Kentucky Department of
EDUCATION

Kentucky Innovation Guide

Ensuring that every
K-12 learner is equipped
for future success

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Kentucky strives to ensure that every K-12 learner is equipped for future success, and this commitment to personalizing learning extends back decades. In the 1990's, the Kentucky Education Reform Act established a vision and structure for transformation rooted in preparing students for future success. Notably, the act mandated the creation of a public education system enabling students to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary for future success. It also created a number of personalized supports for students and established school-based decision making.

In 2021, the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) engaged stakeholders in a series of statewide listening sessions which led to the state's United We Learn vision. This vision for the future of public education in Kentucky focuses on three key areas to ensure that the state's students have the equitable and engaging learning opportunities that they need for success:

1. Developing vibrant learning experiences for every student

2. Encouraging innovation, especially in assessment and accountability

3. Creating a bold new future for Kentucky's schools through collaboration with communities

Personalized learning provides a valuable framework through which districts and schools can realize this vision. Kentucky has long been a national leader in K-12 personalized learning, which the state defines as:

A student-centered, customized learning model that addresses the diversity of a student's background and needs and sets high expectations for all students. This may entail a formalized plan and process that requires students to set learning goals based on personal, academic and career interests with the close support of adult mentors that include teachers, parents and other members of the community.

More recently, Kentucky has created a variety of supports for districts and schools interested in personalized learning. KDE houses the Division of Innovation, a relatively unique state education division within the Office of Continuous Improvement and Support, charged with incubating innovative local practices to promote personalized learning. Through this division and others, the state supports a number of networks and initiatives designed to foster elements of personalization.

These include the Kentucky Innovative Learning Network, project-based learning with PBLWorks, the Local Laboratories of Learning (L3), math badging and student micro-credentials and the Innovative Teacher Fellowship.

In 2022, in an effort to model the process for development of a Portrait of a Learner, the Kentucky Board of Education (KBE) adopted its statewide Portrait of a Learner. Portraits, also referred to as profiles in some districts, describe a learning community's aspirations for what every learner should know and be able to do when they leave the K-12 school system. The statewide portrait is not intended to supersede any locally created portrait - in fact, it was developed after reviewing the large number of local portraits that have been created by districts across the nation. The six components of Kentucky's statewide portrait are:

» Engaged Citizen
» Critical Thinker
» Effective Communicator
» Empowered Learner
» Creative Contributor
» Productive Collaborator

As increasing numbers of Kentucky districts and schools explore personalized learning, the state is continuing to produce practical resources to support them. For example, the state recently crafted guidance on developing local portraits as well as competencies to help learning communities envision what is possible through existing state policy. The document includes a combination of example districts across the state that are implementing personalized learning practices within existing state policy structures. It is also designed to help interested districts understand how they can create personalized learning environments within existing policy structures.

This innovation guide represents another key KDE resource designed to support the development of personalized learning structures. The information and examples included in this guide were collected through a combination of focus groups with Kentucky stakeholders and through direct engagement with districts and schools. All involved districts and individuals highlighted in this report have been provided an opportunity to review and approve the appropriate examples and/or quotes.
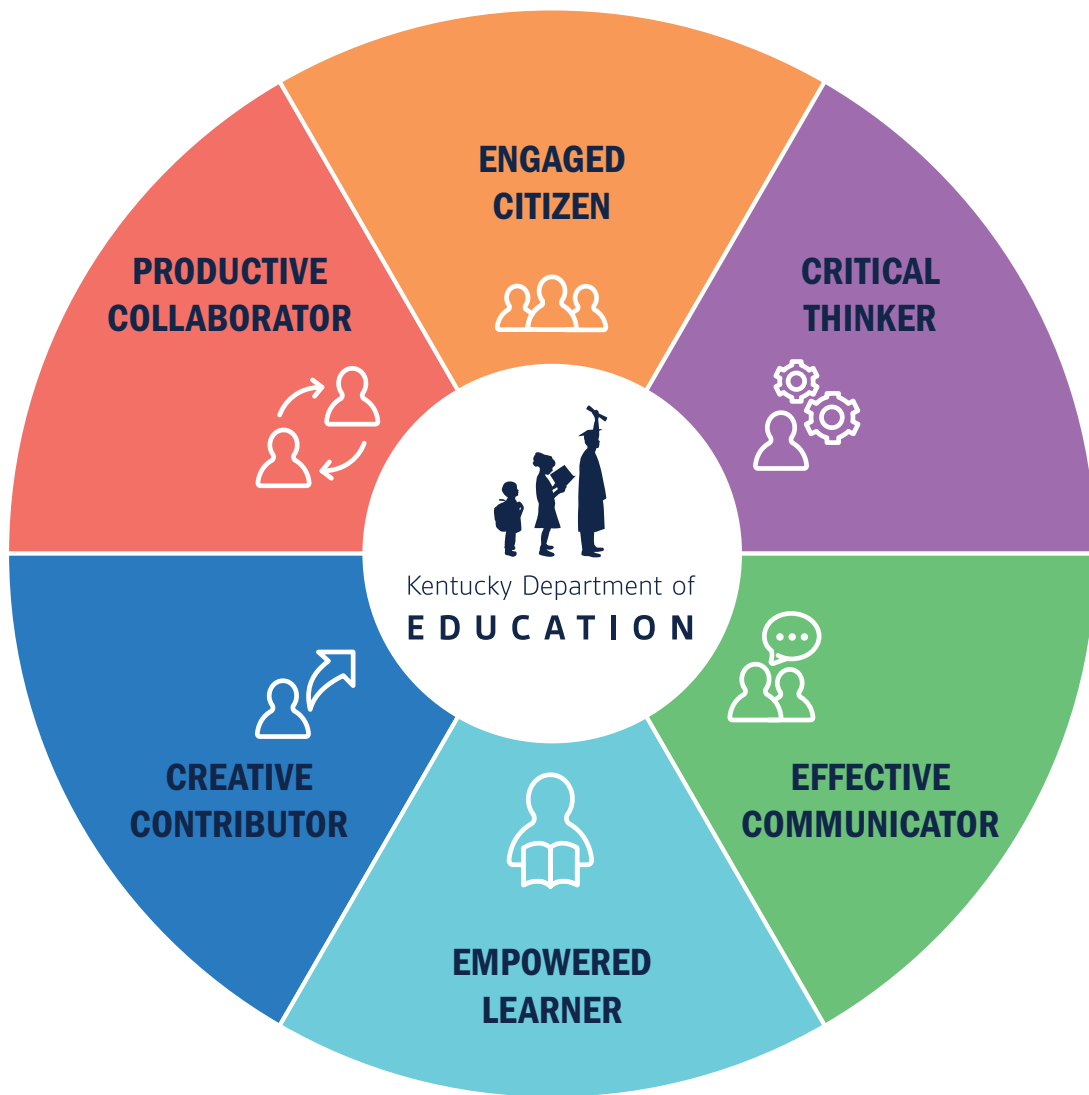
KENTUCKY PORTRAIT OF A LEARNER

ENGAGED CITIZEN - Shows respect and empathy across differences, embraces diversity of opinion, seeks cultural understanding, participates in the democratic process to challenge the status quo, and makes a positive impact on their community and the world.

CRITICAL THINKER - Thinks deeply and makes informed decisions to create solutions or new understanding supported by relevant and reliable evidence.

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATOR - Engages diverse audiences respectfully by exchanging ideas and information responsibly, listening actively, speaking and writing clearly, and using print and digital media appropriately.

EMPOWERED LEARNER - Demonstrates mastery and application of academic competencies. Develops the skills and dispositions to persist through difficulties and plan for a future of self-improvement.

CREATIVE CONTRIBUTOR - Interprets experiences, imagines and plays with new possibilities with curiosity, and creates approaches that are novel, useful, and valued by the world around them.

PRODUCTIVE COLLABORATOR - Engages with others to achieve a common goal through building positive relationships, actively listening, showing empathy, and making individual contributions to a larger group.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This guide is designed to help readers understand how their school or district might explore and implement personalized learning experiences for their students. The target audience is any interested Kentucky stakeholder. This could include students, families, educators, administrators or community members. It is designed to be a starting place for individuals or teams as they consider what types of learning experiences they might create for their students and broadly covers the following three topics:

» Action areas, which are concrete approaches to innovation drawn from actual Kentucky districts that are implementing personalized learning structures for their students

» Examples of Kentucky districts and schools that are undertaking these approaches within existing state policy structures

» Clarity around how state policy flexibilities can be leveraged by schools or districts seeking to create personalized learning opportunities

These three elements are designed to help readers understand what change can look like and offer a possible path to pursuing that change. They are also designed to inspire the reader by highlighting what is already possible within our existing K-12 education system.

What to do Next

After reviewing the guide, there are several next steps that you could take. Readers newer to deeper and personalized learning might want to explore KDE's personalized learning page or the guidance around developing competencies, performance outcomes, and indicators for a Portrait of a Learner. Readers seeking to take action might also benefit from engaging with readiness tools, such as KnowledgeWorks' district conditions for scaling personalized learning. Readers with more knowledge and experience with personalized learning might benefit from exploring the types of opportunities and partnerships Kentucky provides to districts if they are not already engaged. Many of these are listed on the Division of Innovation's home page.

ACTION AREAS AND KENTUCKY EXAMPLES

This guide was developed through extensive community engagement with stakeholders from across Kentucky. This engagement began with focus groups to help identify areas of interest related to personalized learning, both in terms of policy and practice.

Next, districts and schools across the state engaged in in-depth interviews to further develop the ideas begun by the focus groups. Interviews typically included district or school administrators, including those with first hand experience working to create personalized learning opportunities. Based on the information collected throughout this process, KDE and KnowledgeWorks identified the following action areas as the focus of this guide:

1. Creating Portraits of a Learner

2. Local Assessment and Accountability Innovation

3. Effectively Using Funding to Support Personalization

4. Leveraging Graduation Requirement Flexibilities

5. Organizing and Credentialing Learning

6. Rethinking Teacher Certification and Professional Development

These action areas are not exhaustive of everything that Kentucky districts and schools can do to personalize learning. However, these areas came up frequently throughout the information collection process and thus illustrate some of the more common areas where readers might want to start.

Each action area includes three main sections:

» **What it is and how to do it.** The description also includes key considerations for readers.

» **Relevant state policy connections** that the reader should be aware of as they pursue work in this area. This includes specific references to statute, regulation and/or guidance that the reader should consider. It also highlights flexibilities that districts and schools can leverage in each action area when they exist.

» **One or more Kentucky "spotlights."** These are written as narratives detailing how schools across the state are personalizing learning for their students.

This guide celebrates the widespread commitment to innovation across the state of Kentucky. As such, the spotlights in this guide represent broad geographic diversity as well as diversity in the ways in which districts are implementing personalized learning approaches. The spotlights and words of advice are drawn exclusively from Kentucky schools and include the following districts:

» Allen County Schools
» Boone County Schools
» Bullitt County Public Schools
» Eminence Independent Schools
» Fayette County Public Schools
» Fleming County Schools
» Greenup County School District
» Jefferson County Public Schools
» Rowan County Schools
» Shelby County Public Schools

A final word to the reader before diving in. Readers could theoretically begin with any of the action areas highlighted in this guide. However, the collective wisdom and experience of those working to personalize learning is that it is important for learning communities just getting started to define what qualities they want their K-12 system to impart to learners. The portrait and an aligned set of competencies outlined in action area one often play this role. Readers new to this work are highly encouraged to begin in this section and consider how you might work within your community to create this type of vision.

ACTION AREA 1

CREATING PORTRAITS OF A LEARNER

What It Is and How to Do It

As districts, schools and communities reimagine what they want learning to look like, they must first create a clear vision detailing the knowledge, skills and dispositions that learners will need to be ready for future success. This vision builds the foundation, the "why," for what comes next. It also creates a common set of expectations that make it easier for students to transition from one step in their educational journey to the next.

In Kentucky and elsewhere, districts regularly choose to articulate this vision through what is often referred to as a **Portrait or a Profile of a Learner**. KDE's Division of Innovation defines a portrait as:

> *An agreed-upon set of school- or district-level aspirations for what every learner will know and be able to do when they leave school. That exit may happen at the end of elementary school, middle school, high school graduation or at any other checkpoint along the way.*

It's not an overstatement to say that this shared vision represents an important first step for any learning community. A portrait empowers communities by putting their collective aspirations for their students to paper, which allows educators to identify the qualities that they should be striving to impart to their students. Portraits typically include at most six attributes

that communities want to see learners achieve by the time that they leave the K-12 system, though more can be included if necessary. When these are created at the community level, they are often connected to local needs articulated by business and industry and postsecondary stakeholders as well as those articulated by students, educators, and parents. Communities typically develop these documents through an intensive and inclusive community-driven process that includes a broad range of stakeholders. This inclusion helps to ensure broad initial support as well as long-term sustainability.

As important as a portrait is, this vision isn't designed to provide the clarity needed for educators to adjust their practices at the school and classroom level on its own. Communities typically need to go one step further and create what is often referred to as a competency progression to operationalize this vision. KDE defines a competency as:

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A term used to describe how students develop the specific knowledge, skills and mindsets necessary for success in their academic, personal and professional lives. The concepts of knowledge, skills and mindsets are interconnected and essential components of a more holistic approach to learning. These concepts come together to form a defined competency.

Readers can think of the connection between portraits and competencies like planning a trip. At the onset, you might articulate what you want to see and experience, but you still need to create a detailed plan on how to achieve this. The portrait is like the former, the competencies the latter. Once developed, these competencies create the foundation for districts and schools to design personalized learning experiences. KDE has created a detailed resource to

assist districts and schools in developing competencies, performance outcomes and indicators for a Portrait of a Learner for readers wanting to learn more about each of these. For those interested in thinking about how you might message this to your community, this personalized learning communication guide provides suggestions and tips for how your communications department might engage with stakeholders around the need for innovation.

As a final note, it's important to consider that portraits and competencies go hand in hand. A portrait without competencies is missing the connective tissue to bring the vision to life. Similarly, competencies created without the overarching vision of a portrait will lack that connection to a community's goals and aspirations for its students. For that reason, it's vital for districts and schools to pursue these pieces as a whole package.

1 State Policy Connection

Kentucky does not currently have any policy requiring schools or districts to adopt a portrait or preventing them from doing so. KBE recently developed and adopted a [statewide portrait](#) in November 2022, which districts and schools can adopt if they so choose.

Districts across the state have also [created their own portraits](#), many of which were crafted prior to the statewide portrait and which collectively form the basis for its knowledge, skills and dispositions. KDE has assembled a list of various [portraits from around the state](#). KDE also provides a set of [model performance indicators](#) that districts and schools can use for competencies, though again, districts can opt to create their own.

Should districts develop a portrait and an aligned set of competencies, students must still meet a number of graduation requirements specified in state law. The [Kentucky Academic Standards](#) (KAS) establish the minimum required standards that all Kentucky students should have the opportunity to learn before graduating from Kentucky high schools.

Content-wise, all students in Kentucky must meet the state's [minimum high school graduation requirements](#), which include 22 credits spanning five areas - English, math, social studies, science and other areas. Students must also meet several other requirements related to civics, financial literacy, workplace ethics and technology.

Notably, the KAS and the graduation requirements address what is to be learned, but don't specify how those standards must be mastered or the specific resources that must be used.

This provides districts and schools with an opportunity to craft creative personalized learning experiences for students designed to develop mastery of the knowledge and skills articulated in a portrait, as well as to meet those academic and graduation standards. State policy also provides opportunities for districts and schools to create their own portrait-aligned graduation requirements. In Kentucky, districts award diplomas.

Therefore, they are able to create additional requirements on top of those minimum requirements set by the state. These could take the form of performance assessments or portfolios based on portraits in order to advance academically. Several of the districts highlighted in this guide have created such requirements, including the two spotlights in this section, Jefferson and Fayette counties.

1 Kentucky Spotlight

Jefferson County Public Schools

Jefferson County Public Schools (JCPS) has been working hard to create district-wide personalized learning environments focused on equitable education for all students. Jefferson is home to Louisville and over 90,000 students, as well as a high level of diversity both in their student body and in the areas where schools operate. JCPS serves students in areas including the urban core of a major US city, extending to the suburban outskirts of Louisville.

In pursuit of their goal, Jefferson has created their Backpack of Success Skills, which serves as the district's Portrait of a Graduate. This set of skills describes the knowledge, skills and dispositions that the community has collectively decided they want students to have mastered by the time they graduate from JCPS. The Defense of Learning is a district wide requirement, where students at 5th, 8th and 12th demonstrate their learning by showcasing high quality artifacts connected to competencies.

If a student is unsuccessful, the teachers work with the student to give them another opportunity. The focus is on the learning process and not an arbitrary score. The progress towards the defense begins as early as kindergarten, where students might pick one skill out of the backpack and create an artifact demonstrating their success on that skill.

Across all grades, staff shared that the goal is for kids to explore, have conversations, and be the actual doers of the work. Students working to demonstrate mastery of the Backpack of Success Skills have a range of opportunities empowering them to do so.

Middle school students have an opportunity to begin exploring career paths which extend into high school with the academies of Louisville. These academies seek to "transform the high school experience by teaching core content subjects through the lens of career applications so students see the relevance to their future." Students are also able to explore project-based learning in many of the district's schools.

While the ultimate goal is full implementation across all 151 schools, staff shared that they are at different places in terms of building competencies within educators to sustain this important work. Therefore, they are working to reinvigorate the purpose and importance of the Backpack of Success Skills district-wide. In developing and implementing this work, JCPS has also benefited from

participating in several of Kentucky's networks focused on innovation such as the Innovative Learning Network, PBLWorks and the Local Laboratories of Learning (L3s). The district also shared that it has benefited from working with the Ohio Valley Educational Cooperative and leveraging their experience in deeper learning.

JCPS had some valuable advice for districts considering similar work. Executive Administrator De'Nay Speaks shared the importance of focusing this work on equity and ensuring that all students have access to meaningful opportunities, as well as the resources that they need to participate. She shares that in doing this work, it is important to always center students' needs and interests. That way, when you come up against unexpected challenges, it becomes easier to 'fail forward' and continue growing with students' best interests in mind.

Fayette County Public Schools

Fayette County Public Schools is nestled in the city of Lexington and serves over 40,000 students. Fayette County Public schools is one of the most well-educated communities in the state and serves a diverse population of students. There are close to 100 different languages spoken by students in Fayette County Public Schools, with many learners designated as English learners.

The district is central to many metropolitan areas as they are about an hour from Louisville, about an hour and a half from Cincinnati, and also close to Nashville. Fayette County Public Schools recognizes the uniqueness of both their students and their location, and has created a system with a lot of personalizable ways for students to achieve their Portrait of a Graduate skills and dispositions.

Dr. Houston Barber, Deputy Superintendent for Fayette County Public Schools, shared that having a variety of pathway opportunities and ensuring equitable access to those pathways has been very important for their office. These pathways build over a student's educational journey to help them achieve the postsecondary and workforce readiness indicators in Fayette County's Portrait of a Graduate. A plethora of pathway options exist for students during their learning journey.

Beginning in pre-kindergarten through grade three, students can enroll in STEM and immersion programs. Students in grades four and five can continue their STEM and immersion education programs, or seek enrollment in gifted and talented accelerated programs or enroll in the School for the Creative and Performing Arts. Middle school students can access high school courses for specific subject areas of interest.

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A variety of high school programs offer personalized learning opportunities for students including dual language immersion programs, international baccalaureate programs, STEAM programs, as well as others. In grades nine and 10 students have access to a host of accelerated and advanced placement courses, while students in grades 11 and 12 can take advantage of early graduation and Opportunity Middle College.

It's not simply the number of pathways available to students throughout their entire K-12 journey that make Fayette County Public Schools a great example of personalized approaches to ensuring students graduate ready for postsecondary school and work. Fayette County Public Schools has been intentional around creating learning opportunities that tie directly into their Portrait of a Graduate while also empowering student choice and ensuring access. The district is in the process of creating infographics to more clearly and directly show students and parents all of the program options they can access to help them achieve the skills outlined in the district's Portrait of a Graduate.

Students keep track of their growth by logging learning moments in a platform called Elevate. Fayette County Public Schools created Elevate to allow kids to keep track of their own learning and to help them understand what they're doing and why they're doing it.

Dr. Barber attributes this personalized approach, one that empowers students to take ownership of their work through the logging of learning moments and access to various learning pathways, to an increase in student engagement and excitement. Students can start to see pathway options from the minute they walk into an elementary school in the district all the way through secondary school and into postsecondary.

What It Is and How to Do It

Assessment and accountability serve as key components in a personalized education system. However, they look notably different from our current assessment and accountability systems, which rely heavily on high-stakes summative testing to rank and sort students, districts and schools.

While challenging to create, local assessment and accountability systems that support personalized approaches can and do thrive in Kentucky as a supplement to requirements in federal and state law.

At the classroom level, assessments in a personalized system provide timely and ongoing feedback to both students and educators to help them both understand when the student has met the knowledge, skills and dispositions articulated in documents such as a Portrait of a Learner and an accompanying competency framework (see action area 1 for more information on each of these).

Systems of assessments, including formative, interim and summative in nature, form a picture of how students are progressing toward mastery over time. Formative and interim assessments are administered when students are ready, providing students an opportunity to show growth and for educators to further personalize instruction. Summative assessments, in contrast, exist only as a gauge to evaluate system progress and to help policymakers direct resources to areas of need.

Personalized assessments also typically take forms other than traditional multiple choice assessments. They incorporate a more diverse set of options such as portfolios, capstone projects, performance-based assessments and curriculum embedded assessments. A variety of rich and ongoing assessment options help educators and students hold each other mutually accountable for ensuring students make progress towards mastery.

At the district level, assessments are used to help ensure that schools are accountable to preparing students to achieve those expectations that are articulated in a portrait and aligned competencies. Both districts and schools may collect summative data on local innovative assessment practices and use those results to identify school-by-school needs. These data could also be shared publicly to provide the broader community with meaningful insights into their schools.

Districts could also choose to adopt locally created graduation requirements for students to receive a diploma, such as a portrait capstone project or defense of learning. This serves as a form of

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accountability for learners that ensures that they are meeting what the community has created around a student-centered vision for education. Readers saw an example of this with Jefferson County in action area 1 on page 12, and will see several other examples of this throughout the guide.

Accountability systems can also be leveraged to promote personalization. While federal requirements establish specific parameters for what Kentucky's state-level accountability system must do, districts have an opportunity to create their own local accountability systems. These systems should be designed with strong stakeholder input from across the community, and might include a broader set of data points beyond those included in Kentucky's state level system. For example, local accountability systems could find creative ways to include evidence of stakeholder engagement, such as observations, interviews or surveys.

They might also include dashboards that are regularly updated and help communities understand a school's progress in measures that have been collectively identified as meaningful. These data can also then be used by educators,

families and district leaders to make adjustments as needed to ensure that students are receiving the resources and support they need to be successful.

In creating locally designed assessment and accountability systems, learning communities might start by exploring examples from other districts and schools. They might start with Kentucky's Local Laboratories of Learning (L3s) districts, each of which are currently working to design new local assessment and accountability systems to help educators and the broader community better understand the learning that is taking place in districts and schools that have embraced personalization.

The Fleming County example in this section also provides a strong early vision for what a public facing accountability system might look like. At least one of the districts interviewed for this guide referenced Fleming as a model for their own work. Interested districts might also explore tools such as KnowledgeWorks' Finding Your Path guide. This resource includes a section on comprehensive assessment systems, including guiding questions and practices to look for when undertaking the work.

2 State Policy Connection

While Kentucky's current assessment structures place certain requirements on all schools, there are opportunities for local innovation. Kentucky districts and schools are required to administer the Kentucky Summative Assessments (KSA), the results of which are integrated into the Kentucky School Report card.

Currently there are no existing opportunities for Kentucky schools or districts to request waivers from the KSA requirements. However, the state does have a number of flexibilities related to both assessment and accountability. State statute does not place requirements on what formative or interim assessments should look like at the school and/or classroom level.

This provides districts and schools pursuing personalized approaches to teaching and learning with considerable latitude in creating student-centered opportunities. Kentucky statute also allows professional development structures to include assessment literacy that includes integration of performance-based student assessments in daily instruction.

Districts and schools also have an opportunity to create a local accountability system alongside the existing state accountability system. Kentucky's state-level school accountability system, recently updated as of the 2021-2022 school year, includes updated performance measures and identified long-term goals for the district.

The state accountability system also maintains federally mandated structures such as annual meaningful differentiation using multiple measures to describe overall district performance. That said, no statutes or regulations in Kentucky prohibit the development of community created local accountability systems, such as those being piloted in Kentucky's L3 communities.

Kentucky Spotlight

Fleming County Schools

Fleming County is one of Kentucky's leading innovative districts in the area of assessment and accountability. Fleming county serves approximately 2,200 students spread across a largely rural area in eastern Kentucky. In 2014, Fleming County was a state priority district.

Their current superintendent, Brian Creasman, arrived that year and spent the first several years working to shift the district's trajectory. Ten years later, the district has become an example of innovation.

Fleming's work began with their Portrait of a Graduate in 2018, which led to their local accountability model in early 2022. In designing this local accountability system, which they refer to as "Measures of Quality," Fleming decided to shift the focus from state assessment achievement to one focused primarily on growth. This has led to Fleming thinking about school accountability in a radically different way.

Fleming began developing its local accountability model with student focus groups to find out what mattered the most to them, and incorporated student and community feedback at every step along the way. Fleming also includes a much more diverse set of metrics in its local accountability system than those typically emphasized by the state.

For example, readiness for learning in areas like reading, math and writing count for 30 percent, but these numbers focus entirely on growth.

Twenty-five percent of the district's local accountability comes from personalization of learning, which originates from scores on innovative performance assessments focused on BPIs. Readers can view Fleming's Measures of Quality online. The district is currently working on the fourth iteration of the local accountability model in preparation for the September 2024 release.

The district has since created a new local accountability model and revised it three different times, incorporating what they call Bridge Performance Indicators (BPIs). The BPIs measure student progress towards the district's six competencies, which were developed through conversations with staff, students and community stakeholders, and then condensed down by a district-level team.

All students create a website and perform an exit interview to demonstrate progress towards the BPIs, which allows students to focus on a piece of work that they are most proud of and that demonstrates their competency of BPIs. Students have a variety of ways to demonstrate mastery, from creating a working R2-D2 to mastering their English standards through

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the Occupational Safety and Health Administration manual.

The district leverages an online platform, Tote, to review and score student work. This both gives educators a common platform for scoring the work and provides district staff with insights into any inconsistencies and corrections that might need to be made related to scoring. And similar to other districts in this guide, students are required to complete an assessment on the BPIs at grades three, six, nine and twelve before moving to the next stage in their educational journey.

Fleming's Superintendent Brian Creasman and Chief Academic Officer Michelle Hunt emphasize that the work has been an iterative process throughout, that has taken six years to fully develop. It has also required constant course corrections and updates along the way. In year one, for example, teachers were struggling to think out of the box in implementing the profile.

This resulted in additional development and more focused direction for educators. Fleming also focused on building a core of committed staff first, beginning with eighteen teachers that have engaged together for years to better understand how to implement this new system.

Creasman and Hunt's advice for districts is to not spend large amounts of money on flashy new technology. They've been able to leverage free tools like Tote and Google for all of their work. They've also leveraged existing funds, such as Title I and II of ESEA, to undertake this work. They've done this for two reasons – first and foremost, because of their own resource limitations as a small district. But Fleming also sees itself as a model for other smaller districts, and wants to help inspire possibility in other small districts across the state.

EFFECTIVELY USING FUNDING TO SUPPORT PERSONALIZATION

What It Is and How to Do It

Consistent, adequate and equitable funding systems are essential for successful education service delivery. State funding systems are a powerful tool to engender personalized learning approaches to education. Money can be used to support the planning and development of more innovative approaches and to help teachers gain more skills in delivering personalized approaches to education.

Additionally, funding systems must be constructed in such a way as to allow for, if not encourage, the use of competency-based approaches to education.

States can leverage a variety of funding models to build a funding system that works best for them and their students. When considering how to create a funding system that enables personalized and competency-based approach to education, the primary questions are:

1. Are funds sufficient and flexible enough to follow a student and support their individual interests?

2. Do funding systems enable, or at least not hinder, a student to demonstrate mastery at a pace that is appropriate for them and their learning journeys?

Essentially, funding systems shouldn't penalize schools or districts that move towards personalized approaches to learning. Considerations of equity should be at the forefront of any analysis of or changes to an education funding system. As districts engage with state and federal funding streams, they often have a range of flexibility in how to use those funds. Districts and schools should take advantage of these flexibilities to best serve their student populations.

At both the state and district level, a funding system most adept at funding needs of students and their individual interests will provide holistic support for a well-rounded student experience. This means that students are first and foremost provided with adequate resources to ensure that their whole child needs are met including access to food services, technology and/or other learning materials and a safe learning environment.

Funding should also be provided to support development of individual interests including access to school counselors and sufficient teacher and instructional support to provide individualized guidance. And finally,

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funding should be flexible enough so that students can obtain necessary resources to explore learning pathways that interest them. Learning pathways may include post-secondary learning opportunities, career credentials, creative project-based learning opportunities and other learning experiences that may occur inside or outside of the classroom.

While it will never be possible to structure funding in a way that directly encompasses the needs of all students, funding systems can be made flexible enough so that as student interests and opportunities shift, funding can shift alongside. At the district level, district administrators should leverage state, federal and private funding opportunities to address these needs of students. Most states provide districts with sufficient autonomy to use funding in a way that allows for student needs to be addressed in a personalized way.

Learning can happen anytime, anywhere, and at any pace. Traditionally, mastery of content was tied to instructional time, assuming that each student could follow the teacher's pace and fully grasp all of the grade-level education standards within the school year during which they are taught.

However, the growing recognition that learners master content at various speeds requires changes to funding systems to recognize the need for personalization related to instructional time and competency-based learning. Funding formulas often rely on average daily membership or average daily attendance counts to distribute funding.

Occasionally these definitions are tied to instructional time requirements that assume learning occurs over a traditional school year calendar and inside of a traditional classroom.

At its best, a funding system to support personalized and competency-based needs will enable competency-based learning through funding formulas that are tied to student demonstration of mastery regardless of pace. Districts and schools must work within the bounds of state funding formulas and requirements.

However, flexibility for these funding needs can often be found within instructional time requirements, student-count methods and definitions as well as through the use of innovation zones or other waiver programs.

While this guide focuses primarily on state policy, districts should not overlook ways to use federal funding sources to personalize learning. Various districts interviewed for this guide highlighted ways that they've used funding from federal Titles I, II, and IV to support personalized learning activities.

For example, districts could likely use Title II, Part A dollars, which focus on strengthening the quality and effectiveness of teachers, principals and other school leaders, to send teachers to travel and observe other innovative districts for the purposes of professional development.

3 State Policy Connection

As outlined in statute, Kentucky uses a student-based foundation to appropriate funding to students based on various factors. The base funding, along with additional allocations based on student needs, are covered in the Support Education Excellence in Kentucky (SEEK) funding program.

In addition to base funding, SEEK allocates money for transportation costs and special needs students. The total funding is set by these factors as well as the average daily attendance. As defined in Kentucky statute, "Average daily attendance means the aggregate days attended by pupils in a public school, adjusted for weather-related low attendance days if applicable, divided by the actual number of days the school is in session, after the five days with the lowest attendance have been deducted."

Attendance requirements are outlined in Kentucky regulations and are taken daily in elementary school and by class period for middle and high school students. Definitions of average daily attendance and instructional time in the state of Kentucky are flexible enough to provide for most learn anytime anywhere activities.

However, one exception is the early graduation program, outlined in Kentucky regulation, which allows for a competency-based approach, but is bound within a time period of three years. In addition to the state funding system, other funding exists to further supplement innovative approaches to learning.

For example, Kentucky statute establishes the Commonwealth school improvement fund, created to "assist local schools in pursuing new and innovative strategies to meet the educational needs of the school's students and raise a school's performance level."

The fund's first listed purpose is "to support teachers and administrators in the development of sound and innovative approaches to improve instruction or management, including better use of formative and summative, performance-based assessments." KDE is mandated to assist schools in preparing grant proposals, and the Kentucky Board of Education is given the authority to award grants from the fund.

3 Kentucky Spotlight

Allen County Schools

[Allen County Schools](#) is no stranger to thinking out of the box to ensure that their students' needs are met and to encourage personalized learning. Like most schools, Allen County Schools has more needs than they have resources. To help close that gap, Melissa Biggerstaff, Chief Academic Officer, had an idea.

Biggerstaff proposed that the district hire a grant writer to find supplementary funding to provide more resources for their students. While Superintendent Travis Hamby was hesitant at first, he gave his support for the position, but only temporarily. Superintendent Hamby said that if the grant writer wasn't able to generate enough revenue to fund the position, he wouldn't extend the trial period. In the first two years the grant writer generated $13.2 million. Suffice to say, the district has no plans of letting their grant writer go.

Hiring a grant writer isn't just a one and done step to solving funding shortages. Biggerstaff shared that they hired someone who specialized in writing grants, not in education. As a result, staff work in collaboration with the grant writer to identify student needs and support the application process. This collaboration has been an essential component of the district's grant writing success.

Biggerstaff and Superintendent Hamby found this supplemental funding essential for serving less-traditional student needs and supporting the strategy areas outlined in their [district strategic plan](#) – needs that have been exacerbated following the COVID-19 pandemic. Biggerstaff shared that student mental health and wellness was at an all time low following the pandemic, and that the grant generated funds have been instrumental in serving student needs.

Allen County Schools has leveraged the newly available funds to provide students with opportunities that would normally stretch the budget. In one example, Biggerstaff talked about how they applied for and received a grant that allowed every student in their district to walk into Barnes and Noble and purchase a book. Seemingly small but personalized activities like this for students can boost morale and encourage deeper engagement in school.

3

The district is especially unique in that its schools share a single campus, allowing them to leverage programs and supports across schools. Their close-knit community is also what helps them to know that their innovative approaches to serving students' needs are working. At a community event, Biggerstaff overheard a group of parents talking about the way their children were more engaged in learning and feeling excited about school.

When she approached the group to hear more, she was thrilled to learn that it was in her district. Biggerstaff and Superintendent Hamby hear stories like this frequently. Superintendent Hamby shared that he's been passionate about personalized and competency-based approaches to education for years, and believes that passion is ultimately what helped him land his position as district superintendent.

Kentucky's Regional Education Cooperatives (REC) can be an important resource to help maximize a district's purchasing power. Shelby County Public Schools' local REC has been leveraging federal funding to support personalized learning. Reach out to your local REC to learn more about financial opportunities to deepen student learning!

ACTION AREA 4: LEVERAGING GRADUATION REQUIREMENT FLEXIBILITIES

What It Is and How to Do It

High school graduation is arguably the largest milestone in a student's educational journey. Graduation indicates that a student has successfully completed a series of tasks that demonstrate competency of various knowledge, skills and dispositions to be prepared for what comes next.

Graduation requirements are often designed by states and local school boards to ensure that students graduating have gained the skills necessary to participate in postsecondary program options or join the workforce.

In a more traditional system, graduation requirements often center on course requirements or meeting specific academic standards. In a more personalized approach, graduation requirements are often more expansive, placing portraits and mastery of competencies as a priority while still requiring mastery of rigorous academic standards. In considering what graduation requirements should be, the state and local school boards should consult with stakeholders within the community about what they value and see as important skills and dispositions for high school graduates.

Graduation requirements should be comprehensive enough to ensure that students are ready for postsecondary school or work, while also allowing them to explore a pathway, or pathways, that interests them. Students learn best when they are able to explore topics that they are passionate about. Graduation requirements that allow students to accomplish this might include minimum requirements in core subjects that allow a student to spend the second half of their high school career deepening their knowledge in areas of interest.

Additionally, it may include integrated and flexible course offerings that can be used for multiple graduation requirements, like permitting a physics class to count towards science or math credits. Students should be able to achieve graduation benchmarks through demonstration of mastery of career-oriented skills as well as academic skills.

4

Since graduation marks the final milestone for K-12 students, it is important that students truly have proficiency in the skills and competencies outlined in graduation requirements. Having a graduation pathway that ensures students have mastered topics by requiring that students demonstrate proficiency can help ensure that students graduate ready for postsecondary and workforce success.

Many of the example districts throughout this guide, including Shelby County in this section, have already created pathways aligned to their portraits, specifically by creating opportunities like a defense of learning requirement for students to earn a diploma.

4

State Policy Connection

The Kentucky State Board of Education (KBE) is required by statute to establish minimum administrative regulations related to graduation requirements that "comply with the expected outcomes for students and schools." They must also establish requirements for an alternative high school diploma for eligible students, including requirements for early graduation from high school.

Regulations have been in effect since October 20, 2022, and have already been subject to a series of amendments. The state has also created multiple pathways to graduation through its graduation requirements as well as options that schools and students can use to personalize student learning experiences.

For example, local boards have the ability to substitute integrated, applied, interdisciplinary, occupational, technical or higher-level courses for a required course. Additionally, students can also earn performance-based credits in lieu of Carnegie Units for a wide range of courses by leveraging mechanisms such as portfolios, dual credit, or other equivalency courses.

Under the state's minimum requirements for graduation, every student must earn at least 22 credits. These span five areas — English, math, social studies, science and other — in the two categories of foundational and personalized. Personalized course choices are based on a student's Individualized

Learning Plan (ILP), as well as individual needs. Courses taken for course credit must be aligned to the Kentucky Academic Standards (KAS).

Students must also pass a state-mandated civics test, successfully complete a course or program in financial literacy, receive instruction in essential workplace ethics and demonstrate competency in technology using district-created competency requirements based on the KAS for technology.

In addition, the state provides for an alternative high school diploma for eligible students with disabilities. See "Kentucky Minimum Graduation Requirements For Students Entering High School 2019-2020 and Thereafter" and "Kentucky Department of Education Minimum High School Graduation Requirements Frequently Asked Questions". Districts can also create additional personalized local graduation requirements to fit their community needs and the competencies outlined in their Portrait of a Learner.

4 Kentucky Spotlight

Shelby County Public Schools

Shelby County Public Schools serves just under 7,000 students and has the largest percentage of Hispanic students in the state of Kentucky. They've leveraged their Portrait of a Graduate (PoG) to help them strategize around how best to serve their students for a little over nine years.

While the district is currently in the process of developing competency rubrics to support the portrait, they've already begun weaving in the skills and dispositions of the district's portrait into key learning moments for their students.

At Shelby County Public Schools, students participate in defenses of learning at every transition grade, i.e., fifth, eighth and twelfth grade. These learning defenses help ensure that students are proficient in skills and competencies that are grade appropriate interpretations of the competencies outlined in the district's portrait of a graduate. Learning defenses are customized to meet the needs of students.

For example, English learners can perform their learning defenses in their native language. Shelby County Public Schools is so committed to ensuring that students can demonstrate proficiency in the skills outlined in the district's portrait of a graduate that they've set the 12th grade learning defense as a graduation requirement.

Kentucky's minimum graduation requirement allows Shelby County Public Schools to add requirements that meet the needs of their students and the community. By incorporating these learning defenses into graduation requirements, the district has made it clear that the ability to demonstrate proficiency of PoG skills is essential to moving on from secondary education.

Dr. Adam Hicks, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment, expressed pride in the fact that every student participates in these defenses of learning, marking participation as a success of their programs. This year, students in 8th grade will have defended in 5th grade as well, making them the first cohort to participate in learning defenses multiple times.

Not only has the implementation of learning defenses increased student engagement, but it's also deepened the relationship the district has with parents and community partners. Parents who participate in learning defenses can understand how students are building skills overtime that will help them succeed both inside and outside of the classroom. Community members who join defenses can see the type of work students in their district schools are doing.

Assistant Superintendent Hicks shared that getting community partners into the building is a huge win for the program and for students. In 12th grade learning defenses last year students received job offers at the local hospital following their defenses because community members on their defense panels were so impressed. The district shared that there wasn't a lot of red tape involved to get community members in the schools, they just had to run a basic background check and log them in as a school visitor.

Dr. Jennifer Cox, Director of Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment at Shelby County Public Schools, shared that the most important advice she could give to districts wanting to innovate to better serve students is to develop a culture of inspiration and aspiration. Shelby County Public Schools is one example of how buy-in for locally determined competencies and skills can be institutionalized through policy and practice in a way that deepens the student learning experience.

Greenup County Public Schools

[Greenup County School District](#), located in rural Northeastern Kentucky, is a state leader in rethinking how to prepare students for life after graduation. Greenup County faces a number of challenges in areas like transportation, with the school buses serving the districts' 2,500 students covering approximately 2,800 miles every day.

The district's student population also experiences a high rate of poverty and the region as a whole struggles economically. This reality was one of the primary drivers behind the district's decision to reorient their schools around personalized learning.

Superintendent Traysea Moresea recognizes both the challenges and community desires. She shares that everything innovative they've done in their district has been to give kids hope at a young age, especially as students get closer to graduation. This begins before students even enter high school and centers around the district's "[Great Eight](#)", its profile of a graduate. In elementary school, students begin showing their

competencies in specific higher order skills oriented around the portrait of a learner. The number increases in middle school to where students are expected to demonstrate proficiency in half of the district's profile categories and extends to high school, where the focus expands to all eight.

Greenup is working to personalize course content for students within this framework. When graduating 8th grade, they do an exit interview to help their teachers at the next level better understand their needs and interests. The district then works to personalize core content courses at the high school level.

4

For example, students that enjoy a more hands-on approach might meet Algebra or Geometry standards through CTE-oriented coursework or might work through their English standards by engaging with the Occupational Safety and Health Administration manual. All students collect and keep their information in a digital portfolio that they themselves track.

Greenup has also gotten creative where necessary to help their students attain meaningful credentials. For example, the district recognized that a state-recognized certification to become an electrician was not what the local union required. They decided to reorient their program to meet the local workforce needs. The state has also determined that the new program can count towards school accountability in the future.

Greenup also offers programs in areas like small engine repair, where students can get a full certification to overhaul boats and graduate ready for employment, and iron working, where students can be certified and start out as journeymen.

The district has also begun building out a local accountability dashboard as a part of Kentucky's L3 initiative to track progress around their strategic plan, which includes the Great Eight. Superintendent Moresea shared that the dashboard's goal will be to help the community understand how all the learning pieces fit together and move beyond a more singular

focus on state testing. The dashboard will provide insights into school safety, student experiences, and engagement in things like extracurricular activities. The community will also be involved in providing input into the panel.

One important aspect of Greenup's approach that cannot be overstated is community engagement. When the district began its work, they had widespread involvement from stakeholders – both school and non-school based stakeholders. The consistent message that Greenup heard was that everyone needed skilled labor and that they wanted students to work in the community. This then led to all that followed.

Superintendent Moresea has already seen positive impacts on the student experience. Attendance rates are higher, student growth has increased and there are fewer behavior issues. That's not to say that all of the district's challenges have been overcome, but they are making progress in meeting the unique needs of their community. Her advice for those considering similar work is to make sure that kids have a voice in their school and hope for something better. This will help establish hope and build their own belief in their ability to own their own education.

ACTION AREA 5: ORGANIZING AND CREDENTIALING LEARNING

What It Is and How to Do It

Even when educators want to design personalized opportunities for their students, they may be limited by the way in which learning is organized. Traditional structures, such as how many minutes students are required to be in class or how the school calendar is laid out, can often restrict where and how learning takes place.

By contrast, a personalized approach to education takes a more expansive view of when and where learning takes place and recognizes the need for a more flexible approach to how credit for mastery of academic content occurs.

Here's an example of how learning could look different in a personalized system. In a traditional system, students typically receive credit for completing standards only once they've sat in a classroom in a traditional school building for a predetermined number of hours over the course of a semester.

In a personalized system, students could complete the same standards through project-based learning within a defined subject, cross-curricular coursework or even by participating in community-based experiences like internships. Learning could also take place outside of the

traditional school months. Students could receive credit for learning that occurs over summer break, extended holidays or on family vacations.

One important note in considering how to rethink how learning is organized - what changes is where and how students continue to meet statewide expectations for graduation, not in what students are expected to master. Rethinking seat time or school calendar requirements shouldn't result in a reduction in the quality of what students need to master before moving forward in new areas.

Students should still be expected to master rigorous academic content, including the Kentucky Academic Standards, as well as any additional requirements that the district might choose to create related to a portrait and aligned competencies.

5 State Policy Connection

Kentucky [statute](#) currently defines the student instructional year as "at least one thousand sixty-two (1,062) hours of instructional time for students delivered on not less than one hundred seventy (170) attendance days."

However, state policy also allows for districts to adopt a "variable instructional year" which still requires at least the 1,062 hours of instructional time, but allows the local board to determine the number of attendance days used to meet that requirement. These days are then considered proportionally equivalent to the 170 attendance days specified in the law.

The only stipulation in statute is that the school calendar for use by a variable student instructional year must start no earlier than the Monday closest to August 26th. Interested districts could leverage the variable instructional year clause of statute to think creatively about how to allocate the 1,062 required hours across the school year.

State [regulation](#) establishes guidelines and procedures for approving waivers to request a variable instructional year and for districts to adopt what are called "innovative instructional calendars." The regulation specifically requires that districts identify how the calendar will improve teaching and learning, how 1,062 hours of instruction will be included in the calendar, and the structure of any days that are less than six-hours in length.

Districts considering attendance days that extend beyond seven hours must also submit an innovative alternative calendar as articulated in [statute](#). Districts can leverage this flexibility to think creatively about how to create flexible learning opportunities outside of the classroom. Eminence Independent Schools in this section presents a strong example of how this flexibility could be leveraged.

Beyond instructional time and calendar requirements, Kentucky also gives students an opportunity to earn [performance-based credits](#) when they demonstrate satisfactory learning outside of the traditional 120 hour instructional course. Performance based credits must also meet a "rigorous performance standards policy" established by a local board of education, which includes performance descriptors and evaluation procedures to ensure that both content and performance standards have been met.

5 Kentucky Spotlight

Eminence Independent Schools

Eminence Independent Schools is located in the Northern Kentucky triangle between Louisville, Lexington and Cincinnati. The district serves approximately 1,000 students, and for the past twelve years has been pursuing a completely personalized, tech-integrated approach to K-12 education.

In speaking to Superintendent Buddy Berry, Eminence was an early adopter of personalized learning. Eminence's work began with a simple belief that education needed to be personalized for every student. The work began in 2011 by engaging student voices to learn what they wanted out of their school experience, and continued in subsequent years with the district's graduation profile and a set of standards to help students understand how to make progress on the graduation profile attributes. Today, students have to be able to provide a defense of how they've mastered the competencies in 5th, 8th and 12th grade before moving on.

Eminence has created a number of structures to help personalize learning for their students at all levels. At the classroom level, you'll see educators adapting their practices to what students need. This could look like direct instruction or more general facilitation by supporting students working independently.

Students across all grade levels also participate actively in project-based learning. Outside the classroom, the district embeds an annual trip to a college campus for every grade level for every district. High school students can also participate in the early college program on Bellarmine University's campus and earn two full years of credit before graduating.

The district also functions largely on a four day week, something they've been able to do under the flexibilities allowed in state statute. Lastly, the district was an early adopter of the 1:1 computer model, which spurred them to think creatively about how to integrate technology throughout their day.

Superintendent Berry shared the tremendous impact he's seen come from personalizing education for each student over the past twelve years. Eminence is currently seeing a 4-7 fold increase in the number of graduates earning a post secondary degree from when they began.

5

In particular students participating in their Early College Program are seeing a 99 percent post secondary completion rate. He's also seen the impact on the adults in the education system, where they've seen a notable increase in the number of teachers applying to be a part of what their district is doing. And while test scores aren't Eminence's primary focus, he shares that they've seen a dramatic increase in student proficiency on state testing over the past decade.

Superintendent Berry has some choice advice for others considering similar work. In his experience, you need to have the support of your local board of education. He acknowledges that some of their early steps, such as going to a 1:1 technology model, received a lot of pushback, but he always felt that the board had his back. He also emphasizes the importance of having a strong support staff around you that believes in the work. Last, but certainly not least, he shares the importance of testing out new ideas to see what works and making adjustments when necessary.

ACTION AREA 6: RETHINKING TEACHER CERTIFICATION AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

What It Is and How to Do It

In a personalized learning environment, educators are essential to ensuring students meet their learning goals. Making sure that every learner has access to a high-quality educator is critical for student development and to prepare them for postsecondary and career options.

While traditional pathways towards teaching credentials are the most common method for achieving this, other avenues often exist for individuals who are experts in a specific field to become certified teachers.

Having the flexibility to certify teachers who demonstrate expertise in a subject area can be critical to ensuring that the personalized learning goals of students are achieved. Additionally, teachers should have the ability and support to continue their learning journeys through professional development opportunities in order to best serve students. Districts and schools can leverage alternative teaching pathways to address teacher shortages and help get subject matter experts in front of the students.

Personalized learning shouldn't just be for students, but should also be an integral part of teacher certification, licensure and continued professional development. At its core, this means that educator programs should encourage participants to not only gain the broad range of skills necessary to teach effectively, but should also allow them to deepen their knowledge of teaching and learning practices that most interest them and will most greatly benefit the students they teach.

It is essential that these programs and continued education opportunities prepare educators and school leaders to succeed in the personalized learning environments that they are creating for students. This means that these programs themselves will include personalized learning pathways for certification and licensure.

In this same vein, educators should be permitted to show skills and dispositions that warrant certification and licensure through demonstrations of mastery. Teacher licensure pathways that permit individuals to demonstrate expertise in subject areas or teaching generally can help grow the teaching workforce and provide students with professionals who can support their learning journey.

6

Teachers who obtain certification through all pathways, including less traditional methods, should receive training and support to promote high quality, equitable and personalized learning environments for students.

Regardless of the method an educator chooses to obtain their teaching credential, it is necessary that they are offered professional development opportunities to continue growing and evolving alongside student needs. These professional development opportunities should align with the state vision for teaching and learning that will empower educators to most effectively support students achieving the portrait of a graduate.

It is essential that professional learning opportunities are varied in scope to allow for personalization of teacher interest and the needs of students in different communities and districts. The example of possible Title II, Part A funding use from Action Area 3 for teacher observation is an example of how districts could do this in Kentucky.

6 State Policy Connection

Kentucky has multiple avenues for those with qualifying experience to enter the classroom beyond the traditional certification process. The state's traditional teacher certification procedure runs through the Education Professional Standards Board, established in this area of statute, while another area of statute offers multiple alternatives to the traditional certification process.

Kentucky statute specifies that the Education Professional Standards Board in the state is responsible for informing those "who have potential as teachers of these options and [assisting] local boards of education in implementing these options and recruitment of individuals who can enhance the education system in Kentucky."

One of these options involves the certification of a person with "exceptional work experience," defined as "a person with recognized superiority as compared with others in rank, status and attainment or superior knowledge and skill in comparison with the generally accepted standards in the area in which certification is sought" as discussed in Kentucky regulation. A person that meets this criterion who has been offered employment by a school district and has a qualifying postsecondary background can receive a one-year provisional teaching certificate. After completion of the yearlong internship period, they receive a regular teaching certificate.

Additionally, individuals with a master's or doctoral degree in the field they want to teach and at least five years teaching experience at a higher education institution may receive a one-year provisional certificate if offered employment by a school district. As specified in Kentucky regulation, the candidate retains their certificate for another four years after completing the internship period.

The Kentucky Department of Education is responsible for establishing, directing and maintaining a statewide program of professional development. Annually, local school districts in Kentucky must create a professional development plan to meet requirements found in professional development and curriculum policy. This same regulation requires that a minimum of four school days be utilized for professional development. This is a minimum requirement and local school districts can choose to dedicate more time to professional development.

Each professional development plan is required to include, among other components, a statement of the school or district mission, a needs assessment analysis and a method for evaluating impact on student learning. Districts have wide latitude in determining what to include within these requirements, such as training in personalized instructional methods for educators. Rowan County in this section serves as an example of a district doing just that.

6 Kentucky Spotlight

Rowan County Schools

Rowan County Schools serves about 3,400 students in rural Kentucky. The district also has a substantial population of students whose households live in poverty. Ensuring that the needs of these students are met and that they have access to personalized educational opportunities is a priority for the district.

They are able to leverage their relationship with Morehead State University to offer personalized learning experiences through dual credit courses and half-day school days at the university. However, to best serve their students, the district has invested heavily in one area in particular: their teachers. The district is trying new ways to build educator capacity to empower them to support innovative and personalized learning for students.

Teachers in Rowan County Schools have been part of the development, implementation and continuous improvement of the district's portrait of a graduate. The district's portrait, called the Valiant Viking, is the north star for their students. Teachers are an integral part of moving students towards the goals outlined in the Valiant Viking profile. They quickly realized that teachers were having a hard time seeing how all of the different components of the portrait intertwined and connected to curriculum and standards.

Last year, the district hosted a visioning day to help make these connections. Pre-kindergarten through fifth grade teachers met for one day and middle and high school teachers met on a separate day. During this time, teachers discussed how the vision for students could be incorporated at grade-appropriate levels. For example, kindergarten teachers decided that each student should be able to do a student-led conference to talk about their learning.

Teachers back-planned from there, thinking through things like teaching vocabulary to accomplish this goal and starting a learning log for students to build out other necessary skills. Each teacher developed a 30, 60, 90 day plan to work towards the grade-appropriate goal they were targeting for their students.

Teachers in Rowan County Schools are offered personalized professional development opportunities through Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). Teachers sign up for PLC cohorts related to a skill or area of expertise they want to develop, and determine their own learning path for the year. This is the first year of this program but former Assistant Superintendent Julia Rawlings and Assistant Superintendent Brandy Carver both agree this shouldn't be the last year.

6

To support these learning communities, the district is providing eight days for professional development, which is greater than the state minimum requirement. In addition to PLCs, teachers can also become certified in project-based learning. Teachers have been able to opt into project-based learning cohorts and mini professional development sessions. The district now has a school where every teacher has been trained in project-based learning. Former Assistant Superintendent Julia Rawlings shared that she believes the clear, consistent and transparent communication with teachers about your district's goals for students is essential.

Rawlings shared that she believes the visioning day was necessary to get everyone on the same page. Assistant Superintendent Brandy Carver stressed the importance of giving teachers flexibility to move towards goals. Carver said teachers need to be given permission to try something new and assured that it will be ok if the new thing doesn't work out.

Bullitt County Public Schools

As the 7th largest school district in the state, Superintendent Dr. Jesse Bacon of Bullitt County Public Schools says that they are small enough that they can easily get things done but large enough that they have enough resources to tap into.

The district also has a lot of businesses in the community that they can partner with to give students on-the-job experiences. Bullitt County Public Schools utilizes their graduate profile, their core values and their accountability aspiration statements to help drive decision making. They also weren't shy to share one of the biggest drivers in making change and growth happen, which is their teachers.

The district is using a cohort model approach to help teachers deepen their understanding of the graduate profile and integrate it into their teaching practices. Teachers self-select into this learning cohort, though some principals encourage teachers to participate. The district currently has a waiting list for this learning cohort as they've chosen to prioritize quality of learning over quantity of participants. Once a teacher participates in the cohort, they can share their ideas and learnings with other teachers on their teams and in their departments. Teachers in the cohort meet once a month and receive a stipend for participating.

To begin, teachers in the cohort do a deep dive around the graduate profile competencies. Dr. Adrienne Usher, Assistant Superintendent, shared that in her experience, understanding exactly what the graduate profile competencies are and what they are not is essential for successful classroom integration. Teachers in the cohort start by digging into the meaning of competencies and exploring what they look like in the classroom.

6

Following the deep dive into competencies, teachers begin designing lesson plans that integrate components of graduate competencies and deepen student learning. In addition to cohort meetings, teachers can also join monthly design sessions to further engage in this work. Teachers that opt into the design sessions receive an additional stipend for their time and work with curriculum experts to help them apply the competency to what they're already doing. In these design sessions, teachers also do goal setting with coaches to help ensure that they are reaching their professional development aspirations.

Using a grant, Bullitt County Public Schools is beginning to track how participation in this professional development cohort is changing student outcomes. The district will identify the approximately 200 teachers that have been in the cohort and isolate the data from their classrooms to measure student impact of this professional development program.

This study will occur in partnership with Arizona State University's School for the Future of Innovation in Society.

Additionally, Assistant Superintendent Usher also shared that when she does classroom evaluations of teachers, those who have participated in the cohort often score higher than those who have not participated.

> *"If we believe in personalization for students, we must also believe in it for the teachers."*
> — Superintendent Jesse Bacon

Bullitt County Public Schools has leveraged partnerships and in-state networking groups to help them develop this work. In addition to the upcoming partnership with Arizona State, they've previously partnered with organizations like PBL Works, Envision Learning Partners, ALP and Next Generation Learning. They've joined Kentucky collectives like the Innovative Learning Network, Local Laboratories of Learning, the Kentucky United We Learn Council and worked with the Ohio Valley Educational Cooperative. The district has been deeply involved in this work for a long time, with teacher professional development as a leading method for building capacity to best serve students.

CONTINUING THE WORK

KDE hopes that this Innovation Guide will help readers get excited about how they might personalize learning for their students. But before you put it down, please consider some of the final words of advice from districts and schools interviewed in this resource.

1. Start by engaging your community.

Almost every district interviewed for this guide emphasized the importance of starting this work in conversation with their community. Greenup County heard that their community wanted students to be better prepared to meet their local workforce needs and Fleming County utilized community focus groups at the onset before starting their local accountability process. Community buy-in is essential not only to starting the process but ensuring that it achieves true transformation.

2. Don't be afraid to try something new.

Many of the districts interviewed shared the importance of trying and iterating with new ideas over time. When Eminence started, their district made the choice not to plan five or 10 years into the future. Instead, they recognized that their current system wasn't meeting the needs of their students in the here and now. Rather than worry about creating a multi-year phased plan, they opted to start small, test something out and make adjustments as needed.

3. If it's comfortable, it might not be innovative.

Pushing the envelope is crucial when working to create personalized learning systems. Boone County in Northern Kentucky had to stop their initial Portrait of a Learner process and restart it to work through challenges at the implementation level. Innovation is tough, and asking people to make changes can be scary. But if it's not pushing people out of their comfort zone, there's a good chance it isn't truly transformative.

4. Policy is the floor.

This guide emphasizes the connection between innovative practices and what is allowed under state policy. But it also highlights ways in which policy leaves areas open where expansive innovation can take place. For that reason, districts shouldn't limit themselves to only what is enumerated in state policy, especially if something isn't expressly prohibited. Assistant Superintendent Usher from Bullitt says it best in that policy is the floor, not the ceiling.

5. It takes time to achieve change.

Changing an entire system like K-12 education doesn't happen overnight. Districts need to communicate about the need for change, build the support necessary for trying new ideas and adjusting over time and find the time to get creative in creating the types of experiences that their learners need. Fleming County took five years and Eminence twelve to get to where they are today. Throughout the process, it's important to keep the lines of communication open to ensure continued community support for the changes being implemented.

6. Center students' needs and interests.

It's all about the students. If they aren't at the center of what's being done, it might be time to go back to the drawing board. Readers will have seen this with many of the districts highlighted here, from Jefferson County emphasizing the importance of equity to Greenup County finding ways to unearth and communicate student interests as they progress from one level of education to another. In Boone County, they are seeing students own their learning and taking on more agency as they receive freedom to pursue their own interests. Making sure this consideration remains at the top when moving forward with innovative work will help ensure it has the impact you're seeking to achieve!

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

» Kentucky's Portrait of a Learner
https://education.ky.gov/school/innov/Pages/Portrait-of-a-Learner.aspx

» Examples of locally created portraits
https://education.ky.gov/school/innov/Pages/Current-District-Profiles-of-a-Learner-.aspx

» Kentucky Portrait of a Learner FAQ
https://education.ky.gov/school/innov/Documents/PoL%20FAQs%20V1_508.pdf

» KnowledgeWorks' Finding Your Path Guide
https://knowledgeworks.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/finding-your-path-navigation-tool.pdf

» KnowledgeWorks' District Conditions for Scale
https://knowledgeworks.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/district-conditions-scale.pdf.pdf

» KnowledgeWorks' Defining a Competency (video)
https://knowledgeworks.org/resources/define-competency/

» Knowledgeworks' Aligning Competencies to Portrait of a Learner (video)
https://knowledgeworks.org/resources/aligning-competencies-portrait-learner/

This guide was developed in collaboration with:

KnowledgeWorks

KnowledgeWorks is a national nonprofit organization advancing a future of learning that ensures each student graduates ready for what's next. For more than 20 years, we've been partnering with states, communities and leaders across the country to imagine, build and sustain vibrant learning communities. Through evidence-based practices and a commitment to equitable outcomes, we're creating the future of learning, together.