Personalized Learning at Scale
Case Studies of Leading Cities

Leaders of urban school systems are faced with a daunting fact: some individual schools are achieving incredible results for students from low-income communities, but no urban school systems are achieving those results for all—or even most—children in an entire city. For generations, students in urban America have been underserved, with few achieving basic proficiency in reading and math, and even fewer completing college. At the same time, technology has been transforming industry after industry, changing the way we consume media, go shopping, and do business. With 21st century tools available, why should our students be stuck in a 19th century designed school system? We tell the story of ten cities in the case studies below, with a focus on how technology and great teaching, with the right system-level conditions, can personalize learning for all students and drive sustained achievement growth.

In our context, personalized learning means that students' experiences—what they learn, and how, when, and where they learn it—are tailored to their individual needs, skills, and interests, and enable them to take ownership of their education. Early personalized learning work has generated significant interest and promising proof points in district, charter, and private schools alike. However, there has yet to be high-quality implementation at scale—across an entire system of schools or an entire city.

Why is scale important? The benefits of personalized learning are amplified when a system—a school district or a broader city ecosystem—creates the conditions for personalized learning to thrive system-wide, instead of in one-off pilots or individual schools. However, to take high-quality personalized learning to scale, systems will need to address thorny issues in public policy, educator practice, staffing structures, accountability, technology infrastructure, and funding.

To accelerate the pace of innovation at scale, ten medium to large public school systems received funding to develop a system-wide personalized learning strategy. To reach this ambitious goal, systems were challenged to design, launch, and replicate schools that implement personalized learning in a holistic manner, and to overhaul supporting district and city functions (e.g., human capital and facilities) so that they fully support the redesigned schools. Ongoing support for some of these sites is being provided by CEE-Trust and Next Generation Learning Challenges (www.nextgenlearning.org).

We have drafted profiles of these leading cities, telling the stories of how they have dealt with their thorny issues, and where they are having successes and setbacks. We hope that these profiles help urban school system leaders around the country better understand how they, too, could approach system-wide innovation of personalized learning.

COMPONENTS OF PERSONALIZED LEARNING

High Expectations for College Readiness	Adults believe in the enormous potential of all students and support them in achieving at the highest levels, with a focus on: • *Learning Growth:* Meeting students where they are at and supporting their growth from that point. As a result, students master academic content and skills at accelerated rates. This includes at least 1.5 years of growth in Math and ELA each year • *College Readiness:* At least 80% of students will meet or exceed college readiness benchmarks by age 18
Personalized Learning for All Students	Learning experiences for all students are tailored to their individual developmental needs, skills and interest. Personalized learning includes the following elements: • *Learner profiles,* capturing multi-faceted inputs (skills, interests, aspirations) about each student • *Personal learning paths,* enabling students to tailor experiences to their own needs and goals • Individual mastery, assessing progress against standards and goals and advancing students at their own pace • *Flexible learning environments,* offering multiple instructional delivery approaches
Optimized for Scale	The model is replicable and financially viable on public funding, which requires: • *Financial Sustainability:* The school can fund 100% of operating expenses on public per-pupil revenue within four years of launch • *Scalable:* The school model can be replicated at scale if it demonstrates impact

We are eager to share the work of these trailblazing districts with you. We invite you to learn more, to celebrate the successful efforts already underway, and to support the challenging work still ahead.

Education Cities™

Harbormaster-led Systems

System	Demographics	Plan highlights	Partners
CityBridge Foundation (Washington, D.C.)	• 217 schools • 82,958 students • 76% FRL	• Pilot funding for district and charter schools launching innovative models that embrace technology • Design workshops, summer institute, and tailored support for school applicants • Seven design principles for breakthrough schools, including mastery-based credit and scalability	• 2Revolutions
Colorado Education Initiative (CO)	• 112 schools • 55K students • 40-80% FRL	• Participating districts' different personalized learning approaches become proof points for other Colorado districts • State-level policy environment supportive of personalized learning (enabled by the Colorado DOE) • Cross-district learning to more rapidly achieve district- and state-wide scale of next gen models	• Adams County School District • Colorado Department of Education • Colorado Springs School District 11 • Thompson School District
LEAP Innovations (Chicago)	• 658 schools • 400K students • 85% FRL	• Access to the Collaboratory—a space designed to bring educators, entrepreneurs, tech companies, researchers and students together to share ideas, co-develop solutions, and get training. • Summer Design Program for school teams that includes workshops, one-on-one consultations, site visits, apprenticeships, and peer-to-peer learning opportunities • Freely available personalized learning resources, including design roadmaps, design workshop materials, and design readings and videos.	• Chicago Public Education Fund • Chicago Public Schools
New England Secondary Schools Consortium	• 75 schools • 57K students • 48% FRL	• Focus on policy and practice across the five-state region: competency-based learning models and graduation requirements supported by state DOEs • Alignment with international best practices for secondary learning as a proxy for readiness • Intensive personalized supports for schools through Great Schools Partnership' on-site coaching model	• Great Schools Partnership • Connecticut Department of Education • Maine Department of Education • New Hampshire Department of Education • Rhode Island Department of Education • Vermont Agency of Education • Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents • Nellie Mae Education Foundation
New Schools for New Orleans	• 90 schools • 43K students • 77% FRL	• Collaboration of school districts and school support organizations, led by reform leader NSNO • Focus on the local ecosystem: communities of practice, human capital systems, data systems • Transition local CMOs to personalized learning and launch new schools by supporting entrepreneurs	• 4.0 Schools • Educate Now! • Orleans Parish School Board • Recovery School District
Rogers Family Foundation	• 124 schools • 49K students • 71% FRL	• Strategic partnership with Oakland USD, local CMOs, nonprofits, and other funders committed to education reform in Oakland • Access to talent, experience, and lessons learned from local blended pilots • Deep discovery phase open to all schools, personalizing their own learning about NextGen schooling	• Oakland USD and the Oakland Public Education Fund

"Ensuring a high-quality education for every student is absolutely essential both on an individual level and collectively for every state and community in New England."
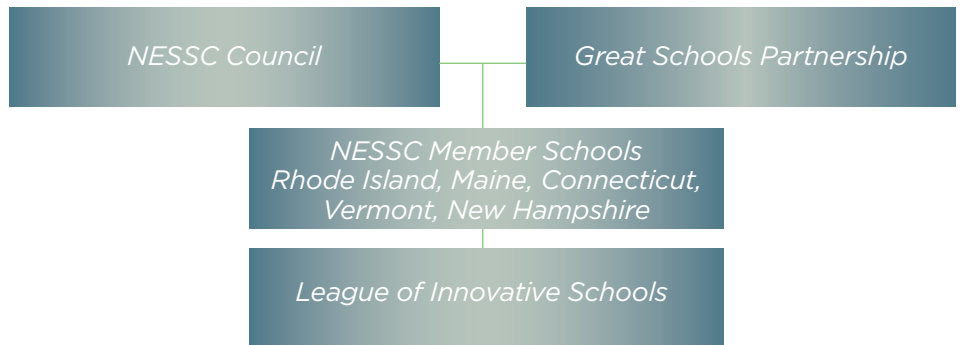
New England Secondary School Consortium

VISION

The New England Secondary School Consortium's vision is to empower New England schools to develop flexible and innovative approaches to learning. By simultaneously addressing policy, practice, and public will, NESSC will be able to ensure that personalized learning is used as a means to close persistent achievement gaps, ensure college- and career-readiness, and promote greater educational opportunities for all students.

COALITION STRUCTURE: The New England Secondary School Consortium (NESSC) includes nearly 500 secondary schools in Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Connecticut. The regional network was created in an effort to promote and support forward-thinkiaC envisions schools and state policymakers working hand-in-hand to change public policy, support educators, and increase public understanding around school innovation. Based on its past experience creating supportive environments for schools and influencing state policies such as graduation requirements, NESSC is well-positioned to scale personalized learning across the New England region.

NESSC Council	Great Schools Partnership

NESSC Member Schools
Rhode Island, Maine, Connecticut, Vermont, New Hampshire

League of Innovative Schools

- NESSC Council: As the primary governing body, the NESSC Council is comprised of state leaders, leaders from the Great Schools Partnership, and other at-large members. Members of the council provide strategic guidance for NESSC and advocate for state policy change.
- Great Schools Partnership: GSP is a non-profit educational leadership and school support organization that serves public schools. As the coordinating body of NESSC, GSP offers technical assistance, resource development, grant administration, logistical support, and strategic planning to members of the consortium.
- NESSC: A collaboration between the SEAs in Rhode Island, Maine, Connecticut, New Hampshire, and Vermont, the network represents 16% of publicly funded secondary schools in the five-state region.
- League of Innovative Schools: A "coalition of the willing" of 75 schools, serving nearly 60,000 students, within NESSC have elected to become a part of this partnership by committing to implementing personalized learning.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:
WWW.NEWENGLANDSSC.ORG

CALL TO ACTION: Outdated classroom practices and legacy systems limit the ability of schools in New England to meet the needs of today's students. While there are bright spots across the region, performance gaps remain. For example:

- Over 50% of 11th grade students are *below* proficient in math, reading, and science in Maine
- Attendance rates in New Hampshire are 77-78%, 15 points lower than regional average
- Four-year graduation rates in Rhode Island hover at 80%, 5-10 points lower than other states'

To realize large-scale change, NESSC believes that schools must embrace the vision and principles of personalized learning. For five years, NESSC has made strong progress in influencing the policy landscape to enable personalized learning, increasing public will through community engagement, and supporting schools through coaching and professional development. The consortium will continue building on the successes of its past work to foster broad innovation across its schools.

DESIRED OUTCOMES: Through its personalized learning initiatives, NESSC plans to achieve three goals:

- Five-year graduation rate of 90% or higher
- Post-secondary enrollment rate of 80% or higher
- Dropout rate of 5% or lower

NESSC has developed a set of common metrics for high school performance that are calculated and reported consistently for all five states, and expects each grantee school and League member to track, measure, and evaluate these. At the same time, NESSC recognizes that its member schools face unique circumstances and are starting at different points. The consortium will set individualized growth targets for its schools, but will expect similar rates of growth across the network: a 5% annual decrease in the percentage of students who do not meet each metric in 2015 and 2016, and a 10% decrease in 2017 through 2020 as exposure to personalized learning accelerates.

Personalized-Learning Levers
- Proficiency-based graduation
- Multiple and flexible pathways
- Learner-centered accountability

State and Regional Support Strategies
- Changes in state and district policy
- Changes in district and school practice
- Increased public will, understanding, and support

State and Regional Performance Goals
- Increase five-year graduation rates
- Decrease annual dropout rates
- Increase the share of students enrolled in two- or four-year degree programs or pursuing industry-certified accredited postsecondary certificates

*Performance-growth targets will be determined individually by each school

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STRATEGY: NESSC has had great success at the state policy level, championing competency-based learning and multiple pathways to graduation. NESSC sees personalized learning as a way of bringing these policies to life in the classroom, through three main strategies:

- *Proficiency-based graduation:* This strategy is a continuation of NESSC's past work to encourage a policy climate in each of the five states that requires or enables graduation by proficiency. A student's readiness for graduation should depend on content mastery rather than traditional credit hours. With a favorable policy climate in place, NESSC schools must now implement clearly defined proficiency standards for graduation that are linked to college- and career-readiness. NESSC schools should also design policies that describe how students will demonstrate mastery of the new graduation standards.

- *Multiple and flexible pathways:* Students will no longer be locked into specific course sequences, learning environments, or seat time requirements. Instead, they will have the option to participate in flexible learning pathways and experience different instructional approaches: traditional, online, dual enrollment, blended, and flipped. Student learning will also take place in diverse settings: internships and project-based work as well as traditional instruction in a brick-and-mortar school. While pathways for students will differ to meet individual needs, they will all enable students to

- *Learner-centered accountability:* Schools will also develop innovative accountability measures that provide information on student achievement, instructional practices, curriculum alignment, and student participation in external learning opportunities. Comprehensive data on implementation and processes—as well as student outcomes—will allow schools to understand *how* students are learning and which strategies are most effective in increasing student performance. With learner-centered accountability measures in place, schools will be able to continuously improve and create school models that evolve as students' skill levels and needs change.

While NESSC is well-positioned to scale personalized learning across New England, it recognizes the continuing challenges of addressing policy, practice, and public simultaneously in order to achieve meaningful change in educational outcomes. To mitigate these challenges, NESSC plans to invest in:

- *Increased public understanding and support:* Despite enthusiasm for personalized learning, NESSC continues to note an information gap for parents and communities. This represents a particular challenge in the New England region where school budgets are determined at the local level; school boards and voters tend to be wary of reallocating funds toward new initiatives. Building community support is crucial for the implementation of innovative models that often require additional funds for start-up costs.

- *Aligned policy priorities:* NESSC has made great progress in advocating for public policy change over the last five years, and the five-state region has seen greater change supportive of personalized learning relative to the rest of the country. But the consortium will still need to monitor the political landscape and factors affecting changes in political leadership. Because NESSC has close ties to the state education agencies in its five member states, a change in elected officials

could pose a risk to the progress the network has made. NESSC's past success in cultivating champions on both sides of the political spectrum, however, increases its likelihood of receiving continued support from policy-makers.

- *Teacher and school leadership capacity-building:* NESSC has encouraged school leadership and teacher buy-in to personalized learning practices. Not all school leaders and teaching teams have the internal expertise to successfully implement the practices, however – or the budget to provide the necessary training to help teachers redesign learning environments. To address this head-on, NESSC and the League of Innovative Schools will offer resources and school improvement coaching to school leaders and teachers to build their capacity to do so.

- *Personalized support for students and schools:* NESSC's work is guided by the underlying belief that although its member schools have a similar mission—to provide an excellent education for all students—they face distinctive challenges because they span diverse communities across a five-state region. As schools begin to plan for personalized learning initiatives, NESSC will meet the individual needs of a school with a customized improvement plan. Through a comprehensive needs assessment of its LIS schools, the consortium has identified three archetype categories of readiness: Community-Driven School, Leadership-Driven School, or Early-Adoption School. Based on a school's individual needs and archetype, NESSC will provide tailored curriculum, leadership, community engagement, and infrastructure support.

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN: To scale personalized learning across its five-state region, NESSC has created a multistep process that will depend on successful proof points and large-scale network collaboration.

NESSC will begin by providing targeted support to a subset of schools within the League of Innovative Schools. Schools that wish to receive this initial support will carry out a large-scale self-assessment using *Global Best Practices,* an internationally-benchmarked tool for secondary learning designed by NESSC. Multiple stakeholders—including school leadership, school board members, and community members—will provide input through data analysis, classroom observations, and interviews. Based on the self-assessment, NESSC will select 10-15 schools—representing a diverse set of communities and financial resources—to be part of Cohort 1 in 2014-15. Schools in Cohort 1 serving at least 40% low-income students will receive funds to subsidize the personalized learning work.

In the first "preparation" year, Cohort 1 schools will receive intensive, targeted on-site coaching support from the Great Schools Partnership, focused on establishing the foundational organizational structures and policies required to transition to personalized learning. In Fall 2015, Cohort 1 schools will fully launch their personalized learning action plans. As this group wraps up its implementation year, NESSC will then support a second group of schools participating in the same implementation process in 2015-16.

Over the course of these two pilot years, other NESSC members will continue to receive professional development and network support to amplify best practice sharing: a resource bank of online tools and resources, regional networking meetings, peer-to-peer learning opportunities, and more. In addition, all Cohort 1 and 2 schools will be expected to host site visits and share their curriculum materials and action plans with other members. With comprehensive network support and successful proof points in place, other schools in the consortium will have the knowledge and tools necessary to implement their own models.

WHAT ARE THEY GOING TO DO?

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

Step 8 Implement + Monitor Action Plan

Step 1 Analyze Student Achievement Data

Step 7 Develop or Refine Action Plan

Step 2 Analyze Existing School Practices

Higher Student Aspirations, Achievement, and Attainment

Step 6 Determine Improvement Strategies + Rationale

Step 3 Identify Internal + External Assets

Step 5 Determine Student Achievement Goals

Step 4 Identify Internal + External Obstacles

WHAT WILL HELP OR HINDER US?

WHERE DO WE WANT TO BE?