

Personalized Learning Plans and Learner Profiles

TOOL: Learner Profiles and Personalized Learning Plans

GOAL: These tools help a student to identify academic and social-emotional needs, goals, and pace; keep track of them; and enable teachers to use them to truly personalize learning.

BREAK THROUGH MODELS: Caliber: Beta Academy, Thrive Public Schools and Chicago International Charter School West Belden
– A Distinctive School Campus

What are Learner Profiles?

A learner profile is just that — a profile of each student as a learner. Student strengths and gap areas, motivation and goals, learning styles, and other personal data related to their learning experience and needs all may be captured in a learner profile.

Chicago International Charter School West Belden (CICS), Thrive, and Caliber all use data, observations, and student-teacher-parent conferences to capture information for their learner profiles. CICS, for example, starts with a [simple survey](#) for its first through third graders, posing questions which allow children to think meta-cognitively about their learning preferences. Scott Frauenheim, Director at CICS, explains, “the Learner Profile is whole scale and interdisciplinary, it informs the rest of the planning.” For elementary school teacher, Jaclyn Vasko, at Thrive, the learner profiles give her deeper insight into her students. “They allow me to know each kid individually, their interests, strengths, and needs. And they are student-driven documents.”

What are Personalized Learning Plans?

Personalized learning plans (PLPs) create the path for the individual learner. They consist of student “daily actionable” goals, action steps, competencies, and sometimes pacing recommendations, as shown in this [example](#) from Caliber. These plans guide students in their learning journey and ensure they accomplish what they need academically and social-emotionally in a way that works best for them.

Both learner profiles and PLPs are living documents: they are frequently revisited and updated by students and educators. At Thrive, for example, Wednesday is used as a flexible day for one-on-one goal check-ins with students. During this time students share where they are in meeting mastery toward their goals and set a plan for moving forward.

Why are Learner Profiles and Personalized Learning Plans used?

“We know we serve complex learners, so we wanted to make sure that independent of where they

started they could all move forward and get prepared for college and have within them some seed of eagerness for a career,” says CEO of Thrive Public Schools, Nicole Assisi. By gathering information about each student and tracking individual content mastery and progress, learner profiles and PLPs allow teachers to organize, pace, differentiate, and monitor instruction so that each student’s education works for and with him or her and help them to create pathways to a future they dream about. Perhaps more importantly, these tools put the learner at the center of the learning plan — not outside of it. Learner profiles and PLPs can give students an authentic voice in their education and help them exercise independence as learners. Thrive, Caliber, and CICS use these tools so students can regularly practice responsibility, goal setting, and purposeful choices, all skills they’ll need to be successful after graduation.

How is it different than past approaches?

Students drive the development of their learner profile and PLP and in using them to guide their learning. This is a stark contrast with a summative grade report provided to students at the end of a term. With learner profiles and PLPs, students start the year providing input into

“Fundamentally, because every child is different, if you want them to master the same skills you need to teach them differently.”

Rui Bao, Head of Data and New Schools, Caliber Schools

how they will learn. They then work in partnership with teachers to develop goals and action plans for how to meet those goals. Students at Thrive, Caliber, and CICS also use their PLPs to lead the student-teacher-parent conference, sharing their progress with their family.

Check out these examples of PLPs from Thrive and Caliber, as well as other schools and districts around the country. As you can see, each organization has their own take for how to approach utilizing these tools and the data they want to include. For example, Summit Public Schools based in California has developed an open and free online app that lets students and teachers track progress against long-term goals and plan learning around it. Explore the rest below!

Personalized Learning Plans

- [Thrive Middle School & Thrive Elementary School](#)
- [Caliber](#)
- [Vermont Department of Education](#) *(here's an example of a filled out PLP!)*
- [Summit Public Schools](#)

At Caliber, for example, the students and teachers develop five PLPs per year (starting a new one at the beginning of each term). The process begins with the co-creation of goals and action steps, regular check-ins on progress, and reflection on growth at the end of the period, including sharing the PLP with parents through student-led conferences. “Built into our work are daily and weekly check-ins on whether students are

making progress toward their ultimate goals,” Head of Data and New Schools, Caliber Schools, Rui Bao, explains. With frequent check-ins, students see the impact of their day-to-day actions on realizing their larger hopes and dreams for the future.

PLPs also provide much more detailed information than summative grade reports, and from day one. They document academic growth and assessment scores as well as allowing educators to capture data and progress around non-academic skills and competencies.

What is the advantage for students?

Using these tools, students tend to own their learning and understand their growth in a deep way. Through thoughtful discussions of their goals, dreams, and passions, and in answering what they want to do and how they can make sure they'll get there, students begin seeing the implications and applications of content and learning in their life. “It is so amazing to see students take ownership of their daily academic goals,” says Frauenheim. “Seeing the growth in students and the emotion in parents is what personalized learning is all about.”

Understanding their school career trajectory also increases daily engagement; students can track their day-to-day tasks and see how each individual activity is moving them along to reach their greater goals. “Students aren't bored in

class, and if they are, they know how to fix it,” says Assisi. In reflection with their teachers, students are also able to track how meeting goals and overcoming challenges impacts their portfolio and their non-academic personal growth.

Another advantage is transparency in grading and monitoring learning progress. Nothing should be a surprise. When students are part of creating their own goals and identifying supports, they have a much clearer idea of what they need to do to show mastery and they are able to see the incremental steps they are taking to get there.

How does it improve learning?

Imagine starting each year with an in-depth picture of each student, rather than a few numerical test scores. Teachers at Caliber, Thrive, and CICS have access to a trove of information about each of their students and how they learn; look at all that is captured in the [learner profile](#) CICS uses.

These teachers then get to work side-by-side with students planning the next steps on their learning path.

The various types of data captured in the tools can better inform instruction and educational choices. Teachers are not compelled to “teach to the middle” or follow a predetermined trajectory because the tools equip them with knowledge that enables them to differentiate seamlessly for and with their students.

“When you know what holes you need to fill...learning can happen much more quickly,” Bao explains. For example, if you identify through the plans that a sixth grader entering your school is missing a particular second grade level math concept, you can better craft a sixth grade learning plan that provides opportunities to develop the understanding and skills behind that second grade level math concept.

What is the advantage for instructors and administrators?

Rather than preparing materials for whole group instruction around a pre-determined curriculum, teachers in the three schools use their planning time to target lessons to individual student needs — reviewing data and creating groupings, dynamic content, interventions, and lessons — all based on real-time data and results embedded in their students’ learner profiles and PLPs. To leverage these tools to their maximum benefit, teachers and staff need to have deep knowledge on how to use student data dynamically, and how to shift on a dime to meet a student where he or she needs.

Through the learner profiles and PLPs educators at all three schools notice that relationships, rigor, and relevance of the work have all been transformed. They also speak to a higher level of

collaboration as the documents give them a shared vision that they use in coordination to personalize and optimize the learning for their students. “Using these documents lets the kids know we trust them, and it gives us time to build relationships between one another. That’s the purpose behind this work,” says Colleen Collins, Assistant Director at CICS.

What are the challenges?

The greatest challenge is finding a way to capture all the rich information they are gathering about students in one place. All three schools use a variety of blended learning platforms and dashboards that they wished communicated with one another in a more seamless way. “We are still tinkering with the right way to put the PLP together, to make all the information come together and to manage, store and share that data,” says Assisi. For now teachers take on the work of integrating the information so that they can meaningfully reflect on it with students.

Another challenge of utilizing these tools is time management. All three schools have created schedules that allow for teachers to meet regularly with students to check in on progress and with their colleagues to analyze data and design future learning experiences. Time is also needed to educate parents and bring them onboard with what learner profiles and PLPs are all about. This step is

especially important because parents are key to supporting the individual goals and progress of their child.



What’s next?

Thrive has already begun using [PLPs for teachers](#) to plan their own professional development. In these PLPs, teachers create goals for themselves and use the document to plan and track their growth in collaboration with their principal.

Caliber is working to streamline and automate some of their processes so that teacher brainpower is used to co-create goals and design instruction rather than copy data or transfer observations into the plans.

CICS is working to make these tools completely student-driven. “Surprisingly we’ve actually gotten the farthest with the youngest students,” says Collins. “It’s ok to provide support for kids as needed in creating these and engaging them in the process; it doesn’t need to be a blanket approach. The key is to get them to drive these documents.”