Education Elements
6 Personalized Learning Risks to Avoid

1 Lack of Clear Vision, Narrative, and Rationale

District **struggles with painting a clear picture** of how personalized learning looks different from what happens in classrooms today. Instead, it **turns to educational jargon** — e.g. "we want to see 21st century skills and higher-order thinking skills."

Avoid the Risk	As a Result...
• School leaders and teachers may understand **pieces of what they should do** – e.g. more small group instruction or flipped teaching – but aren't able to articulate why they are taking these new approaches and how these changes eventually lead to long-term expected outcomes. • Furthermore, district and school leaders **struggle to identify early wins or proof points of success** that would help them increase buy-in across the district and offer exemplars of good practice.	• Create a district vision statement and explain why personalized learning supports that vision • Connect personalized learning to the instructional language and priorities of the district • Identify measures of success early in the process – what's the expected path to this success and key indicators of success along the way • Agree on a process to check if schools are on/off track from expected path, and identify immediate supports to course correct

2 Curricular & Instructional Misalignment

District does not spend the appropriate time sufficiently early in the process ensuring that new models and content **align with the district's current curriculum or instructional frameworks**. District curriculum coaches and school-based instructional coaches are **missing from initial conversations** around planning, design, and professional development.

Avoid the Risk	As a Result...
• School leaders and teachers are **unclear on expectations** and how the new instructional model "fits in" with what they were already doing – for example, what does differentiation look like in a personalized system? • The lack of clarity can often lead to a **compliance mindset** among school leaders and teachers.	• Ensure any changes proposed are aligned with current pedagogy, or if they are departure from current pedagogy, to explain the shifts and how to do them • Involve curricular leads at the district and school level early in the process in order to identify gaps, either real or perceived • Acknowledge realistic timeline for changes, e.g. revamping curriculum • Articulate what teachers should be doing less as well as more • Create process to continuously check on instructional alignment in the classroom (e.g. walkthroughs)

3 Failure to Build Capacity at District and School Level

District creates a rollout plan that **does not identify the principal as the main driver of change in the building**. District may allow teachers to opt-into personalized learning, but have no expectations for principal involvement. District may also fail to build internal capacity to communicate, coordinate, or support the work. Instead, it defers to vendors or consultants to fully own the messaging and delivery of training.

Avoid the Risk	As a Result...
• District may have a few shining stars at the classroom level, but limited examples of excellent, whole-school shifts to personalization. • Once the vendors or consultants leave, there is no one with the capacity or experience to continue to the work.	• Involve the principal in all key meetings and decisions • Set expectations for the principal role; do not allow principal to delegate key responsibilities to coaches or APs • Ensure district owns the message and does not defer to outside organizations to deliver message to school • Build capacity in the district to support school leaders and teachers • Be clear about expectations for the district vs. the school vs. outside vendors

4 Starting with the Wrong Schools

District **begins the work in schools or grade levels that may not be ready** for personalized learning. District may choose to roll out at particular grade level based on political pressure, e.g. "we can't do this with elementary school students before high school students." Or, district funds personalized learning with turnaround grant and starts in schools that don't have the appropriate culture or staffing for the change.

Avoid the Risk	As a Result...
District and school leaders may be unable to **identify early wins or proof points of success** that would increase buy-in across the district and with external stakeholders, e.g. parents and school board.	• Start with your strengths – schools who are instructionally and culturally ready to move forward right away • Pay attention to timing of rollout – determine if start of year or mid-year is most appropriate for schools • Change course or go slower if needed • Be open to schools or classrooms starting at different places

5 Under-communication with Stakeholders

District does not have a strategic communications plan to ensure its stakeholders are hearing the right message about personalization. The district initially communicates its plan with parents, school board, and journalists, but does not follow up with subsequent messages or venues for discussion.

Avoid the Risk	As a Result...
• Create a strategic communications plan for each stakeholder group • Ensure plan includes spiraled approach – not just at start of the year • Identify strong schools and teachers early in the process to show examples of success • Empower teachers to speak about the initiative	• Create a strategic communications plan for each stakeholder group • Ensure plan includes spiraled approach – not just at start of the year • Identify strong schools and teachers early in the process to show examples of success

6 Selecting the Wrong Devices

District does not have an adequate process to select devices. District **may not consider software compatibility** with devices, nor how the device supports stated instructional goals. District may not check references for devices, and experiences significant **breakage**. Finally the district may not have sufficient plan in place to **support devices selected**, both technically and financially.

Avoid the Risk	As a Result...
• District encounters problems once devices are deployed to students and loses significant instructional time. • District receives negative publicity from local press. • Parents, teachers and school board express frustration with the work.	• Carefully consider your instructional goals and how each device would support those goals • Rigorously check references for all devices • Pilot devices before purchasing district-wide • Create financial and technical sustainability plan