

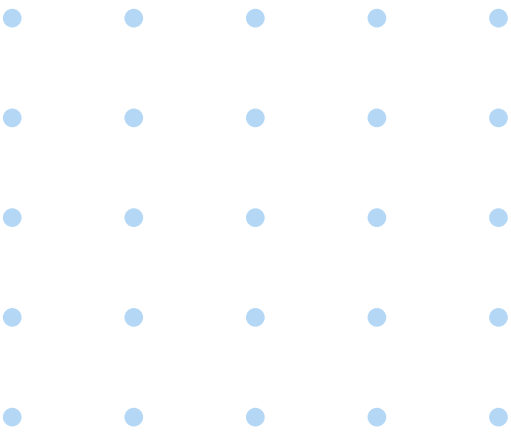


Montana Office
of Public Instruction

Montana Innovation Guide

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





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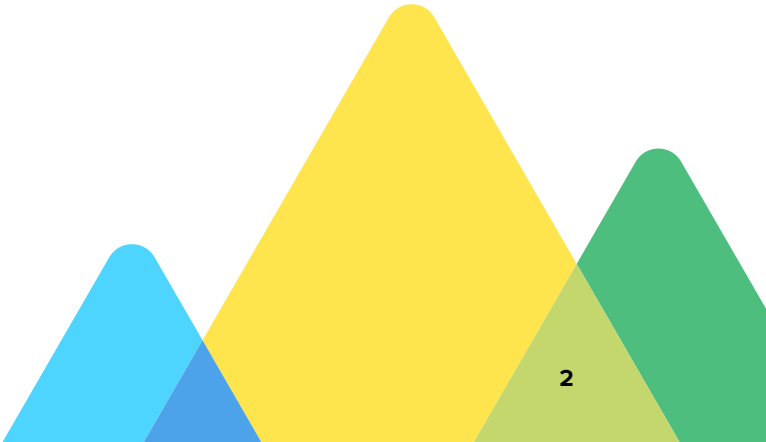
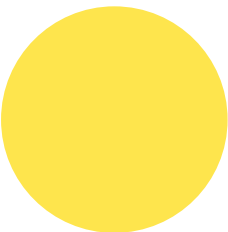
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INTRODUCTION

The Montana education system is committed to creating opportunities that prepare students for postsecondary success. The [Montana State Constitution](#) states that a goal of the education system is to “develop the full educational potential of each person.”

To ensure that every learner is ready for what comes after high school, districts across the United States are leveraging personalized and proficiency-based models of education. Nationally, the [Canopy Project](#) has identified 319 schools engaged in innovative education practices. KnowledgeWorks has created Innovation Guides highlighting some of these practices in [Kentucky](#) and [South Carolina](#). In Montana, districts are innovating and providing their students with a range of experiences to support their learning and are starting to use personalized and proficiency-based practices as they do so.

Each school and district in Montana face distinct challenges.

The [Montana Office of Public Instruction](#) (OPI) is prioritizing the implementation of policies and programs to support schools and districts pursuing personalized and proficiency-based learning. Montana’s [administrative rules](#) provide definitions for both of these critical learning components.

Proficiency-based learning means “systems of instruction, assessment, and academic reporting that are based on students demonstrating that they have learned the knowledge and skills as outlined in the state content standards.”

Personalized learning means “to:

- » develop individualized pathways for career and postsecondary educational opportunities that honor individual interests, passions, strengths, needs, and culture;
- » support the student through the development of relationships among teachers, family, peers, the business community, postsecondary education officials, public entities, and other community stakeholders;
- » embed community-based, experiential, online, and work-based learning opportunities; and
- » foster a learning environment that incorporates both face-to-face and virtual connections.”

Districts must create the right environment to foster learning communities that empower students to pursue their interests and obtain the necessary skills and dispositions for success. While Montana’s policy environment supports district innovation, local agencies are still figuring out how to effectively apply newer policy components and develop local graduate profiles and strategies to leverage available funding streams. OPI continues developing resources to support schools and districts engaging in this work, including this guide.

Each school and district in Montana face distinct challenges depending on their geographic location, characteristics of their student population and features of the surrounding community. By leveraging personalized and proficiency-based approaches to education, schools and districts can provide learners with individualized supports that are responsive to local conditions and help learners meet their education goals.

Importantly, Montana is [home to twelve Indian tribes](#) in eight federally recognized nations. Montana’s constitution recognizes the distinct and unique cultural heritage of Montana’s Indians, and [state policy](#) requires all students to [learn about Montana’s Indians](#)

The Montana Innovation Guide highlights the policies and programs in the state to enable personalized and proficiency-based approaches to learning. While this resource is not all-encompassing, it highlights the policy areas and corresponding education strategies that present promising models to deepen the impact of and scale personalized and proficiency-based learning. The guide also spotlights school districts in Montana that are undergoing transformation and implementing these strategies.

By clearly articulating the policy flexibility and supports that enable personalized and proficiency-based learning alongside examples of Montana districts doing this work, we hope readers feel inspired to implement similar practices in classrooms, schools and districts. Interview participants and Montana policy specialists at OPI have reviewed all examples, quotes and policy interpretations.



HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This guide is designed to help readers understand some of the “why” and “how” behind personalized and proficiency-based learning. We hope that readers will walk away with an understanding of the areas highlighted in the guide and of how to start advocating for or implementing personalized and proficiency-based strategies. This guide is written specifically for educators and education leaders in schools and districts in Montana but may be of interest to broader community members, families and learners themselves.

To unpack and share innovative approaches that support Montana students, we outline several policy areas that we believe represent the most accessible and instrumental models to enable personalized and proficiency-based learning. This guide is meant to be a starting place for schools and district teams to think through how to deepen and scale approaches to personalized and proficiency-based learning. Each section contains the following components:

- » Action Area Description: Provides descriptions of concrete models schools and districts can use to serve their students through personalized and proficiency-based structures and practices.
- » Policy Connections: Outlines the areas of flexibility and support for innovation that schools and districts in Montana can leverage to do this work.

- » Montana Examples: Spotlights real examples of how districts in Montana are leading innovation. In this guide, we include districts that are exploring personalized and proficiency-based learning in a variety of ways and to varying degrees to show a full spectrum of what is possible.

You can read this guide cover to cover or start in the action area that most aligns with your district’s needs and interests. However, graduate profiles are often cited as an essential first step in this work, and we strongly encourage starting with the Community Visioning and Graduate Profiles action area if a vision is not yet established in your learning community.



ACTION AREAS AND MONTANA EXAMPLES

This guide was developed for Montana schools and districts with input from Montana schools, districts and OPI. OPI partnered with KnowledgeWorks to support the creation of this guide to help schools and districts deepen and scale personalized and proficiency-based practices in the state.

This work began with research into Montana state policy to identify opportunities for strategic implementation of personalized and proficiency-based learning practices. Next, education leaders in school districts were interviewed about personalized and proficiency-based learning practices. Using knowledge from policy research and in-depth interviews, KnowledgeWorks and OPI identified six action areas for schools and districts hoping to implement innovative and student-centered approaches to learning:

1. [Community Visioning and Graduation Profiles](#)
2. [Funding Structures](#)
3. [Teacher Preparation and Professional Learning](#)
4. [School Structures](#)
5. [Career-connected Learning](#)
6. [Assessments and Continuous Improvement](#)

Each action area includes a description, a connection to state policy and examples of school districts in Montana doing work in this area. While these action areas are not exhaustive, they were selected because they appear to offer the greatest opportunity for school districts in Montana to engage in

innovative approaches to build personalized and proficiency-based learning opportunities. Nine Montana school districts engaged in interviews for this project and have spotlights included in the guide:

1. [Corvallis School District](#)
2. [Evergreen School District](#)
3. [Great Falls Public Schools](#)
4. [Kalispell Public School District](#)
5. [Livingston Public Schools](#)
6. [Lockwood School District](#)
7. [Reed Point School District](#)
8. [St. Regis School District](#)
9. [Troy School District](#)

Districts were provided the opportunity to review and approve each of their spotlights to help ensure that the story shared accurately reflects its unique experience and perspective. In Montana, districts are at varying stages of implementing innovative learning practices, and we have provided a wide range of examples in the hopes that at least one of these stories will resonate deeply with your learning community.

We encourage you to consider what practices or concepts may be most applicable to your learning community.

ACTION AREA 1

COMMUNITY VISIONING AND GRADUATE PROFILES

What It Is and How to Do It

Starting with a shared vision that informs strategic planning and provides context for data-driven decision-making at all levels of the learning community is essential to reimagine schools through a personalized learning lens. This vision provides a clear “why” behind the need to transform school structures, paving the way for a more intentional shift in teaching and learning practices. Many communities articulate this vision through a [Portrait of a Learner or Graduate Profile](#), which acts as a “north star” for redesigning education systems. State policy in Montana refers to this vision as a graduate profile, while local communities might refer to it as a portrait of a learner or graduate.

A well-developed graduate profile reflects a community’s aspirations for its learners, equipping them to navigate an ever-evolving future shaped by rapid change and emerging workforce demands. Typically, these profiles highlight no more than six key attributes learners must achieve by graduation, often linked to the needs of local businesses and industries.

By defining specific learner attributes, such as critical thinking, collaboration and adaptability, profiles enable educators to design [competency-based](#) progressions that allow students to demonstrate mastery in authentic, context-driven ways. Proficiency-based learning, in turn, aligns with these profiles by emphasizing mastery over time-bound credit accumulation, ensuring every learner can progress at a personalized pace.

Crafting these visions is a collaborative and inclusive process involving learners, educators, employers, postsecondary partners and other community stakeholders. Engaging these diverse voices ensures a shared commitment to the vision and lays a foundation for sustainable and systemic change. By building this broad coalition of support, schools and districts can cultivate a culture that embraces the vision and champions its integration into practice.

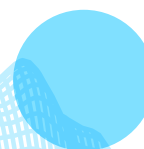
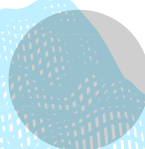


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In Montana, profiles offer a unifying vision while respecting district autonomy and community inclusivity. This inclusivity ensures broad support and aligns educational outcomes with local needs and priorities, such as workforce development and cultural preservation. Importantly, as the north star for a community's education system, graduate profiles can guide the redesign of school structures, curricula, instruction, teacher professional development and evaluation to reflect a personalized and proficiency-based approach.

By building this broad coalition of support, schools and districts can cultivate a culture that embraces the vision and champions its integration into practice.

Implementing the graduate profile requires sustained effort. Districts must integrate the profile into strategic planning, teacher professional development and accountability systems. By embedding the profile into district policies and practices, it becomes the guiding force for transforming educational experiences to better serve all learners.



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State Policy Connection

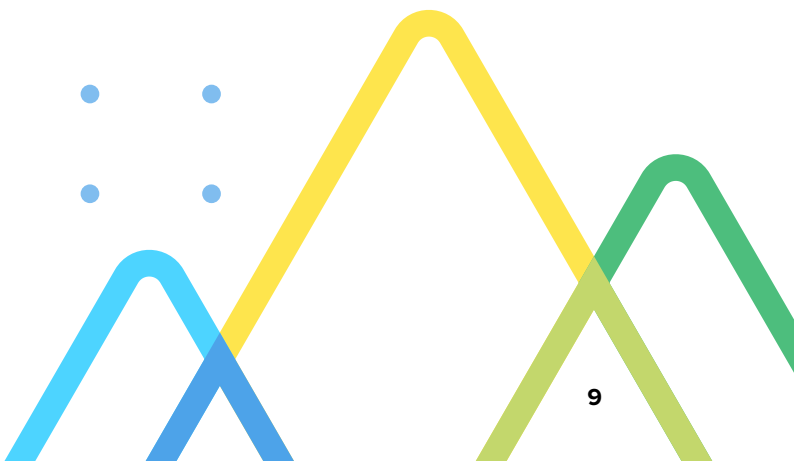
Montana provides a flexible policy landscape that enables districts to connect their community-developed graduate profiles with personalized and proficiency-based models. While Montana does not mandate a unified statewide profile of a graduate, local districts are required to create their own as part of accreditation under the [Accreditation Standards](#). This mandate emphasizes a learner-centered model based on shared community values, offering a strong foundation for personalized and proficiency-based learning systems.

These profiles can be used in conjunction with policy related to state standards, competencies and assessments to support proficiency-based learning. [Montana policy](#) indicates a learner is proficient when they have “demonstrated a level of knowledge and skills that are expected to be learned, signaling that a student is well prepared to progress on the learning continuum aligned to the content standards, learning progressions, and necessary readiness skills.”

For a learner to be proficient, they must demonstrate proficiency. [Proficiency is defined](#) as “a measure of competence that is demonstrated through application in a performance assessment.” This offers learners the opportunity to demonstrate proficiency in a range of performance-based ways and offers districts the flexibility to align graduation criteria with the skills and attributes articulated in their graduate profiles.

For example, a local profile emphasizing collaboration and communication could inform the design of group-based, project-oriented assessments that could also be used to fulfill proficiency-based learning requirements articulated in [regulation](#) related to state academic content standards.

Moreover, [Montana state policy](#) promotes individualized pathways, work-based learning and community-embedded opportunities, creating opportunities for integrating graduate profiles. These policies provide the structural flexibility districts need to align graduation pathways with the attributes outlined in their profiles, ensuring learners are prepared for the workforce and overall postsecondary success. By leveraging the autonomy provided under state policy, Montana districts can develop graduate profiles that reflect local aspirations and serve as actionable blueprints for advancing personalized and proficiency-based learning.



District Spotlight

Reed Point School District

In south-central Montana, [Reed Point School District](#) serves a small, close-knit community with a student body of fewer than 100 students. The district is bringing the community together to chart a shared vision for student success by developing their [profile of a learner/graduate](#)

The district has leaned into a highly participatory process, holding forums and workshops where participants explore what students need to thrive in the workforce, contribute as citizens and lead meaningful lives. These conversations emphasize the value of local voices and workforce demands, ensuring the graduate profile reflects regional and future-ready priorities. At the heart of Reed Point School District's graduate profile are five pillars: Character, Knowledge, Contribution, Intrinsic, and Soft Skills.

“This is about more than preparing our students for the next step; it’s about honoring who we are as a community and ensuring our students are ready for wherever life takes them.”

Each pillar consists of a set of attributes. These attributes—spanning qualities like resilience and ethical decision-making, academic knowledge, employability, creativity and work ethic—reflect the aspirations of the Reed Point community for its students. Through a collaborative process that involved educators, students, families, local employers and other stakeholders, the district has defined a clear “north star” to guide its educational transformation.

The district's graduate profile is more than an inspirational document; it is the foundation for systemic change. Reed Point School District has begun integrating the profile into its curriculum, teacher professional development and strategic planning. For instance, teaching practices are shifting to focus on real-world problem-solving and collaboration, while new assessment methods emphasize authentic demonstrations of learning.

Superintendent Heather Jarrett notes that Montana's state policies support this transition, enabling districts to develop and apply proficiency-based models that prioritize mastery and work-based learning over seat time. This connection between local aspirations and state policy empowers Reed Point School District to create customized pathways for learners, ensuring they graduate with the technical and soft skills needed to thrive.

By grounding its vision in broad community input and leveraging Montana's policy flexibility, the district demonstrates its commitment to personalized learning and community-led education and creates a sustainable blueprint for educational success. Superintendent Jarrett noted, “This is about more than preparing our students for the next step; it’s about honoring who we are as a community and ensuring our students are ready for wherever life takes them.”

Evergreen School District

[Evergreen School District](#) is in the heart of Kalispell in northwest Montana, between Glacier National Park, Flathead National Forest and Kootenai National Forest. This unincorporated district is small geographically, running only about three miles wide, but has the 48th largest student population in the state. Evergreen School District is a pre-kindergarten through eighth-grade school with a large majority of students experiencing poverty. The district is consistently thinking about how it can improve school operations to better serve students, including developing a learner profile.

The development of the [Evergreen School District Learner Profile](#) didn't happen overnight. Over the course of a year, a key set of stakeholder groups, including a district leadership group and a community council group, began thinking through how to build out the district's vision, mission and goals into a fully developed profile. The District Leadership Team included representatives from the elementary school, the middle school, the Crossroads program and the district. At least one education leader represented every class level and specialization. While the District Leadership Team is a group that regularly meets to tackle projects and programs to help support students, the Community Council group – which included parents, higher education representatives and business community members – met specifically to help develop the learner profile.

Developing the profile was an iterative process with both groups as they shared ideas and narrowed down the characteristics and competencies they believed were the most important for students when heading to high school. In addition to carefully considering the content to include for the learner profile, the groups also focused heavily on how the learner profile's visual components would represent their students' goals. The learner profile uses the district's colors. The vision, mission and goals are at the bottom of the image and represent the foundation for

these characteristics. And finally, the image includes mountain ranges, representing the community's geography and the goal of helping students reach their peaks. After that, they focused on how each student could demonstrate the skills. To implement their learner profile, [each month](#) includes a focus on one of the competencies outlined in the profile.

The development and implementation of the learner profile is just one of the many ways the district works to build its culture and community. Local news sources have highlighted the [profile's development](#) and [various other district activities](#) that help build the feeling of community. Superintendent Laurie Barron highlighted that while the profile creation was well-timed with the accreditation requirement, the purpose of undertaking the process was much deeper than that, as serving students is always the top priority for the district. Superintendent Barron said she and the community recognized that going through this process and being able to articulate the competencies that matter the most would benefit their students.



What It Is and How to Do It

Personalized and proficiency-based learning can be accomplished by utilizing existing funding streams to deepen and scale these practices. Often, some monetary and time investments are key factors to successful new programs and learning opportunities. For example, funding may be useful to support the planning and development of more innovative teaching and learning practices. Understanding the flexibility that exists within state and federal funding structures can help school districts think through how to maximize the dollars to which they have access.

Personalized and proficiency-based learning operates on the premise that learning can happen anytime, anywhere and at any pace. When students have access to classes, internships and other educational experiences that allow them to explore a variety of topics, they can find the passions they want to pursue after high school graduation. This personalized approach may also mean that students can move through learning content at a pace that makes sense for them while receiving the support they need along the way.

Understanding your state's funding system is critical to maximizing personalization and proficiency-based pathways and options for your students. While states use [various funding models](#), funding allocations are often determined based on a student count using student attendance or enrollment/membership. Understanding how student count is calculated may impact how your school or district offers students personalized and proficiency-based learning options. For example, some state definitions of attendance may make it challenging for districts to offer out-of-school learning experiences to

students. While the funding formula is states' primary method to allocate funds, some states offer grant programs.

Understanding your state's funding system is critical to maximizing personalization and proficiency-based pathways and options for your students.

In Montana, districts have access to funds through both federal and state sources. Often, it is most effective for districts to consider all [available funding sources](#) when deepening and scaling personalized and proficiency-based learning options for students. For example, [up to three percent](#) of Title II, Part A federal funds can be used to help schools create personalized learning environments. Federal dollars and Montana's grants specifically targeted to support personalized learning can help schools and districts design and implement these programs. Montana's state funding formula is also conducive to personalized and proficiency-based programs.

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State Policy Connection

As outlined in [statute](#), Montana uses a foundation formula with student-based and resource-allocation components to distribute funds. The base amount varies by district type (elementary versus high school) and whether the district has junior high programs. Smaller districts receive larger per-student funding rates than larger districts. The formula provides additional funding for students with certain characteristics based on indicators such as the number of at-risk students, American Indian students and students with disabilities. The formula also provides additional funding for higher wages for high-quality educators, financial support for the state data system and funding for Indian education. To determine the student count of a district, [Montana uses](#) the “average number belonging.”

Montana state policy provides explicit supports for personalized and proficiency-based learning programs in several ways. [Statute](#) specifically states that funding for students using demonstrations of proficiency rather than hours of instruction shall have their student counts determined based on the number of hours normally provided for the content for which a student has demonstrated proficiency.

Districts that provide a career and vocational/technical education program, which are often important components for personalized and proficiency-based education systems, are [eligible to receive](#) additional funds. Additional [funding is also available](#) to support career and technical student organizations.

Districts can also access funding through the [Advanced Opportunity Act](#). [To receive funding](#) from the Advanced Opportunity Act, districts must apply and “develop an advanced opportunity plan for each participating pupil from grades 6 through 12 that fosters individualized pathways for career and postsecondary educational opportunities,” among other things.



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District Spotlight

Lockwood School District

Located just east of Billings, [Lockwood School District](#) has students from a range of socioeconomic backgrounds and experiences, which makes personalizing their learning experience incredibly important. Superintendent Don Christman says that when students come together at school, it's hard to notice their socioeconomic differences. Therefore, Superintendent Christman has leveraged various funding sources to create supports that help narrow learning opportunities between different income levels.

For students to show up ready to learn, they need to have their basic physical and emotional needs met. The 14 million dollars the district has raised in grants help cover the cost of programs to support their students. For students who have experienced trauma, Lockwood School District integrates counseling into the school day. The [School Safety Professional Development Grant](#) helped cover the start-up and implementation of this program. After two years, the district will have established a program that can be billed through Medicaid. Lockwood School District participates in the state's [BackPack Program](#) to ensure that students have food to eat over weekends and holidays.

[Montana's Transformational Learning Program Grant](#) and the [Advanced Opportunities Act](#) led to big things in the district. Because the Transformational Learning Grant included the personalized learning programming component, Superintendent Christman said it was easy for him to picture what it would look like to provide unique educational experiences to students, but that it took time to bring teachers and community members on board. Once they started to see students pursue passion and career interests like Emergency Medical Technician certification or unique internship experiences, the

community quickly realized the value of individual academic plans and other components of the Transformational Learning programming.

Part of what's made Lockwood School District's funding strategy so successful is that they take advantage of funding opportunities that snowball into additional dollars.

While the Transformational Learning Grant helped them start this work, the Advanced Opportunity Grant has been instrumental in ensuring students have equitable access to unique opportunities that align with their interests. For example, the district used Advanced Opportunity Grant dollars to cover the cost of the Global Affairs Club's attendance at the [EconoQuest](#) economic literacy competition.

Part of what's made Lockwood School District's funding strategy so successful is that they take advantage of funding opportunities that snowball into additional dollars. The district used funds from the [Teach Act](#) to increase teacher base pay and encourage more teachers who meet the "high-quality teacher" qualifications to

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teach. Investing in components of teaching and learning that will likely lead to additional funding opportunities helps the district keep money coming in to support programs they offer students. Most importantly, these funds help ensure that opportunities are equally accessible to all their students, which is especially important given the socio-economic diversity of their district.

Lockwood School District constantly seeks funding opportunities and community partnerships to help students get unique learning and job experiences that correspond with their interests and passions. Superintendent Christman has spent time building relationships with people at the state level, including OPI and Governor Greg Gianforte. He recommends that other school and district leaders prioritize relationship-building and cultivating strong community partnerships.

Evergreen School District

It can be helpful to create goals and coaching check-ins while rolling out new programs and using funds. Evergreen School District created district, school and individual teacher personalized learning implementation goals when developing their Transformational Learning Plan using corresponding grant funds. Teachers engaged in this work also had coaches and check-ins to support implementation.

ACTION AREA 3

TEACHER PREPARATION AND PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

What It Is and How to Do It

Effective preparation and ongoing professional learning equip educators with the skills to facilitate instruction to individual learners, ensuring that every student progresses at their own pace while meeting defined competencies.

In personalized and proficiency-based learning systems, educators must shift from traditional teaching methods to roles that facilitate learning based on students' unique needs, strengths and interests. To achieve this, teacher preparation programs must focus on essential components such as understanding diverse learners, designing adaptable instructional strategies and utilizing varied assessment methods to track progress.

As emphasized in Montana's teaching standards, effective teacher preparation must integrate inclusive practices that address cognitive, social and emotional differences. By aligning with [elements of personalized learning](#), these standards encourage educators to foster environments where students actively participate in shaping their learning journeys. Districts seeking to personalize education for their students can and should engage with providers to ensure that educators are coming to the district equipped with what they need to function effectively in these systems.

Personalized and proficiency-based systems should support individual students' needs, strengths and interests while ensuring they achieve defined competencies at their own pace. Therefore, educators must be equipped with innovative strategies and a sense of agency and empowerment to adapt their

practices to flexible and innovative learning environments. Teacher agency is essential for these systems to thrive. Schools and districts can create environments where teachers thrive and are motivated to engage in transformation efforts by embedding opportunities for decision-making, collaborative problem-solving and leadership.

Educators must be equipped with innovative strategies and a sense of agency and empowerment to adapt their practices to flexible and innovative learning environments.

Educators can build authentic connections, spread best practices for personalized and proficiency-based learning and prepare their school, classrooms and overall community for transformation through collaboration and high-quality professional learning. Collaborative teacher learning can take the form of professional learning communities or teacher-led improvement teams to provide avenues for teachers to collaborate on curriculum development, address systemic challenges and innovate classroom practices. These structures enable continuous improvement and foster a sense of ownership, leading to more sustainable change efforts.

Montana’s approach to teacher professional learning and preparation includes a range of supports, such as the [Teacher Residency Program](#), which offers year-long, immersive experiences for pre-service educators. The [Statewide Mentorship Program](#) complements these efforts by pairing experienced educators with new teachers to guide them in best practices. By leveraging these opportunities in a way that is aligned with elements of personalized learning, Montana

districts can start and scale their proficiency-based learning models. Teacher preparation and personalized learning not only supports individual educators, it also strengthens the broader educational ecosystem, ensuring students are prepared for a complex and dynamic world. Empowered teachers—those equipped to lead, innovate and collaborate—become catalysts for transformative learning experiences, driving both student success and systemic progress.

State Policy Connection

Montana’s state policies establish a strong foundation for teacher preparation and professional development, offering opportunities to advance personalized and proficiency-based learning. When aligned to personalized and proficiency-based learning principles, existing frameworks can support educators in tailoring instruction to meet diverse student needs.

[Teacher preparation standards](#) in Montana emphasize understanding the central concepts, tools of inquiry and structures of the discipline taught. Educators are expected to create personalized learning experiences that make the content accessible and meaningful for all learners, ensuring mastery of the subject matter. These standards also integrate the instruction of reading and writing literacy across all program areas, fostering inclusive and responsive instruction tailored to diverse developmental needs. While districts do not directly manage teacher preparation programs, they can engage with programs to ensure teaching candidates arrive prepared with the tools they need to succeed in personalized systems.

[Montana policy](#) requires districts to provide teachers a minimum of three pupil instruction-related (PIR) days annually. These PIR days must focus on improving teacher effectiveness and aligning with educational goals, enabling educators to adapt their practices to better support personalized learning.

These standards also foster inclusive and responsive instruction tailored to diverse developmental needs.

Additionally, programs such as the [Teacher Residency Program](#) and the [Statewide Mentorship Program](#) provide immersive experiences for educators to engage with innovative teaching strategies. The Teacher Residency Program, supported by [state policy](#), allows aspiring educators to explore personalized teaching models during a year-long placement. The Statewide Mentorship Program offers districts a framework to support educators in implementing personalized and proficiency-based learning by pairing them with experienced mentors who can provide guidance on tailoring instruction to meet individual student needs.

District Spotlight

Kalispell School District

[Kalispell School District](#) began its journey toward a personalized and proficiency-based learning system with a core commitment to embedding professional learning into every stage of the process, ensuring school administrators and educators are equipped to drive this change.

From the beginning of Kalispell School District's journey, district leadership prioritized engaging school principals as instructional leaders. In the first year, principals were onboarded into personalized and proficiency-based learning concepts through a year-long professional learning series designed to deepen their understanding of personalized learning elements. Additionally, principals traveled to school sites across the country, including South Carolina, Colorado, Arizona and Utah, to observe working models in action. These experiences helped establish a shared vision for how Kalispell School District could transition to personalized and proficiency-based learning. By focusing on change management alongside instructional strategies, the district aims to cultivate leadership qualities that would enable principals to effectively guide and support their teams through the transition.

To scale these efforts, Kalispell School District expanded its focus to include union leaders, instructional coaches and teacher mentors. A cornerstone of this expansion was the district's "Boot Camp," a professional learning initiative that equips educators with foundational knowledge and skills for personalized learning. This initiative has started to integrate the district's teacher mentoring program to include teacher mentors as facilitators of professional learning. District leadership describes the

Boot Camp – and personalized learning journeys broadly – as a "six-lane highway," offering flexibility in pacing and entry points for teachers at different stages of their journey. This approach empowers educators to explore personalized strategies within their own classrooms and align with their areas of expertise.

By investing in educators and fostering a shared vision for personalized learning, the district has created a model for how schools can successfully transition to personalized and proficiency-based systems.

The mentorship program will play a vital role in sustaining the Boot Camp's success. Teacher leaders now co-present these sessions as they prepare to take on full facilitation responsibilities in the future, fostering peer-to-peer learning and reinforcing a culture of collaboration. Kalispell School District has also partnered with organizations to implement Impact Teams, Launch Teams and internal site visits, which help teachers analyze student data and refine their instructional strategies.

The district's efforts have yielded noticeable changes in classroom dynamics, including around student agency. Students are more

engaged and responsible for their learning, with classrooms characterized by small-group discussions, independent projects and student-led goal-setting. Parents and community members have observed this shift, noting the clarity and ownership students demonstrate in their work.

Kalispell School District's journey models the power of professional learning in driving systemic change. By investing in educators and fostering a shared vision for personalized learning, the district has created a model

for how schools can successfully transition to personalized and proficiency-based systems. Kalispell School District has even positioned itself as a national and state leader of professional learning on systemic learner-centered shifts, hosting annual summits on personalized and proficiency-based learning. This story underscores the importance of the state-level professional learning structures discussed in this section, highlighting their potential to transform education across Montana.

St. Regis School District

[St. Regis School District](#) is a K-12 district in rural Montana, located about 70 miles from Missoula. The elementary school, junior high and high school share a building and serve a total of approximately 180 students. While the district is in one of the most impoverished areas of the state, teachers and education leaders are working to build a community that helps students prepare for their postsecondary goals. One of the district's methods in building this community is to leverage the expertise of their teachers and the relationships they build with students.

One of the unique things that the district does to encourage personalization is a fifth-day experience. Since the school district is on a four-day school week, on Fridays, students can pursue additional learning experiences beyond their normal class requirements. The structure for the fifth day is personalized depending on the teacher and the student. Some students will come into the school and work ahead in their classes. Other students will pursue learning opportunities outside of the building that align with their interests.

Tyler Cheesman, the district's counselor, says that a lot of the time, these opportunities are realized when relationships are built with students. When someone at the school knows and understands a student's interests and needs, they can more effectively help them enroll in or develop an experience aligned with those interests and needs.

Supporting educators to bring their whole selves enables more authentic connections between students and educators.

Ms. Cheesman works hard to help students find opportunities that align with their postsecondary goals. Any program in which a student wants to participate has to be approved by the local school board, which has been supportive of the program expansions in the district. The district has leveraged many digital platforms that provide course content to students as well as dual credit programs through the Montana university system, including an option to gain an associate degree during high school. Additionally, many teachers in the district have specialties and interests that align with what students want to learn.

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One creative way that St. Regis School District has ensured their students get a range of personalized education experiences is to tap into the skills their educators have. For example, Superintendent Derek Larson has a passion for music and provides instruction to students during the fifth days. Educators offer supplementary learning experiences that help students get their Emergency Medical Technician certification, their food handler's cards and more.

The district uses professional learning grants to pay educators for teaching during the fifth day. Ms. Cheesman and Superintendent Larson think that one of the reasons the district has a low teacher turnover rate is that teachers are encouraged to teach supplementary courses and skills that align with their interests. Supporting educators to bring their whole selves enables more authentic connections between students and educators.

The district leverages its small size to create greater flexibility for its teachers. In addition to teaching courses of interest during the fifth day, teachers also have input into the core classes they're teaching. Ms. Cheesman will often ask teachers about what they want to teach and students what they want to learn, allowing everyone to have some say in what the school courses look like. Additionally, they try to arrange prep periods so that teachers with similar subjects have breaks at the same time, allowing teachers to more easily collaborate.

Superintendent Larson says the success of their district is based on relationships. The district has found that by creating intentional space for collaboration among all levels of stakeholders, including teachers, administrative staff and students, they can provide better and more personalized learning opportunities for their students.

What It Is and How to Do It

Rethinking the structure of school is a key step in advancing personalized and proficiency-based learning. Conventional school structures could limit the flexibility needed for students to demonstrate proficiency in a range of ways, thus also limiting the opportunity to prepare learners for the workforce and postsecondary life more broadly. Personalized learning thrives in environments where learners can demonstrate proficiency through diverse models at a time and place that make sense to them, rather than being bound by rigid timelines and traditional school spaces.

Learning communities can design a system of “learning time” that is malleable and responds to the changing needs of learners. Learners and their supporting community are partners in designing time driven by the shared vision.

Learning communities can collaboratively create flexible learning spaces that support the whole learner, as well as implement processes to encourage and support learners in co-designing learning spaces. For example, a school might customize spaces for various learning group sizes and learning goals, like hubs and collaborative spaces.

By creating flexibility and opportunities for deeper engagement, innovative learner-centered school day structures can drive progress in key areas, including teacher professional learning and career-connected learning. Districts can begin by reimagining daily, weekly or annual calendars to allow for innovative learning experiences, such as

dedicating specific blocks of time to work-based learning or community-based projects that help students apply skills in real-world contexts. Incorporating asynchronous courses and learning periods can further personalize schedules, enabling students to focus on areas where they need growth or participate in work-based opportunities during traditional school hours. Additionally, leveraging technology, such as remote learning platforms and virtual mentorship programs, can extend learning beyond the classroom, offering students access to personalized resources and enriching their educational experiences in meaningful ways.

Personalized learning thrives in environments where learners can demonstrate proficiency through diverse models at a time and place that make sense to them.

Restructuring the time, space and place of learning not only accommodates the varied needs of learners but also aligns with broader educational goals. It fosters learner agency, cultivates real-world skills and ensures that all students have equitable

opportunities to show proficiency. Montana’s legislative provisions offer a solid foundation for districts to innovate in this area, making it an opportune time to embrace these transformative possibilities.

State Policy Connection

Montana districts have the authority to adjust school day and week structures.

[Policy](#) allows local school boards to define the length of a school day and number of school days in a week. Montana also provides mechanisms for districts to apply for [variances to state standards](#). This waiver process allows schools to pilot unique approaches to scheduling and instruction that can align with personalized learning. For example, districts could propose an alternative calendar and are encouraged to create assessment plans that emphasize student mastery over traditional measures. These provisions allow schools to implement innovative schedules that support flexible and personalized instructional approaches.

Additionally, [state policy](#) defines pupil instruction as “any directed, distributive, collaborative, or work-based or other experiential learning activity provided, supervised, guided, facilitated, or coordinated under the supervision of a teacher that is conducted purposely to achieve content proficiency.” This expansive definition allows districts to incorporate real-world experiences, project-based activities and remote learning—among other approaches as a part of day-to-day learning. Moreover, Montana’s funding structures contain a provision that prevents districts from using an alternative schedule where students can reach proficiency at their own pace from being penalized ([see action area two for more details](#)). This enables varied learning experiences that extend beyond traditional classroom instruction.

For high school students, [credit requirements](#) offer additional flexibility. Credits can be awarded based on seat time, demonstrated proficiency or alternative models aligned with district curriculum and state content standards. This supports the development of programs like work-based learning and independent study, where students earn credits for demonstrating mastery through non-traditional means.

By leveraging these policy provisions, Montana districts can create flexible and innovative structures that align with personalized and proficiency-based learning. These changes ensure that every student has the opportunity to learn at their own pace, in ways that reflect their interests and strengths, while maintaining rigorous academic standards.

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District Spotlight

Corvallis School District

[Corvallis School District](#) in Corvallis, Montana, has reimagined its school day structure to support personalized and proficiency-based learning, emphasizing distance learning and real-world learning pathways. This shift reflects the district's commitment to meeting the unique needs of its community while preparing students for future success.

The district serves approximately 1,500 students across elementary, middle and high school. Recognizing the need for transformation in a competitive educational landscape, Corvallis School District pioneered innovative approaches, including the creation of their [RISE Charter School option](#). This option offers two innovative pathways for Corvallis learners: the Distance Learning Academy (DLA) and the Pathway Learning Academy (PLA). These academies provide flexible, personalized opportunities for students, including traditional in-person learning, remote instruction or hands-on, project-based pathways.

The DLA provides flexible remote and hybrid learning options, including K-12 Learning Centers, an independent high school and face-to-face electives. Learners can pursue this path in a remote or hybrid fashion to provide flexibility in their day-to-day schedule and engage in a range of personalized learning opportunities, including real-world and work-based learning opportunities provided through the PLA.

The PLA offers six career-focused pathways designed to support local workforce development. These pathways include:

- » Farm to Food
- » Medical
- » Stream to STEAM
- » Construction
- » Business
- » Salute to Service

Corvallis School District's journey models how thoughtful restructuring of the school day can lead to transformative outcomes.

Learners engage in work-based learning through four tiers, with internships and apprenticeships fostering hands-on skill development:

- » Career Exploration (K-6)
- » Career Awareness (Grades 7-8)
- » Career Preparation (Grades 9-10)
- » Career Implementation (Grades 11-12)

Using competency-based education, [Corvallis School District learners engage in these pathways](#) to demonstrate proficiency on content standards, guided by Individualized Learning Plans, project-based learning and proficiency-based models. Corvallis grade level teams develop competency-based units that are sequenced into their curriculum and assessment, all aligned to Montana state standards. The DLA and PLA experiences not only provide practical skills for the workforce but also integrate academic content. Corvallis School District has leveraged partnerships to develop virtual curricula and project-based experiences tailored to Corvallis contexts and PLA pathways.

The district's shift toward proficiency-based learning began with extensive community engagement. Corvallis district leaders worked closely with local stakeholders, including families and religious communities, to identify priorities. Community input shaped the district's strategic plan, which aligns entirely with proficiency-based models.

In practice, the new structure offers flexibility for students to move at their own pace. The impact has been profound. Corvallis School District's new models have attracted hundreds of students in a community

that leverages school choice, increasing enrollment and funding. Superintendent Pete Joseph notes that students are more engaged and motivated, benefiting from personalized learning paths that prepare them for post-secondary opportunities. Corvallis School District's journey models how thoughtful restructuring of the school day can lead to transformative outcomes. By prioritizing community needs, leveraging state policy flexibilities and fostering innovation, the district has created a system where every student can thrive.

Great Falls Public Schools

Located in the Golden Triangle of Montana with a variety of businesses and a strong agriculture industry, [Great Falls Public Schools](#) is the second largest school district in the state. A few higher education institutions are nearby, including Great Falls College and Touro Medical School.

The district is a Title I district with a large population of Indigenous students, students from military families and students with special needs. Great Falls Public Schools prides itself on providing differentiated and personalized learning experiences to support all learners. They've accomplished this through a variety of structures, including those that employ proficiency-based models.

Students at Great Falls Public Schools have access to a range of internships that facilitate personalization. The school district uses a proficiency-based approach to provide students with credit for these internships. In partnership with specialists in the field, each internship has corresponding proficiencies that students must meet to be awarded credit. While students could obtain credits through internship hours, the school district found that having a proficiency-based model was more effective. This process was developed in coordination with the [Transformational Learning Program](#) that

exists in Montana. When students use the proficiency-based approach to internships, they can move through internships at a faster rate and extend internship opportunities for students who take longer to master corresponding proficiencies.

Superintendent Hoyer says they
"don't just double dip, we triple dip."

The Transformational Learning policy has also led to other changes in the school district. Superintendent Heather Hoyer shared that they used to think of Transformational Learning opportunities primarily for the "highflyers" in the district that had completed most of their required credits. They realized they were missing opportunities to use Transformational Learning to benefit all students. In one story, Superintendent Hoyer shared about a student who was a strong employee and learner at their job setting but struggled to

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demonstrate these skills in traditional school settings. By leveraging the flexibility of the Transformational Learning policy, they were able to ensure the student earned credits for the skills they were demonstrating as part of their employment experience.

The Central Montana Works group hosts hands-on experiences to help students learn about various career options. For example, the logging association demonstrates how to use chainsaws, and the medical school teaches CPR. They once even had electrical linemen take students up and down in buckets and show them how to climb the poles. Great Falls Public Schools took this concept back to their district and created a learning system where fourth graders could visit with high schoolers and learn about the classes offered in high school.

The district is currently working to build a space in their old shop building that can be used for this project. The shop building is sitting empty and the space will allow them to create an age-appropriate environment for the elementary students to learn on the high school campus.

A common theme for the district is the intention to maximize student experiences and opportunities. Superintendent Hoyer says they “don’t just double dip, we triple dip.” They help ensure students get credit for learning with the career-based experiences they have through internships and employment while they can also get paid for these experiences. They are constantly innovating based on the needs of their students and their surrounding environments.

What It Is and How to Do It

Career-connected learning experiences help students apply skills to real-world contexts, expand upon skills gained in the classroom and test out areas of interest they might want to pursue after graduation. Schools and districts can support career-connected learning opportunities through age-appropriate off-campus experiences or on-campus guest speakers, internship opportunities and local graduation requirements, among other things.

School districts may find it beneficial to leverage their local portrait of a graduate and community members and businesses when creating pathways and/or requirements related to career-connected learning. 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.

Schools and districts can help students across all grade levels learn about career options and the application of competencies in a variety of ways, including guest speakers and off-campus experiences.

At the high school level and even sometimes middle school, career and technical education, work-based learning, apprenticeships, internships and local graduation requirements can be powerful levers to connect students to career learning opportunities. Internships can be especially

beneficial to students as the skills gained in an internship are often transferable to the workforce as well as providing opportunities for students to become proficient in competencies outlined in the portrait of a graduate. Internships can be hands-on or virtual. Local graduation requirements allow districts to require learning experiences that help students meet the competencies outlined in their graduate profiles and are prepared for their goals following graduation. For example, a local district may find it useful to require students to take a certain class, engage in an internship or obtain a certain amount of volunteer hours that align with their career interests.

Schools and districts can help students across all grade levels learn about career options and the application of competencies in a variety of ways, including guest speakers and off-campus experiences. For example, a class learning about government may benefit from a trip to the state capitol. During this trip, students will be able to apply their newly gleaned knowledge about governance from class to go even deeper. Having guest speakers join a class to help students connect their learning to job opportunities may also

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be beneficial. A student may not fully grasp the importance of learning algebra until a local engineer joins for a day to talk about how algebra applies to their job and leads the class in a fun activity that brings it all together. For schools and districts located in more remote areas, classes can leverage virtual visits from guest speakers.

Providing career-connected learning experiences at every stage in a student's education journey helps them prepare for their next step. It ensures they'll be college- and career-ready when they graduate. Elementary school students can use learning experiences to help shape their

understanding of careers and what they might want to do when they grow up. Middle school students may use their career-connected learning experiences to help them decide which pathways to access in high school. High school students can use learning experiences to help them get certified in career areas of interest, start obtaining college credit and even get their foot in the door to professional opportunities after graduation.

In Montana, districts have the flexibility to structure systems for career connected learning that fit the needs of their students in the context of their communities.

State Policy Connection

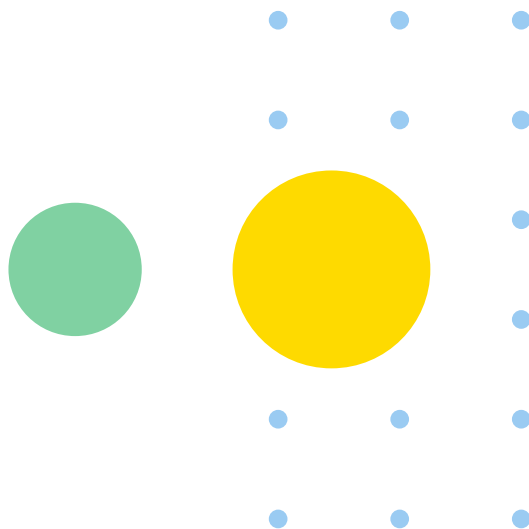
In addition to the local portrait of a graduate, Montana districts can leverage graduation requirements to set goals around career-connected learning pathways. Local graduation requirements should be tied to the skills and dispositions outlined in the portrait of a graduate and used to ensure that all students engage in experiences that help them achieve the goals of the portrait of a graduate.

A large amount of flexibility exists in Montana graduation policy that allows school districts to provide personalized and proficiency-based learning opportunities for students. In Montana, students must earn a [minimum of 20 credits](#) to graduate. Regulation outlines [13 required credits](#), leaving at least seven credits that are determined at the local level. These credits can be obtained through a time-based model or by demonstrating proficiency.

[District trustees](#) are responsible for determining credit for a course completed in a shorter period of time or longer period of time than required or through content proficiency. Suggested alternative means include “correspondence, extension, and distance learning courses, adult education, summer school, work study, work-based learning partnerships, and other experiential learning opportunities, custom-designed courses, and challenges to current courses.” State statute also ensures that districts are not penalized for students who demonstrate proficiency in a shorter timeframe than would typically be required under a more traditional schedule (see [Funding Structures](#) for additional details).

State policy also establishes requirements for access to career-connected learning experiences. [Regulation states](#) that one of the 20 minimum credits students required for graduation must be in career and technical education. [Policy states](#) that work-based learning opportunities must be provided to all students, and students must receive credit for related classroom instruction and on-the-job training. Credit must be given whether there’s a proficiency-based model in the district or not.

A time requirement equivalent can be earned if no proficiency-based model is available. The programming must include planning with the student and their guardians to ensure the student’s experience is educational and to determine how academic credit will be awarded as a result of the experience.



District Spotlight

Troy School District

The [Troy School District](#) is a small rural district of approximately 360 students. Although the district and the town are small – Troy has a population of fewer than 1,000 – district education leaders help make sure that students still have access to a range of opportunities and classes that are connected to their career interests. While the district has already taken steps to support their students with personalized learning, Junior High/High School Academic Advisor Jordan Graves says that the district is consistently thinking about how they can provide their students with bigger and better opportunities.

To support career connected learning, the district provides learning experiences outside of the classroom. For example, a social studies class visited a yoga studio after learning about the cultural importance of yoga in class. After learning about marine life in class, the elementary school took a trip to Spokane to see the aquarium. Ms. Graves says this helps make the learning experiences more tangible and engaging.

Students also access internship opportunities, including at the hospital in the nearby town of Libby. Ms. Graves shared that she's also working with a small airline in Bonners Ferry, Idaho, to help a student interested in becoming a pilot gain exposure to the job. While the community's small size can make it difficult to connect students with outside learning experiences, Troy School District is a great example of how innovative and creative thinking can overcome some of these challenges.

The district also helps students gain career exposure through course offerings. Students often leverage the [Montana Digital Academy](#) to access more niche classes that meet individual student interests. The district also

partners with [Flathead Valley Community College](#) so that students can take courses for dual enrollment credit. Additionally, individual teachers are crucial to supporting students along their learning journeys. For example, the civics class has a lot of project-based components that allow students to explore areas of interest and go at their own pace. The flexibility of these projects means that students can demonstrate learning using a variety of methods.

These seemingly small changes in learning have big outcomes for students.

The district has leveraged graduation requirements to ensure that students are ready for life after high school. In 2016, the district started a life skills class because parents and teachers felt that students could benefit from strengthening basic life skills, including writing letters, putting together a resume, changing the oil in a car, sewing and understanding their finances. The class was originally offered to freshmen, but the district quickly realized that a refresher course closer

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to graduation would also be helpful. Once students started taking these courses, people in the district, including the school board, could see the benefit. As a result, the courses became required for graduation.

These seemingly small changes in learning have big outcomes for students. Ms. Graves shared that a student who did not benefit from a traditional school setting was successful in the project-based civics class because of the flexibility. As students have had more engaging learning opportunities, including those outside of the classroom, attendance has gotten better. The district-wide implementation of the life skills course has helped students for life post-graduation. The Troy School District wants to keep working towards proficiency-based and personalized learning opportunities for students.

Livingston School District

Livingston School District integrates real-world work experiences through innovative programs, such as a farm-to-school initiative that boosted credit recovery rates from 30% to 100%. Using a collective impact model, the district partners with local industries to align resources and embed career exploration across all grade levels.

ACTION AREA 6

ASSESSMENTS AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

What It Is and How to Do It

Personalized and proficiency-based learning doesn't happen overnight. Transforming a system requires a continuous improvement mindset, time, commitment and willingness to adjust along the way. When implementing personalized and proficiency-based learning strategies, schools and districts often find it helpful to evaluate the effectiveness of strategies by a variety of methods, including through responsive assessment systems. In Montana, the state has begun leveraging a new through-year assessment process that they hope will support schools and districts in accomplishing these goals.

Assessments occur at different levels in the education system. Systems of assessments, including formative, interim and summative, form a picture of how students progress toward mastery over time. To the extent possible, assessments should be personalized and contain elements that allow students to demonstrate knowledge and proficiency in a variety of ways. More personalized assessments incorporate a 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 toward mastery. This may look different depending on when assessments are given to students and how they're utilized.

Assessments vary depending on the level at which they are collecting data. At the classroom level, assessments can be used to gauge student performance and determine if a student is proficient in the standards and

competencies that the class targets. Often, assessments for classes have a greater range of flexibility, allowing students to demonstrate knowledge in a variety of ways beyond multiple-choice tests.

The data gained from assessments can be used to help students, families and education leaders at all levels of the system direct resources and ensure student success.

At the district level, education leaders should consider how assessments help students develop toward the knowledge, skills and dispositions outlined in the local portrait of a graduate, graduation requirements and state standards. Often, this is done well when classes intentionally connect the skills students gain in their classes with the skills and dispositions from the portrait of a graduate. At the state level, assessments ideally should align with the state's vision for personalized and proficiency-based learning and measure grade-level knowledge,

skills and dispositions necessary for future success. In practice, state assessments are currently used to inform federal and state accountability systems in most states.

Gauging student understanding of standards and concepts is a critical component of assessment collection at all levels. The data gained from assessments can be used to help students, families and education leaders at all levels of the system direct resources and ensure student success. For stakeholders to effectively use the information gained from assessments, there must be resources to support data literacy. For example, it's important that district and state education leaders understand assessment data to help direct finite resources to the students

and learning communities with the greatest need. District and school leaders may use assessment data to help determine what programs or supports are helping students learn and improve outcomes. And of course, it's important that students, families and educators can use assessment data to understand how students are learning at an individual level. Assessment data can also be tied to continuous improvement plans at the school, district and state levels.

Montana has recently started using Montana Aligned to Standards Through-Year Assessment (MAST), a new through-year assessment model that will likely inform statewide and district-level assessment structures.

State Policy Connection

As part of the [accreditation process](#) in the state of Montana, districts must develop a continuous improvement process. [School districts must](#) assess all students' progression, growth and proficiency in content standards and content-specific grade-level or grade-band learning progressions in each program area as aligned with the district assessment plan.

[Regulation states](#), "to ensure a learner-centered system and establish a plan for continuous education improvement..." When evaluating integrated strategic action plans (ISAPs), one of the guiding questions related to this is whether the district ISAP includes two or more educational goals based on the compressive needs assessment and has a process to monitor and evaluate the implementation goals.

Montana's assessment process is fully outlined in its state [Every Student Succeeds Act plan](#). For the 2023-24 school year, Montana received a [waiver](#) from the U.S. Department of Education to test a through-

year assessment called MAST for math and English language arts students in grades 3-8. This includes a range of testing windows to create more personalization in the testing process. The MAST includes multiple choice, matching, ordering and short text entry components of the assessment. While this process is new, the state offers resources, including a [frequently asked questions page](#). Additional information on the MAST testing is available to teachers, parents and students through the [MAST portal](#). The portal includes introductory videos and other resources to help stakeholders understand the process and the results.

Using MAST

While Montana strives to increase the use of data literacy and continual improvement, the [MAST assessment](#) has shown it offers a new approach to assessment. It provides additional opportunities to utilize data literacy and continual improvement to enhance student learning. MAST supports continuous improvement in these areas:

1. Frequent Assessment Opportunities

- » MAST replaces the traditional single summative assessment with multiple, smaller testing windows throughout the school year. This structure allows for real-time data collection and analysis.
- » Frequent assessments provide timely feedback to educators, enabling them to adjust instruction to address student needs proactively.

2. Professional Development for Data Literacy

- » Targeted professional development is provided for teachers to enhance their ability to interpret and act on assessment data.
- » By improving educators' data literacy, MAST warrants that data is not just collected but is effectively utilized to inform teaching practices and intervention strategies.

3. Integration into Continuous Improvement Cycles

- » MAST promotes a data-driven culture by embedding assessment results into continuous improvement processes at both classroom and district levels.
- » Schools can use the data to identify trends, strengths, student misconceptions and areas for growth, aligning these insights with their strategic improvement goals.

4. Focus on Individualized Learning

- » The assessment model's design supports a student-centered approach, where data is used to personalize instruction and support proficiency-based learning models.
- » This alignment encourages districts to use assessment data to support student progress while meeting educational standards.

5. Collaboration and Feedback Loops

- » MAST fosters collaboration among educators, administrators and stakeholders by sharing actionable data in a transparent manner.
- » Feedback from stakeholders is used to refine instructional practices and the assessment system, creating a continuous feedback loop for improvement.

Through these mechanisms, MAST enhances data literacy among educators and supports the idea that assessment data can become a powerful tool for driving continuous improvement across Montana's education system.

CONTINUING THE WORK

Fostering Innovation and Connection Across Montana

This guide aims to serve as an inspiration and a roadmap for embracing personalized and proficiency-based learning in Montana. Reimagining education requires more than structural change; it demands a cultural shift that values student agency, educator innovation and deep community engagement. These principles align well with Montana's traditions of local autonomy and community collaboration, providing a strong foundation for transforming learning for each Montana learner.

Montana districts can leverage the action areas and strategies in this guide to move their personalized learning journey forward. Many Montana districts spotlighted in this guide have cited community engagement and visioning as a critical step to strengthening this work, though any area could be a strong starting point depending on the needs of the district and its community. Crafting or refining a [graduate profile](#) can help articulate the skills, knowledge and attributes students need to thrive in both local contexts and global environments. This vision can provide a clear direction for creating personalized pathways and proficiency-based systems that reflect the strengths, aspirations and values of the community.

Next Steps

Building capacity for personalized learning requires a commitment to continuous improvement. Districts can establish systems for regularly analyzing student outcomes, program effectiveness and instructional strategies, ensuring data informs decisions.

Data literacy among educators and leaders is a critical component, enabling schools to identify trends, address inequities and refine approaches to meet the diverse needs of their students.

Collaboration among educators, families and community partners is equally important. Districts can foster this by exploring flexible school structures, investing in professional learning opportunities and designing career-connected experiences aligned with state initiatives. These efforts ensure that education remains responsive, dynamic and future-ready.

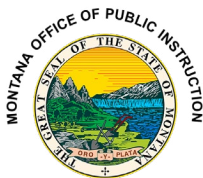
Montana's education initiatives, such as [Montana Ready](#) and the [Montana Advanced Opportunity Act](#), support schools in creating learner-centered systems that prepare students for success in a rapidly evolving world. The [Transformational Learning Grant](#) has also supported learner-centered systems. These opportunities empower districts to align local efforts with statewide goals, enhancing their capacity to design flexible and personalized learning environments.

It's important to recognize that districts are all at different points in their personalized learning journey. As such, districts should consider their current capacity, readiness for change and unique community needs when planning and implementing personalized learning strategies. This ensures that efforts are sustainable and aligned with their specific contexts.

By taking advantage of available tools, programs and resources, districts can create systems that foster personalized and proficiency-based learning and honor their unique communities while preparing students for meaningful and successful futures.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- » **Montana – Ready and Work-based Learning**
<https://opi.mt.gov/Educators/Teaching-Learning/Montana-Ready>
- » **Montana – School Innovation, Flexibility and Efficiency**
<https://opi.mt.gov/Leadership/Management-Operations/School-Innovation-Flexibility-Efficiency>
- » **Montana – Work-based Learning Manual**
<https://opi.mt.gov/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=255FZgWbDC4%3d&portalid=182>
- » **KnowledgeWorks – Finding Your Path: A Navigation Tool for Scaling Personalized, Competency-Based Learning**
<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**
<https://knowledgeworks.org/resources/define-competency/>
- » **KnowledgeWorks – Aligning Competencies to Portrait of a Learner**
<https://knowledgeworks.org/resources/aligning-competencies-portrait-learner/>



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