

# MA Personalized Learning Network School Selection and Design Process

## Introduction and Background

As Massachusetts' student population grows more diverse and new skills and competencies are required of our graduates to be successful, schools need a new approach to successfully educating all our youth. The one-size-fits-all model of the past will not close achievement gaps or produce citizens equipped with the knowledge, skills, and entrepreneurial spirit that will be necessary for success in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The Center for Collaborative Education (CCE) believes that the key to educational equity and excellence for all students in the Commonwealth lies in personalized learning.

In March 2014, the Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education released a report on *The New Opportunity to Lead*, providing recommendations for the future of MA education, in which they called for “unleashing innovation.” The report calls for the state to “adopt new models of schooling which are student-centered and personalized: where students can learn anytime, anywhere; where teaching is more tailored to their needs and aspirations; where students play a much more active role in their own learning; and where they move ahead once they have mastery of relevant knowledge and skills.”

The Massachusetts Personalized Learning Network (MA PLN) seeks to create a critical mass of schools that exemplify personalized, competency-based, and authentic learning approaches in educating students, in which students are at the center of learning. Our goal is to fundamentally change the public discourse about what constitutes excellent schools for diverse students in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Through a multi-district approach, we seek to create a MA “tipping point” for equity-minded personalized learning (PL) schools.

## District Selection

Over the coming years, MA PLN will sponsor annual cohorts of personalized learning schools. All proposed school designs will originate within selected MA urban school districts. MA PLN seeks to demonstrate that personalized learning schools can become the preferred learning option in districts rather than a “boutique” school on the district fringe. Preference will be given to middle and high schools in urban districts that:

- Serve high percentages of students who are low-income, Black, Latino, and/or English Language Learners; rated below the state average in all or some of these areas.
- Have district leadership that share the vision of and embrace the MA PLN principles
- Commit to launching multiple PL schools over multiple years
- Commit to using PL as a means to close the achievement gap by race, income, and language
- Extend autonomy to each PL school through Innovation or Horace Mann Charter I status or a “thin contract” between the local teacher union and the school committee

- Have or commit to creating the needed technology infrastructure to support PL-aligned blended learning

## School Selection as a Planning School

Upon district selection and a signed agreement, CCE will identify potential schools through a competitive application process within each district. We will be seeking a mix of conversion schools and new school designs. Preference will be given to proposed designs that embrace all MA PLN tenets and can demonstrate break-the-mold capacity. Selected teams will receive planning grants as well as support in all aspects of design and (should the school apply and be approved for the implementation grant) early implementation (through the first two launch years) that will be contextualized to each individual design team.

An information session will be held within each MA PLN district to provide an overview of the MA PLN and the benefits to schools interested in becoming personalized learning schools. A Request for Proposals (RFP) to be accepted as a MA PLN planning school will be distributed to interested schools that focuses on the school’s rationale for participation, commitment to the MA Personalized Learning principles and six school conditions, as well as intended school outcomes in student engagement, achievement, and teacher efficacy. The completed proposal, including the signature of District Superintendent or designee, will be submitted to CCE for review.

**Estimated Timeframe: one month from the information session**

School Conditions	Personalized Learning Principles
1. School Leadership and Vision	1. Authentic Learning
2. Aligned District and School Autonomies	2. Competency-based Learning
3. Professional Collaborative Communities	3. Flexible Learning
4. Family and Community Partnerships	4. Student-driven Learning
5. Cultural Relevance and Attention to Equity	5. Dispositions for Learning
6. Campus Technology and Infrastructure	

Using a scoring rubric based on the conditions and readiness for personalized learning, RFPs will be reviewed by a team which will include CCE’s Personalized Learning Team, DSD Senior Director, and CCE Executive Director along with representatives from other CCE teams, and external partners such as DESE and NGLC. Proposals will be rated:

- *Accepted;*
- *Accepted with Required Revisions; or*
- *Declined*

A written response to the RFP will be created and sent to the school principal and district designee.

**Estimated Timeframe: 2 weeks**



## Technical Assistance to Planning Schools

Approved design teams will be expected to participate in a rigorous planning process. The goal will be for each team to develop a comprehensive, research-based personalized learning school design that has high success potential.

- **Planning Grant:** Selected planning design teams will receive a \$10,000 planning grant to be used in support of the design process, including stipends for design team members, consultants, travel to visit PL schools, materials, conferences, and food.
- **Orientation Activities:**
  - **Administration Orientation & Planning:** District and school administration will meet with PL Director and/or assigned coach to review the design process, identify school leadership and design team, and schedule timeline for survey, orientation meetings, and design team PD and workshops.
  - **Readiness Survey (for conversion schools):** A school readiness survey (based on the PL School Planning Document) will be administered to design team members to get baseline data on current implementation of the Personalized Learning Network Principles.
  - **Design Team Orientation & Planning:** An orientation will be provided for the school's identified design team to introduce them to PL, the five principles of PL, the process for school design, the schedule of meetings, use of the online learning platform, Buzz, and their role and responsibilities.
  - **Full Staff Orientation:** An orientation will be provided for all school staff to introduce them to the concept of personalized learning, the five principles of PL, and the process for school design and teacher input. This will be an opportunity to field questions from school staff.
- **Design Team Personalized Learning Institute:** The identified design teams will engage in a PL Institute that will extend over a 6-8 month period. This interactive institute will provide an immersion in the PL principles and conditions, while enabling team planning towards the design and development of individual school PL plans. The institute will begin with an initial gathering in the spring followed by a 2 day summer meeting. In the fall, the cohort will reconvene twice to apply online learning and give and receive support from design teams from six schools. As part of the Design Institute, each design team will attend two site visits to a school in New England which exemplifies the intended goals of their PL school plan.
- **Coach Support:** A CCE coach will be assigned 15-20 days with each school in the MA PLN and will meet on a regularly scheduled basis with the school leadership and design team to support the development of a comprehensive school PL implementation plan. This may also include providing ongoing professional development to staff. A coaching plan will be developed for each planning school.
- **Gaining Autonomy:** PL school designs will be required to gain Innovation, Horace Mann Charter I school status, or a "thin contract" between the local teachers union and school committee in order to ensure they have a full slate of autonomies. CCE staff will schedule and facilitate meetings among each team, the district staff, and as needed the union to discuss and negotiate the autonomy model of choice and conditions for the proposed design and plan.
- **Building Public Support:** MA PLN staff will assist each design team and district to develop a plan for building district, school committee, parent, and community support. This work might include school committee presentations, public relations materials, and community forums.



- **Policy Support:** CCE staff will work with PL schools, member districts, and the MA Department of Elementary & Secondary Education to problem-solve policy concerns at the district and state levels.

The end goal of the design phase is completion of a full implementation plan for a personalized learning school. This plan will be submitted to the district and MA PLN for review and approval.

## Early Implementation Support

Upon approval for implementation, early implementation support (first two years of launch) will be provided to each successful design team:

- **Implementation Grant:** Approved design teams will receive a \$100,000 implementation grant to be used in support of the school's launch, including salaries, stipends, consultants, travel, materials, conferences, and food.
- **Coaching:** CCE will provide coaching assistance in all aspects of preparing for school start-up and early implementation, including hiring school leaders and staff, scheduling, curriculum and assessment, professional development, teaming, and Election-to-Work Agreements for faculty, with the PL Principles as the lens. Technical assistance will be provided to build a strong governing board to oversee and guide the school's development, including member selection and by-laws.
- **District Technical Assistance:** The work will include collaboration with the district around facility set-up and preparation, school support for its financial model, hiring practices, and special education and ELL services.
- **Network Support:** A MA Personalized Learning Network will be formed for all MA PLN schools. Quarterly leadership sessions will be convened using text-based discussions, dilemma-based consultancies, and sharing of effective practices. Cross-network learning walks will be scheduled as part of each network meeting, with host schools identifying key questions to guide the observations and debrief discussions.
- **District & State Policy Support.** CCE staff will continue to work with PL schools, member districts, and the MA Department of Elementary & Secondary Education to problem-solve policy concerns at the district and state levels, with the goal of rethinking policy to support a new generation of personalized learning schools.
- **School Quality Review:** CCE will conduct a PL School Quality Review (SQR), built upon a set of key benchmark practices (framed by the PL Principles) and outcomes indicators. These reviews will take place in the fall of year two of school launch in order to provide each school with comprehensive data on progress that should inform refinements of the design implementation, and every four years thereafter. Each partner district will participate in the reviews in order to build district-school collaboration.

