Culture Shift:
Teaching in a Learner-Centered Environment Powered by Digital Learning

DIGITAL LEARNING SERIES

ALLIANCE FOR EXCELLENT EDUCATION

The increasingly global economy and complex world have changed the demands on the U.S. education system. Unlike in the first half of the twentieth century, today all students must be able to think critically, communicate effectively, collaborate with others, and analyze information and sources while meeting rigorous benchmarks, such as those contained in the common core state standards. For students to be adequately prepared for college and a career, they must graduate from high school with a very different set of skills and knowledge than was needed in the past; according to the authors of *Teaching 2030*, "in the emerging workplace, most students—not just an elite few—must be able to find, synthesize, and evaluate information from a wide variety of subjects and sources." This requires a shift from a teacher-centric culture to one that supports learner-centered instruction with an intense focus on the student, whether in face-to-face, blended, or virtual environments.

LEARNER-CENTERED EDUCATION

The learner-centered environment uses data to set learning goals and criteria for success, assesses progress, and provides students with a comprehensive system of academic and developmental supports. Learner-centered education dramatically impacts the work of educators, and education systems and schools must empower teachers to apply their pedagogical knowledge, instructional skills, and digital tools and resources to meet the needs of individual students. Technology and digital learning support this culture shift by providing tools, resources, data, and systems that increase teaching options and opportunities as well as promote efficiency.

> **Learner-Centered Education**
> 1. Rigorous and based upon college- and career-ready expectations
> 2. Personalized
> 3. Collaborative, relevant, and applied
> 4. Flexible, any time, any where

> "We need to change society's views of teaching— from the factory model of yesterday to the professional model of tomorrow—where teachers are revered as thinkers, leaders and nation-builders. No other profession carries a greater burden for securing our economic future."
>
> -Arne Duncan,
> U.S. Secretary of Education

TEACHING IN A LEARNER-CENTERED ENVIRONMENT

The global economy and more rigorous standards that increase the demands on students also raise the expectations of teachers. Teachers will likely need to take on new professional responsibilities and roles in working with students and peers, and they should view this as an opportunity to share ownership in collaborating, planning, and learning with their students. This allows many teachers to apply a wide array of skills to meet the needs of students and may also offer opportunities for more hybrid positions in the school in which they teach students as well as work in other capacities, including as a

- **facilitator of learning;**
- **user of data and assessments;**
- **collaborator, contributor, and coach with peers; and**
- **curriculum adapter and designer.**

To be prepared for the multifaceted new roles in this more personalized, learner-centered environment, teachers need support and professional learning opportunities to help them develop new skills, maximize the potential of digital learning, and provide models and opportunities for practice and a school culture that encourages and facilitates the teachers' roles. This may happen with experts and colleagues alike and in formal and informal settings.

The Council of Chief State School Officers recently updated the Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (InTASC) Model Teaching Standards, which outline high expectations for teachers to have the understanding, knowledge, and skills to ensure that instruction is personalized and meets the needs of a very diverse student body. The goals and aspirations outlined in the InTASC report represent a significant shift for many teachers and align closely with the learner-centered approach described in this document. Similarly, the Center for Teaching Quality's Teaching 2030 model envisions the future of teaching as "[t]eachers … who are recruited for their diverse teaching skills and strategically prepared, in both virtual and brick-and-mortar venues, to mutually support each other's learning, promoting a high level of interaction that is flexible, democratic, and person-centered."
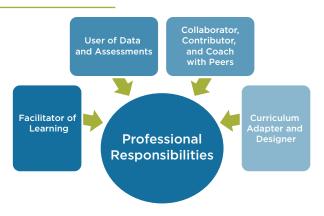
> In countries where students demonstrate the highest achievement on international assessments, teachers receive far more support than U.S. educators do, and teaching is considered a prestigious occupation.

Professional learning opportunities for educators vary widely across the country in quantity, type, and quality. Professional development ideally should be "a process of continuous improvement for teachers and principals that transforms practice and increases student achievement." Extensive research emphasizes that effective professional learning opportunities should

- **be intensive, ongoing, and connected to practice;**
- **focus on student learning and address the teaching of specific curriculum content;**
- **align with school improvement priorities and goals; and**
- **build strong working relationships among teachers.**

PREPARING AND SUPPORTING EDUCATORS FOR NEW ROLES

Technology and digital learning increase access and opportunities for professional learning by increasing flexibility in terms of time and eliminating the confines of geography for opportunities. Teachers have access to more courses and formal professional learning, as well as increased exposure to peers and colleagues from around the world. This can increase teacher effectiveness as well as student achievement. Joellen Killion writes that "[a]ccording to the research, these intensive professional learning efforts that offered an average of forty-nine hours per year boosted student achievement by approximately 21 percentage points." The dramatic results of creating professional learning opportunities and support provide an impetus to meet the effective professional development standards above to improve student achievement.

User of Data and Assessments

Collaborator, Contributor, and Coach with Peers

Facilitator of Learning

Professional Responsibilities

Curriculum Adapter and Designer

CULTURE SHIFT TO SUPPORT LEARNER-CENTERED INSTRUCTION

Administrators, teachers, students, and parents must all have a commitment to personalized and collaborative learning, and educators must be empowered to use innovative approaches for learner-centered instruction. Teachers must also have the support systems and professional learning opportunities to develop and continue to grow their skills and access the resources needed. The school culture must encourage, expect, and support the kind of teaching and learning that prepares students for college and the workplace, and must also provide educators with the time and professional learning opportunities to develop and sustain the skills and efforts needed for learner-centered instruction. Leadership, changes in the teaching profession, and the integration of digital learning are critical to the transition to this new culture.

RECOMMENDATIONS

✓ Develop a deep understanding of what it means to have a learner-centered environment; identify the many potential changes that must be made from the current instructional models; and create opportunities to discuss and observe learner-centered instruction among all parties involved in a student's learning process.

✓ Provide leaders with the professional learning opportunities needed to understand how to initiate and grow a strong culture of a learner-centered environment in a school.

✓ Empower school and district leaders to develop collaborative working environments for teachers that set high expectations and provide the support needed for educators and staff.

✓ Integrate technology and digital learning into the strategic planning and culture discussions within the school to maximize potential to support learner-centered environments, including the use of data and assessments, multiple types of digital content and curriculum, and collaborative opportunities for teachers and students.

✓ Elevate the profession of teaching by understanding the complexities of teaching very diverse students in a learner-centered environment; establish teacher effectiveness evaluations that support growth and take into account multiple variables; and align professional learning opportunities to evaluations.