

Supporting Personalization for Academic and Social Learning in High Schools

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The National Center On Scaling Up Effective Schools spent the 2010-2011

school year observing classrooms and interviewing students, teachers, support staff, and school leadership teams across four high schools in South Florida to study the policies, programs, practices, and processes that made these schools effective in reaching all learners. From our multi-level comparative case study research in these schools, along with existing research on effective schools nationwide, we find that the effective schools in Broward developed a systemic approach to personalization for academic and social learning. This brief explains the elements of Personalization for Academic and Social Learning (PASL), and gives examples of potential interventions schools can develop and use to improve PASL.

Definition

Personalization for academic and social learning (PASL) represents a systemic, school-wide approach to meeting the academic and socio-emotional needs of high school students. PASL refers to the ways in which schools actively encourage students to develop a sense of belonging to the school as a whole, as well as meaningful, positive connections with adults and other students.

What does it look like?

When administrators and teachers concentrate on personalization for academic learning, they hold high expectations for student's academic success, get to know students as individuals, customize instruction to meet the needs, experiences, and interests of their students, and develop students' sense of belonging and engagement in their learning.

Key Findings:

- Systemic structures to promote strong relationships between adults and students
- Programming to meet both academic and socio-emotional outcomes.
- Strong and reliable disciplinary and support systems for students that create feelings of caring and trust
- Instructional activities that drew on students' experiences and interests
- Stronger linkages with parents

When schools promote personalization for socio-emotional learning, they explicitly build students' capacity to recognize and manage emotions, solve problems, and build relationships with others; these schools also encourage informal personalization through positive school climate achieved through administrators' and teachers' expressed ethic of caring, concern, and support for students' well-being, intellectual growth, and educational success.

Critical to PASL is a behavior management system consistently enforced by administrators and teachers that addresses student behavior in an individual and fair manner and in which students feel safe.

In schools that promote a culture of personalization, students not only feel safe, but also exhibit a sense of belonging toward the school that, in turn, leads to higher motivation, engagement, and sense of self-efficacy.

Potential Practices, Policies, Programs, Processes

We identified a number of school-wide structures that increased personalization in schools. These organizational structures supported the practice of meaningful conversation among students and the adults at these schools, including administrators, guidance counselors and support personnel.

- Targeted looping of educator teams, in which assistant principals, guidance counselors, and teachers shared the same students over years in order to develop meaningful relationships
- Proactive use of data by administrators, teachers, and support staff to monitor student progress, provide feedback to students, and create targeted, personalized interventions
- Opportunities for participation through extensive athletic and extra-curricular options
- Small learning communities created through student teaming
- Consistent behavior management systems
- College readiness programs (AVID, etc)
- Comprehensive middle school articulation plan that helped students understand the transition and feel connected to their high school