teachers. On the flip side, there are big concerns that AI could replace teachers, cause big data privacy

problem, and inject biases into K-12 education. Hear what our guests think the road ahead looks like for AI in education.

Moderator: Michelle R. Davis, Senior Contributing Writer, Education Week
Guest: Andreas Oranje, Vice President of Assessment and Learning Technology Development, ETS

Key Takeaways:

- Oranje described the promise of AI for PL as being a smart learning system that can sense where a student is and what they need to do next, allowing teachers to provide a learning experience that caters to every level of student in their class concurrently.
- I asked whether teachers should be worried that AI will put them out of a job. Oranje said the technology actually frees teachers up to do what they were trained to do: be instructors and mentors to students, doing the complex and sophisticated job of teaching.
- Oranje said the biggest danger of AI is a "poorly trained system" that either uses bad data to make judgments or uses data that represents some students and educational contexts to draw conclusions about a different context and group of students.
- There was lots of discussion about specific products and requests for products that use AI. Some companies that were mentioned were ALEKS, IBM's Watson, Century Tech and Edmentum. One educator said he'd seen a real difference in students since they started using Edmentum for PL, because the technology could drop students down numerous levels when it sensed a gap in their knowledge.

For more information about personalized learning, read our special report here:
www.edweek.org/go/PLreport

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