Personalized Learning at Loudoun County Public Schools (LCPS):
An interview with Mr. James Dallas, Director of Teaching and Learning, LCPS
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These notes were transcribed after a 30-minute conversation with Mr. Dallas on 8/30/2018; these are not direct quotes from Mr. Dallas. My notes represent the spirit of our discussion.

What is personalized learning all about? We hear about it but what does it actually mean?

From the LCPS web site: "Personalized Learning is dynamically tailoring learning experiences to students' strengths, needs and/or interests. A PL approach supports Project Based Learning (PBL) and One to the World by encouraging the following:

(1) Access to significant content for students who may have learning gaps
(2) Challenges for students who have shown basic mastery
(3) Relevance for all students as their interests help shape the direction of "meaningful contributions to the world."

The outcome of learning in LCPS is students who are knowledgeable critical thinkers, communicators, collaborators, creators and contributors. These traits allow students to make meaningful contributions to the world.

Loudoun Schools are implementing the Core 4 of Personalized Learning in their schools which include:

More information about these PL can be found here:
https://docs.google.com/document/d/1iRrQqubpDEyGfsEPRkXhTe9K8Q8mSrTw0RbUFC_dI8s/edit

How many schools here in Loudoun have implemented personalized learning? There are 40 schools implementing PL in the 2018-2019 school year. This has been a phased approach. Each spring, schools apply to become personalized learning schools. We choose schools where the leadership is bought in and prepared to truly transform the way teaching is done at the school. A personalized learning centric classroom looks very different from a traditional classroom. You'll see things like flexible seating, group work, there is creative thinking going on, it's loud, it's messy…there isn't a teacher standing at the front of the room dissemination information.

How can this approach help to better challenge our most advanced students? In every class in elementary and middle school, an assessment is given out at the start of the year and twice throughout the year called Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) testing. These are computer-adaptive achievement tests in Mathematics and Reading which generates, "RIT scores," which are tracked throughout the year to measure progress. The difference between MAP testing and DRA and other tests is the MAP has no ceiling. Advanced

students will be measured on their true ability regardless of how many grades/levels ahead they are when they start the year. Throughout the year, RIT scores are expected to go up.

Personalized learning in general allows teachers to differentiate based on ability. Using the RIT scores, teachers can group students or develop curricula that meet a student where their needs are. To help teachers do this, LCPS has published Curriculum Guides. Not only are lessons planned according to a student's ability but also to their interests and needs. If a student is weak in an area but very advanced in another, lessons can accommodate both backfilling in the weaker area and stretching the student in the area where they area advanced.

How do the Chrome books play into PL? Personalized learning is not about the device. The laptops are just a tool that allows students to access digital content. Personalized learning is about the content, not the modality of access. The decision to issue Chrome books to students was separate and distinct from the decision to launch PL in some of our schools.

How does PL prepare students for the SOL? Personalized learning requires a change of thinking for teachers. The one phrase we use all of the time when training teachers is, "It's not about the test!" If you are making the content personally relevant, students will engage with the material. If they engage, they will master the material. SOL's and other tests measure mastery so PL helps students do very well on tests, especially ones like the SOL designed to measure the minimum material students are expected to learn each year. PL moves the focus away from the test and back to helping students deeply learn.

How does PL work in conjunction with Project Based Learning (PBL)? From the LCPS web site: "Project Based Learning (PBL) is an inquiry-based process for teaching and learning. In PBL, students focus on a complex question or problem, then answer the question or solve the problem through a collaborative process of investigation over an extended period of time. Projects often are used to investigate authentic issues and topics found outside of school. During the inquiry process, students learn content, information, and facts necessary to draw conclusions about the question. Students also learn valuable skills and habits of mind during the process." For more information, visit https://www.lcps.org/domain/17792.

PL allows for much deeper learning when it's used in conjunction with PBL. Think of it this way…PBL is a methodology for delivering instruction (the "how") while personalized learning provides the structure (the "what").

How is the effectiveness of PL measured throughout the year? We have built into the PL curriculum opportunities for stakeholders to give feedback that is helpful, kind and specific (that's how we teach students to share feedback during PL lessons). Dr. Tyler can share more about student growth and PL program metrics (Note: I have an email into Dr. Ryan Tyler, LCPS Research Supervisor, to ask him some questions).