



Moving from Inflexible Systems to →

Customization

When formal education began, schools borrowed guiding principles, like standardization and structure, from the factory systems developing at the time. School became a place where rigid structures batched learners of the same age together and engaged them in the same content, through the same activities, at the same pace. This one-size-fits-all approach results in very few learners experiencing the level of support, or challenge, they need—holding some students back from more advanced content and activities, while leaving others behind. However—for all young people to succeed—the focus, pace, and sequence of learning, as well as the resources and support provided, must be tailored to each learner’s identity, prior knowledge, development, way of learning, and life experiences. This ensures that all learners have just what they need to be successful, and that learners who need more receive more.

This Leap Means...

- ▶ Learners following a variety of pathways in regard to the how, when, and where of learning based on their unique developmental level, interests, learning needs, or other factors.
- ▶ Learners receiving the resources, scaffolds, and supports needed to be successful with intellectually challenging work.
- ▶ Learners experiencing personalized learning opportunities and flexible systems that evolve to fit them.

Customizing young people’s learning experiences in response to the ways they vary can nurture their identities, fuel motivation, and support learning. In fact, for these experiences to be truly relevant to and intellectually challenging for every learner, at least some degree of personalization is essential. This is because every learner is unique and has different needs based on what they value and want to achieve, where they are developmentally, and more. By increasing customization in all learning environments, more learners can receive personalized academic and social experiences that support their developmental needs; educators can become masterful interventionists and relay just-in-time support to every child; and classrooms can become safe places that promote continuous progress while also fostering a respect for differences. By personalizing learning in response to these differences, and by ensuring learners who need something more or something different receive it, our education system will become more effective for all.



Inequitable, Industrial-Era Learning

Inflexible Systems

Learners experience rigid structures and policies that batch those of the same age together and engage them in the same content through the same activities at the same pace—holding some learners back from more advanced content and activities and leaving others behind.

Equitable, 21st-Century Learning

Customization

The focus, pace, and sequence of learning, as well as the resources and supports provided, are tailored to each learner’s identity, prior knowledge, development, way of learning, and life experiences, ensuring that all learners have what they need to be successful, and those who need more receive more.

Transcend’s Leaps for Equitable, 21st Century Learning are informed by the [science of learning and development](#); equity in education; and [contemporary societal, political, economic, and scientific trends](#).

Customization at

Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center

Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center (The Met) is a network of six schools located in Providence and Newport, Rhode Island. The Met's mission is to educate and empower youth through relentless commitment to student-centered learning and personal growth so that all students graduate as skilled and responsible, diverse thinkers and civically-active citizens who gain fulfillment in their life and work. The school's approach to achieving this mission is highly personalized, based on students' interests and needs:

- ▶ **Personalized Curriculum** – Advisors work with mentors, parents, and students to build a personalized curriculum around each student's interests. They then engage professionals from the community to help students pursue those interests through real-world projects completed on site with the professionals who become mentors to the students. The projects provide opportunities for the students to explore and master the content and skills outlined in their personalized curricula.
- ▶ **Learning Through Interests and Internships** – Through real-world projects, each student works with a mentor who is an expert in a field the student is interested in. The student and mentor work together to engage in project-based work that addresses authentic problems and works toward real goals. The projects are a major driver of students' academic growth but also benefit mentors and the larger community or sector.
- ▶ **Individual Learning Plans** – Each student has an individualized Learning Plan. Plans are created and updated each marking period with the student's learning team, which includes the student, a family member, the student's advisor, and whenever possible, the student's mentor. Learning plans are built around a student's interests, talents, and needs.
- ▶ **Advisory Structure** – Advisories are students' homebase and play a key organizational and relational role in their lives. Advisories include about 16 students who often stay together, with the same advisor, for all four years at The Met. An advisor's role is to know each student well, manage students' project work and Learning Plan, and provide the right amount of challenge and support needed to promote growth. Students gather for advisory time each day to explore new ideas and concepts as well as to build community.
- ▶ **Flexible Scheduling** – The Met encourages students to explore their interests outside of traditional school hours and awards credit for doing so. In addition, students are grouped flexibly; they engage in one-on-one and small-group work around their interests and needs and these groupings evolve regularly.

Additional School Examples to Explore

CICS West Belden – CICS is a K-8 charter school located in Chicago. Its approach to customization entails Learner Profiles and Personalized Learning Plans, student interest surveys, weekly conferences, standards-based report cards, and multi-age classrooms with flexible movement between classes.

Wilder Elementary School – Wilder is a rural school district in Idaho with a high-poverty student population. The district is implementing a personalized learning model that enables students to master work at their own pace. This was a key turning point in the district's overall transformation.

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