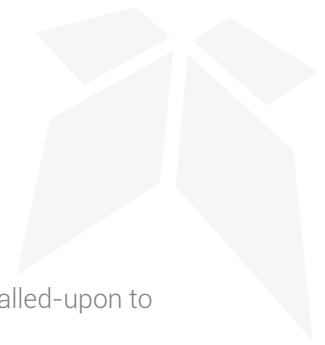


# How does Personalized Learning Align with Project-Based Learning



## INTRODUCTION

As more districts adopt personalized learning strategies, Education Elements has increasingly been called-upon to articulate the alignment between PL and other learning initiatives.

The Core Four of Personalized Learning provides clarity on what personalized learning looks like and communicates the shifts in instruction we expect to see. A primary goal of personalized learning is to meet the needs and interests of all students and ensure everyone has equitable access to excellent instruction. Other learning initiatives with similar goals can use the Core Four as a framework to ensure their success and illustrate their alignment with personalized learning.

This series of briefs seeks to illustrate the Core Four framework as a tool to align PL and other learning initiatives in ways that are tangible for teachers and leaders.

## PERSONALIZED LEARNING & PROJECT-BASED LEARNING

The Buck Institute defines Project-Based Learning as, "... a teaching method in which students gain knowledge and skills by working for an extended period of time to investigate and respond to an authentic, engaging, and complex question, problem, or challenge." Personalized learning is what ensures that all students:

- Choose a project that reflects their interests, strengths, and perspectives.
- Build the knowledge and skills necessary during a sustained inquiry.
- Receive the feedback and support to produce a quality project.

The Core Four framework further illustrates the alignment between PL and PBL in the following ways:

**Flexible content and tools** build the **key knowledge and understandings** a student needs for any project. The differentiated path and pace allow all students to engage in **sustained inquiry**.

**Reflection** supports the inquiry and the student's ability to choose a **challenging problem or question** that is meaningful to them. It gives students the tools they need to iterate their work and seek out support when they need it. **Ownership** ensures that projects are **authentic** for all students.



**Targeted instruction** facilitates a supportive **critique** of the project, allows for **revision**, and provides a structure for teachers to support students with similar interests or knowledge-building need.

Teachers make **data driven decisions** that allow them to choose those strategies and instructional models that will ensure all students are building the **success skills** necessary to produce a quality project.

\***Blue text** identifies the *Essential Project Elements* of Project Based Learning, as defined by the [Buck Institute](#).

Districts that are using both personalized learning strategies as well as a project-based learning approach are able to deeply engage all students in real-world problems with more intentionality and support. These two approaches complement each other because they both build-upon student interests and strengths, and leverage their unique perspectives in critical thinking tasks. The strategies and instructional models captured in the Core Four can allow teachers to ensure that all students can participate in the rigorous inquiry model of project-based learning

# Personalized Learning and Project-Based Learning IN ACTION

## SCHOOLS AND DISTRICTS TO WATCH

### [Loudoun County Public Schools \(VA\)](#)

LCPS sees personalized learning as a crucial instructional framework to help students engage in “authentic, challenging problems” that lead students to deeper understanding. The district communicates the alignment between PL and the deeper learning initiatives of Project-Based Learning and Performance Assessments in their academic vision and professional learning workshops with Education Elements. As a result, students across the district develop projects that are meaningful and rigorous, and they receive the individual support necessary to be successful.

### [Goshen Post Elementary School \(VA\)](#)

Goshen Post Elementary School is committed to creating daily, authentic learning experiences for their students, which requires teachers to change their traditional pedagogy of teaching, to one that is student driven with an authentic purpose. We know as educators, by personalizing instruction with experiences that are meaningful, it increases student engagement and promotes a deeper level of learning. The Personalized Learning framework greatly supports PBL instructional practices, as it allows for students to reflect, respond and investigate on their own to solve real life problems and/or challenges. Best teaching practices occur when PL and PBL are blended to meet the needs of all our students. It is a seamless approach. Students become empowered when they are given the opportunity to learn through a personalized, problem based experience. As Goshen Post moves forward as Loudoun County's first PBL Design School, we not only want to ensure our students learn through the PBL process but also are given the opportunity to excel by ensuring a personalized approach through a differentiated pace and path for all our students.

## ADVICE FOR TEACHERS AND LEADERS COMBINING PL AND PROJECT-BASED LEARNING

- Students should take time to brainstorm possible projects and reflect on which are most meaningful to them. This reflection will ensure that students develop a project that they are genuinely curious about.
- Teachers could design a playlist that helps roadmap the process involved in developing a project. This will build student ownership in the process and allows teachers to focus on individual support.
- A station rotation model could be used to allow students to (1) independently research their project topic, (2) share and collaboratively brainstorm ideas with their peers, (3) receive feedback from the teacher in a small group.
- Teachers could use data to identify below-grade level students who should receive additional targeted instruction during the development of the project. This will ensure that all students are successful with grade-level content.
- Research using reliable digital resources allows each student to build knowledge of their specific project topic. Teachers could guide younger students to specific digital sources and teach older students to properly assess the reliability of sources.
- School leaders could create the time and space for students to publicly share their projects. This could be at a parent night, in a public and well-trafficked location in the school, and/or celebrated in a school communication tool like a newsletter.
- Teachers and school leaders could leverage their personal and professional network to bring in “experts” who could provide additional knowledge for students, give feedback, and even help grade final projects.

## ABOUT EDUCATION ELEMENTS

Education Elements works with districts to build and support dynamic school systems that meet the needs of every learner, today and tomorrow. They take the time to understand the unique challenges school leaders face, and then customize the Education Elements approach for each district. Ed Elements has worked with hundreds of districts across the country. They bring deep expertise, design thinking, expert facilitation and the spirit of collaboration, along with their extensive toolkit of resources and technology, to deliver sustainable results.