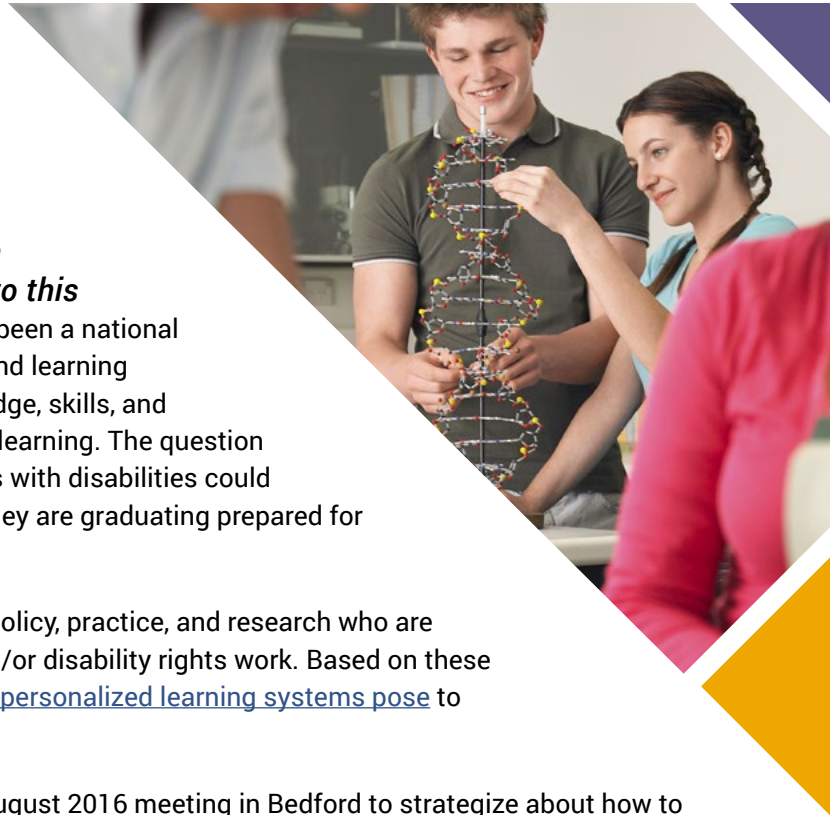




PERSONALIZED LEARNING: MEETING THE NEEDS OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

**RECOMMENDATIONS FOR
POLICY & PRACTICE IN
NEW HAMPSHIRE**



“New Hampshire takes the lead!” The education innovation community has grown accustomed to this phrase, and for good reason. New Hampshire has been a national leader in moving toward flexible systems of teaching and learning in which students can demonstrate mastery of knowledge, skills, and dispositions without being limited by place or mode of learning. The question our project explored was how New Hampshire students with disabilities could maximize the benefits of the state’s efforts, ensuring they are graduating prepared for success in college, careers, and civic life.

To answer this question, we interviewed 34 leaders in policy, practice, and research who are deeply involved in the state’s personalized learning and/or disability rights work. Based on these interviews, we identified [10 challenges and 10 benefits personalized learning systems pose](#) to students with disabilities in New Hampshire.

We invited 15 of the individuals we interviewed to an August 2016 meeting in Bedford to strategize about how to reduce challenges and seize the benefits of personalized learning for students with disabilities. The attendees identified the four issues most important to them:

- 1. Preparing educators to support personalized learning for students with disabilities**
- 2. Facilitating effective interventions and accommodations to provide access to the full range of opportunities embedded in personalized learning**
- 3. Facilitating effective assessment and accountability systems that meet the needs of students with disabilities**
- 4. Engaging families of students with disabilities in the success of personalized learning efforts**

Personalized Learning and Meeting the Needs of Students With Disabilities in New Hampshire

August 11, 2016 – Bedford, New Hampshire

Meeting Participants

Greg Amend, *Vilas Middle School*

Tobi Chassie, *Pittsfield School District*

Donna Couture, *Winnacunnet High School*

Robin deAlmeida, *Reaching Higher New
Hampshire*

Mary Earick, *New Hampshire Department of
Education*

Paul Leather, *New Hampshire Department of
Education*

Susan Lyons, *National Center for the
Improvement of Educational Assessment*

Grace Meo, *CAST*

Kelly Moore Dunn, *New Hampshire Technical
Institute*

Alan Pardy, *New Hampshire Association of
Special Education Administrators*

Karen Soule, *New Hampshire Department of
Education*

Brian Stack, *Sanborn Regional High School*

Susan Shapiro, *Plymouth State University*

Santina Thibedeau, *New Hampshire
Department of Education*

Jonathan Vander Els, *New Hampshire Learning
Initiative*

Based on the group's discussion, NCLD identified major challenges confronting the state and key actions that can ensure personalized learning efforts more fully meet the needs of New Hampshire students with disabilities. By taking these actions, we hope the state's efforts will continue to extend rigorous and inclusive learning opportunities that prepare all students for college, career, and civic success.



ENSURING STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES BENEFIT FROM PERSONALIZED LEARNING IN NEW HAMPSHIRE: OVERALL SYSTEM CHALLENGES

Culture

- Educators may not set the same high-level goals for students with disabilities as they do for other students, leading to less rigorous expectations.
- Educators, parents, and community members may attempt to protect students with disabilities from failure by offering them less rigorous coursework and learning experiences, rather than allowing them to face and overcome challenges. As a result, students aren't provided opportunities to learn about themselves or to become self-advocates.
- The special education system often approaches the needs of students with disabilities through a reactionary, legalistic lens, reinforcing a culture of distrust between parents, educators, and schools.
- Schools are hindered by separate funding streams and siloed approaches to education and service delivery that reinforce separation of general and special educators.

Educator Capacity

- Educator training around personalized learning doesn't sufficiently emphasize the added demands of working with students with disabilities, including implementing Universal Design for Learning (UDL), using non-pull-out interventions, understanding individual students' needs, working with parents of students with disabilities, and designing and using assessments.
- Teacher certification and higher education preparation still breed separation between general and special educators—reducing their capacity to collaborate—and fail to emphasize key skills such as mastery of UDL.
- Educators are not effectively trained to support an inclusive climate through schoolwide frameworks such as a multi-tier system of supports (MTSS) and positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS).

ENSURING STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES BENEFIT FROM PERSONALIZED LEARNING IN NEW HAMPSHIRE: OVERALL SYSTEM CHALLENGES (CONTINUED)

Resources

- The way IEPs are written can limit the time, staff, and resources that can be devoted to supporting personalized learning.
- Educators need tools such as learning management systems, assessment rubrics, and communication toolkits specific to meeting the needs of students with disabilities in personalized learning systems.
- Paperwork and administrative demands upon special educators limit their capacity to focus on personalized instruction.
- The state's schools face teacher shortages, especially in special education, and the New Hampshire Department of Education (NHDOE) has a staffing shortage, limiting its ability to support schools through transitions.
- Teacher contracts may limit flexibility in leveraging staff to support personalized learning.



ENSURING STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES BENEFIT FROM PERSONALIZED LEARNING IN NEW HAMPSHIRE: POLICY & PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Teachers, school leaders, and paraprofessionals should be trained to effectively include students with disabilities in personalized learning systems.

- NHDOE should reconvene the New Hampshire Task Force on Effective Teaching Special Education/English Language Learner Subcommittee to develop specific recommendations to support these groups' success in personalized learning environments.
- NHDOE and districts should hold regional workshops and develop school-based training modules for teachers, school leaders, and paraprofessionals on implementing personalized learning, including strategies such as UDL and creating safe and supportive learning environments for students with disabilities.
- Educators participating in the Performance Assessment for Competency Education (PACE) initiative should be provided specific training to interpret and use results from PACE performance assessments to drive high-quality instruction for students with disabilities and support them across their specific learning progressions and continua. Further, the knowledge of these educators should be leveraged to inform their peers' work across the state.

2. The New Hampshire Department of Education, districts, and schools should invest in systems of accommodations and provide guidance to schools that ensure inclusion of students with disabilities in personalized learning efforts.

- NHDOE should invest in expanding the UDL Academy project that's working with local districts to scale UDL across classrooms, schools, and districts and strategize ways to ensure that non-participating districts benefit from the work and learning of this initiative.
- NHDOE should expand the Schoolwide Integrated Framework for Transformation (SWIFT) initiative that empowers local districts to emphasize integration, inclusion, and supports for all students as a key driver for future personalized learning efforts.
- NHDOE, in collaboration with the Center for Assessment and other partners should develop competency-based assessments to replace the alternative assessment for the 1 percent of students with the most significant cognitive disabilities.

ENSURING STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES BENEFIT FROM PERSONALIZED LEARNING IN NEW HAMPSHIRE: POLICY & PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS (CONTINUED)

3. The New Hampshire Department of Education should make sure that efforts around innovation, scaling, and information dissemination explicitly include work and reflection on strategies to ensure that personalized learning efforts fully meet the needs of students with disabilities.

- The New Hampshire Learning Initiative, NHDOE, and other key stakeholders implementing the state's Vision 2.0 should analyze and specify how activities in the vision address specific needs of students with disabilities and other traditionally disadvantaged students, with a goal of ensuring that they more fully benefit from the state's personalized and competency-based education efforts.
- All pilot initiatives, including PACE and NG2, should host specific affinity groups around traditionally disadvantaged students to discover challenges and best practices in serving these students as initiatives are implemented. Learning should be shared with non-participating schools.
- The statewide New Hampshire Network and regional networks should have a specific subgroup to enable local educators to share best practices and work through common challenges in serving students with disabilities in personalized learning systems.
- The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) offers opportunities for innovation and expansion of initiatives related to personalized learning, UDL, and technology. NHDOE should consider pursuing these opportunities and ensure that all districts and schools are aware of how funding through ESSA could support, enhance, and scale ongoing initiatives in these areas.

4. The New Hampshire Department of Education, school districts, and schools should develop a plan and subsequent resources on communicating with parents of students with disabilities about personalized learning.

- NHDOE and local partners should develop communications toolkits and training modules to convey the changes in PACE, competency grading, and other personalized learning innovations to parents of students with disabilities through different modes of communication. They should develop implementation toolkits and rubrics for educators to implement these initiatives effectively for this population.
- The state and pilot districts should develop model report cards that communicate student challenges and success for all students, including those with disabilities.
- Educators should be provided training and tools to align IEP goals with state and district/school academic competencies and assessments.