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.

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.

CEE-TRUST
The Cities for Education Entrepreneurship Trust

SYSTEM	DEMO-GRAPHICS	PLAN HIGHLIGHTS	PARTNERS
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
Dallas Independent School District (TX)	• 224 schools • 160K students • 88% FRL	• Greater autonomy for educators and schools implementing personalized learning • Extensive cross-sector engagement: foundations, businesses, human capital organizations • Piloting first in elementary and middle schools	• 2Revolutions! • Commit!
Denver Public Schools (CO)	• 185 schools • 87K students • 72% FRL	• Dynamic learner profiles that aggregate real-time information on student needs, skills, and growth goals. • Continuous improvement focus, with new district-level structures (education campaigns, rapid feedback) • Coordinated learning with Colorado Education Initiative	• Colorado Education Initiative
Henry County Schools (GA)	• 50 schools • 41K students • 53% FRL	• Focus on 21st century skills; real-world learning experiences leveraging the local business community • Flexibility to implement supported through state policy changes (charter district status) • Piloting first in secondary schools, while building awareness and capacity district-wide	• Communities in Schools—Henry
Lake County Schools (FL)	• 40 schools • 45K students • 83% FRL	• Student-directed learning, including student-facilitated parent-teacher conferences • Redesigned, flexible classroom spaces • Personalized professional development for teachers	• University of Central Florida
New England Secondary Schools Consortium	• 75 schools • 57 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
Pinellas County Schools (FL)	• 142 schools • 101K students • 72% FRL	• Blended, flexible learning environments, with 1:1 computing and student-led project-based learning • Emphasis on collaborative learning • Piloting first in high schools, with "school within a school" programs and a new incubator school in collaboration with New Tech Network	• New Tech Network
Riverside Unified School District (CA)	• 49 schools • 43K students • 63% FRL	• Flexible physical space allowing smaller, mixed-aged groups to meet with teachers • Expanded technology supports and learning resources for teachers • District-led personalized learning "design labs"	• Gooru Learning
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

"The long-term vision is a grand restructuring of how we approach learning and how schools are able to pivot and respond and think differently about the needs of students. We get closer to students' needs and interests and passions, rather than just English Language Arts and Math work."

COALITION SNAPSHOT
(2013-14)
- Type .... Urban-Suburban Coalition
- Size (3 school districts)
  —K-12 schools 112
  —Students 54,715
  —Teachers............................... 3,200
- Demographics
  —White 18-75%
  —African-American 1-7%
  —Latino/Hispanic 20-70%
  —Asian/Pacific Islander 1-5%
  —Multiracial/other 2-7%
- Free/reduced lunch
  eligibility 40-80%
- Graduation rate 60-80%
- Per-pupil spend.......... $7,500-$8,200

cde
COLORADO
DEPARTMENT
of EDUCATION

The District of Choice.
Adams County School District 50

COLORADO SPRINGS
SCHOOL
DISTRICT
11

THOMPSON
SCHOOL DISTRICT

THE
COLORADO
EDUCATION
INITIATIVE

Colorado Coalition

VISION

The Colorado Education Initiative and its partners imagine a future where education is designed to: help students develop the academic, professional, entrepreneurial, personal, and civic competencies that a modern society and economy demand; support educators in creating learning environments designed to maximize these outcomes for students; and promote systems that support and incentivize educators in this effort.

Academic Competencies

Self Knowledge

Professional Competencies

Entrepreneurial Competencies

A Drive to Contribute
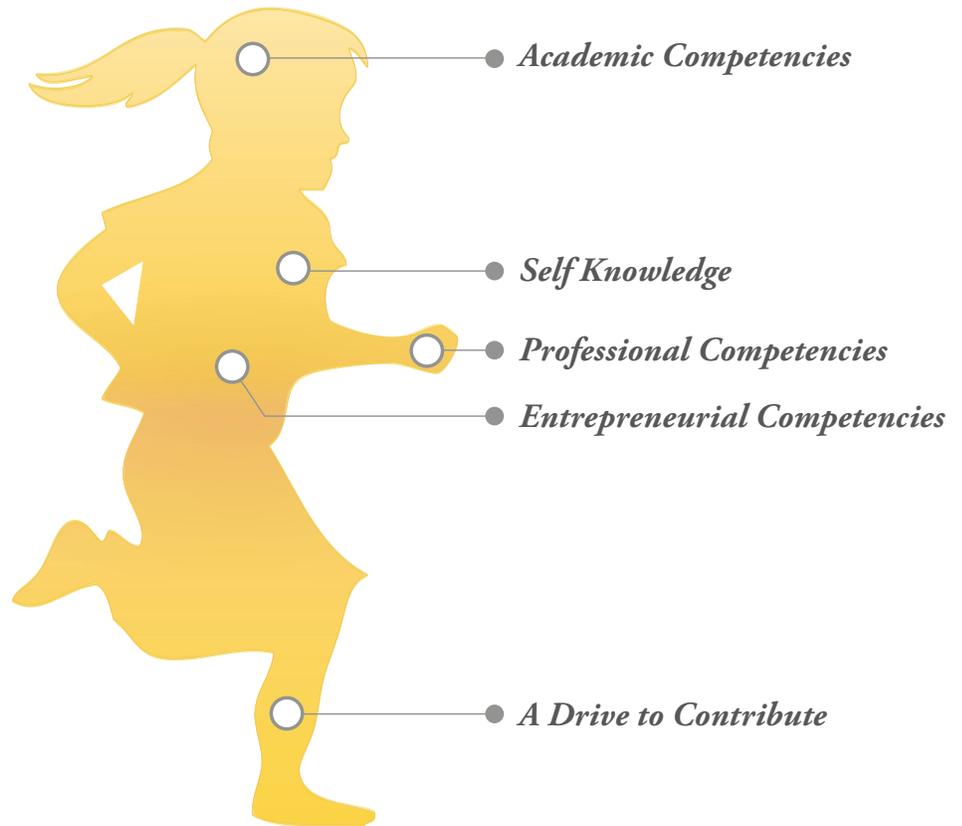
COALITION STRUCTURE: Three districts and two state organizations partnered to form the Colorado Coalition: Adams County School District 50 (Adams 50), Colorado Springs District 11 (D11), Thompson School District (Thompson), the Colorado Department of Education (CDE), and the Colorado Education Initiative (CEI). The Coalition came together as an effort to build something scalable across an entire state, with the state itself committing to creating a policy environment that supports next generation learning. The participating districts, in turn, serve as proof points for other Colorado districts, who can see themselves in the Coalition's work: the Coalition districts have diverse student populations and varied approaches to personalized learning. Together, the Coalition aims to accelerate cross-district learning to more rapidly achieve district- and state-wide scale of next generation learning models.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:
WWW.COLORADOEDINITIATIVE.ORG

Coalition Working Group
Establishes vision and priorities; creates common criteria and processes to address them

Colorado Legacy Foundation	**Districts**	**Colorado Dept. of Education**
Builds state and national awareness; facilitates sharing, support for, and accountability among all partners	Implement next gen models and systems; support each other and schools; leverage and inform policies needed to scale	Removes barriers to next gen learning in practice, policy, and procedure; enables systems conditions needed to scale

CALL TO ACTION: The Coalition unified by a desire for stronger learning outcomes for all students, and does not accept the current results that Colorado schools produce. The three Coalition districts have each begun implementing personalized learning initiatives, but none of this work is yet at scale—and performance gaps persist. Each member brings a sense of urgency to the work:

- *Adams 50:* implementing a district-wide Competency-Based System (CBS); seeking to continue improving performance relative to state averages—only 25% of students meet state achievement targets.
- *D11:* piloting different personalized learning models across several schools; seeking to reverse five-year trends of flat or declining proficiency in the state accountability system.
- *Thompson:* implementing literacy and math design collaboratives and performance-based assessments; seeking to close large achievement gaps between Hispanic and white students.
- *CDE:* acknowledges that Colorado's education system is not producing desired results; seeking to leverage recently-passed Graduation Guidelines and be a thought partner to districts in scaling next generation learning statewide.
- *CEI:* believes Colorado's vision for next generation learning is necessary to realize increased achievement for all students; seeking to be a convener, resource broker, and critical friend to CDE and districts piloting this vision.

DESIRED OUTCOMES: All Coalition districts commit to the following growth measures and college readiness rates:

- High growth (65%+) on the Colorado Growth Model (students' state exam scores)
- 1.5 years of growth annually on English Language Arts and Math
- At least 80% of students meeting or exceeding college readiness benchmarks by age 18

Additionally, Coalition partners will work together to determine outcomes and pilot metrics that hold schools accountable to all next gen outcomes. This work intends to leverage and inform key existing policy initiatives, including Colorado's Graduation Guidelines, Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness Endorsed Diploma criteria, and District and School Performance Frameworks.

STRATEGY: The Coalition's plan is highly aligned with recent state policy reforms around college readiness, such as the Graduation Guidelines adopted in 2013, and will create resources, practices, systems, and policies that support rigorous and high-standards implementation of personalized learning. Fostering student development of both academic competencies and the other outcomes that matter for 21st century adult success requires learning environments that look and feel different from most classrooms in Colorado today. Coalition partners have identified how these learning environments and systems will need to shift to support students and educators. Each Coalition district will tailor its strategy to reflect its unique entry point and assets:

- *Adams 50:* Adams 50 has achieved school- and district-wide scale of its competency-based model, which supports students in engaging in 21st century skills and progressing at their own pace based on assessed mastery of learning rather than seat time. To build on school performance gains the district has already experienced as a result of this model, Adams 50 will develop next generation student outcomes, expand options for personalized learning pathways (such as through community and business partnerships), and provide supports for educators, including professional development and resources to personalize instruction.
- *D11:* Awareness of personalized learning at D11 is already high. D11 is offering students choice in how, when, and where they learn best, starting with demonstration classrooms that leverage technology to transform the learning environment. Through its work with the Coalition, D11 will take personalized learning beyond these classrooms to school- and district-wide scale, while supporting district and school leaders with personalized learning trainings, modules, and resources. The district will also align policies, practices, and conditions to better support personalized learning.
- *Thompson:* Thompson has developed a demanding career and technical curriculum that combines academics and real-world relevant learning to prepare students for college and workforce success. Thompson has implemented district-wide professional development resulting in increased educator capacity to personalize instruction and use performance-based assessments to improve student and educator outcomes. Through this work and with the support of a local task force, educators will

redesign classrooms and systems to better implement their improved practices. The Coalition will support Thompson in further developing its personalized learning vision and implementation strategy.

While the Coalition partners each have a solid foundation in place to support changes to the school experience, they all acknowledge the challenges of a large-scale shift to next generation models:

- *Policy barriers:* Colorado's focus on accountability makes some school leaders and policy-makers averse to the risk-taking that comes with shifting to a new model. After the big push for increased accountability, there is also some fatigue at the state and local level. To address this challenge, CDE will need to thoughtfully connect next generation learning to existing initiatives whenever possible, and to provide meaningful supports, not just compliance oversight, to districts.

- *Scaling what works for each district:* Coalition districts have already built the conditions that enable small-scale personalized learning initiatives, but need support to create proof points and systems that promote and incentivize scale across grades and schools. CEI will help districts identify what is working and engage CDE and other experts to help districts spread innovation beyond pilot schools.

- *Funding personalized learning:* Evaluating the real start-up costs, identifying appropriate funding sources, and prioritizing resource allocation is a hurdle for all three school districts to clear. CEI and CDE will support district and school leaders in balancing school budget autonomy with coordinated efforts to use state and federal funding for innovation.

- *Implementation plan:* The Coalition provides the foundation for the shift to personalized learning by focusing on three things: supporting the hard work of school design and implementation; leveraging lessons learned to support more schools (district-wide scale); and rethinking both the design of schools and the design of district systems that support schools (district-level redesign).

The three Coalition districts have each selected two schools to participate in a whole-school next generation learning model design phase in 2014-15, based on a set of agreed-to readiness criteria co-developed by Coalition partners. These criteria assess schools' readiness to launch pilots; emphasize the inclusion of students, parents, and community members; and set an expectation that information will be shared across Coalition partners. Taken together, the range of pilots across different settings will help identify the major policy changes needed to free all districts to operate as next generation learning systems.

Since each district comes to the work from a different entry point, common school design parameters are important to create some consistency. The Coalition has developed a menu of options for districts and schools to consider, including both structural designs such as competency-based pathways and instructional designs such as use of varied and frequent assessments. Pilot schools will implement these design changes slowly to help them monitor results and course-correct as needed. In parallel, the Coalition will identify and build awareness about lessons learned from the pilot schools to increase the pipeline of schools and educators who are willing, ready, and able to design and implement next generation models. This work will focus on helping two key groups become informed and prepared: 1) engaging consumers (parents, students, employers, and post-secondary institutions) with school design and implementation processes; and 2) readying more and more early adopters as critical friends with school design teams and participants in relevant topical design networks.

The Coalition will also engage in a district-level system design process that examines how district functions, structures, and processes support personalized learning, and explores different ways to organize a district. This will enable the Coalition to identify opportunities to improve district systems and begin addressing them now to support pilot schools, and to pave the way for systemic next generation learning implementation more broadly.