

# HOW TO SUCCESSFULLY SCALE PERSONALIZED LEARNING: SIX KEY LESSONS FROM EFFECTIVE PROGRAMS

Fuel Education in partnership with Getting Smart



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# INTRODUCTION

In February 2014, [Getting Smart](#) and [Fuel Education™](#) (FuelEd™) came together to release [Fueling a Personalized Learning Revolution in Secondary Education](#). The paper highlighted how personalized, blended learning can improve access to high-quality learning opportunities by focusing on various experiences of high school students in districts across the country.

**The ultimate goal of blended learning is to create opportunities for student learning to be customized to individual needs and personalized along unique learning pathways.**

Our first paper contended that the ultimate goal of blended learning is to create opportunities for student learning to be personalized along unique pathways. We described the way in which personalization revolutionizes how students learn and teachers teach in schools and districts across the country. Benefits include increased engagement as a result of powerful learning experiences, access to tools that support quality work products, and choices in learning opportunities beyond the traditional school day. This personalized approach provides students ownership of the learning experience, flexibility in path, and opportunities to progress at an individual pace.

In this follow-up paper, we shift our focus from individual classrooms and courses to explore the question of scale. Specifically, we were interested in learning how schools and districts successfully scale online and blended programs so that a growing number of students have access to the potential of personalized learning.

## Our Process

The Getting Smart research team worked with FuelEd to identify a diverse sample of clients who would represent the wide range of schools and district partners they serve. Together we narrowed the list to six featured participants to interview for this paper.

With the intention of capturing key lessons related to scaling personalized learning to extend learning opportunities for all students, we asked such questions as:

*What is the state of online and blended learning in your district? What was your entry point into online and blended learning, and how did that act as a catalyst in serving more students? How have data and results informed your decisions to expand online and blended learning options? How do online and blended learning help you to scale personalization in order to meet the needs of increasing numbers of students? What successes have you had? What lessons have you learned?*

This paper captures our findings from these interviews and describes both a framework to consider in creating a plan and six key lessons from educators experienced in scaling their online and blended learning programs.

## What Is Personalized Learning?

Personalized learning is defined as conditions in learning that help support individualized and/or customized learning experiences for students. These conditions often include allowing a student to work at his or her own pace, expanding learning opportunities beyond the traditional school day, and tailoring individual courses to meet student-specific interests and needs. As described in *Fueling a Personalized Learning Revolution*, teachers can leverage technology to give students a more powerful and personalized learner experience. This means arming students with smart tools and content that engages them in meaningful work and demands critical thinking, creates opportunities for collaboration, and results in high-quality demonstrations of mastery.<sup>1</sup> We know that these types of skills prove increasingly important for college and career success, and these demonstrations of competency will remain a relevant tool for student assessment.

For this reason, many schools and districts also approach personalized learning through other methods such as [project-based learning](#), [competency-based learning](#), and [work-based learning](#). Several of the people we interviewed integrated their blended and online learning initiatives with other methods, like project-based learning, all under the common goal of boosting personalization. Principal Nathan Barrymore explains how this integration works at Da Vinci Schools: “Project-based learning is personalized automatically, because deliverables for students aren’t set in stone. It’s about much higher engagement, thinking more critically, and students refining a product that they helped create.”

According to a recent [infographic](#), the FuelEd approach to personalized learning has 10 components:

- 1 Certified instruction and professional development
- 2 Tailored services and implementation support
- 3 Integration with district systems
- 4 FuelEd content
- 5 Open educational resources
- 6 Teacher-authored content
- 7 Third-party vendor content
- 8 Single informative view
- 9 Mobile access to monitor students
- 10 Competency-based assessment reports



Nathan Barrymore is a principal and founding member of Da Vinci Schools—a charter school network serving students two miles south of Los Angeles. Blended learning is one way that the Da Vinci Schools approach personalization, but it is just a component of their overall approach. The schools prize project-based and authentic learning with a focus on college and career readiness. Priorities include: creating deeper learning experiences, taking learning beyond the school walls, and into the community as well as solving meaningful challenges.

# The new generation of personalized learning delivered by FuelEd

## Challenges facing traditional instruction:

only 53% spent teaching



47%

- Grading
- Lesson planning
- Attendance
- Conferences
- Classroom management
- In-service training
- Staff meetings
- Professional development

Which challenges are driving change according to district leaders?



2013 AP computer science exam



## How can you transform this student and teacher experience?

**THE 4 E's** Engage each student | Increase education equality | Expand access to quality content | Multiply teacher effectiveness by allowing them to focus efforts

### 10 FuelEd Approach to personalized learning

- Integrate curriculum and content
- FuelEd Content
- Open Educational Resources
- Teacher Authored Content
- 3rd Party Vendors

### 10 Student Benefits of personalized learning

- Certified instruction & professional development
- Tailored services and implementation support
- Integration with district systems

Curriculum is specifically tailored for each student's unique needs

8 Single Informative View

Competency-based Assessment reports

Continuous feedback

Any place

At student's own pace

32%

62%

50%

- Questions answered according to student preference
- Different learning objects and types help students learn their own way
- Expanded curriculum options
- Gain 21st century learning skills used in the workplace, college

getfueled.com

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Sources: [http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/DigitalEducation/2014/01/big\\_race\\_gender\\_disparities\\_discovered\\_on\\_ap\\_computer\\_science\\_exam.html](http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/DigitalEducation/2014/01/big_race_gender_disparities_discovered_on_ap_computer_science_exam.html), Quality Counts, Education Week Research Center, 2014

## What Are the Benefits of Personalized Learning?

Schools have found many benefits to personalized learning. We see the advantages of personalized blended and online learning falling into two main categories: improved student outcomes and expanded student access.

### Improved Student Outcomes

The ultimate benefit of personalized, blended learning models is in improved learner outcomes. Increasingly, schools and school districts show that personalizing learning doesn't just work for some students; it works for students at all achievement levels. It can help fill knowledge and skills gaps for students who have fallen behind. Students already doing well in school can continue to move through content at their own pace. Students who excel academically do not risk their own progress being thwarted. And overall, when students have more ownership of their learning and

"In order to create a powerful learner experience, we must empower students with smart tools, engage them in meaningful work, personalize their learning environments, and create opportunities to develop Deeper Learning competencies. The learner experience must also be seamless and cohesive—a goal more readily achieved when students and teachers can access all the courses, content, assessments, data, and communication tools they need from a single location. Solutions like FuelEd make all of this possible."<sup>2</sup>

can demonstrate more autonomy, they gain more experience developing Deeper Learning competencies that ultimately boost college and career readiness.

In *Online, Virtual and Blended Learning in Action*, Project Tomorrow and FuelEd studied the impact of blended learning in Poudre School District (PSD) Global Academy—a school that outpaced schools in Colorado in student growth during the 2013–2014 school year. Here, growth is measured by demonstration of at least one grade level of academic progress, regardless of where students start on the scale. The authors write, “In 2012 the growth rate for the students at PSD Global Academy was 51, meaning that the growth rate for students at this school was 51 percent higher than other students statewide. By spring 2014, that growth rate jumped to 70. In the most recent TCAP [Transitional Colorado Assessment Program] testing, PSD Global Academy students were 70 percent higher than their peers statewide in reading, 81 percent higher in writing, and 52 percent higher in math. While single year scores are interesting, the upward trend of continuing growth year over year is more impressive and consistent with the school’s focus on student growth and a holistic approach to meeting the needs of each student on a personalized basis. A key aspect of that approach is obviously the effectiveness of the teaching and support staff to deliver on that promise.”<sup>3</sup>

Achieving improved learning outcomes demands the acknowledgement of the central role that teachers play in working with students in blended and online environments. Instructional strategies include using data generated by online tools to inform classroom instruction, customizing online content for school-specific needs, generating teacher-created content that works in concert with online content, and creating supplemental assessments that target individual student needs. Targeting student needs remains important in any personalized learning approach. As Shannon Burcham, principal at Trigg County High School in Cadiz, Kentucky, says, “Technology helps us sort out what [students] know and don’t know, but also helps us drill down across disciplines.”



Trigg County School District is a rural “District of Innovation” located in Kentucky, populated largely by tobacco growers and farmers. Principal Shannon Burcham and Computer-Based Instruction Monitor Michelle Strickland appreciate the opportunities that their partnership with FuelEd has created for students who often lack such options in rural districts. World language served as an entry point into blended learning for Trigg County. When their Spanish teacher retired, school leaders explored how a new approach to world language instruction could expand access for their students, and they now offer four languages through Middlebury Interactive Languages™ (a FuelEd partner). But world languages aren’t the only area in which students at Trigg County now have expanded options; blended and online learning are now available for the full range of students from credit recovery to Advanced Placement®. Burcham and Strickland express particular pride in their students now having access to 19 AP® courses—something very atypical for a rural district.

Because of blended and online model adoption and success, personalized learning opportunities have become available to all students. As Steve Cassity, a teacher and FuelEd coordinator at Independence School District in Missouri, reports, “We’re learning that this is how students like to learn—different generation, different type of learner.”

In *A Better Blend: A Vision for Boosting Student Outcomes with Digital Learning*, the authors discuss some of the benefits of personalized learning at scale for all students. All students can control their own path and pace of learning. The expanded resources offered beyond students’ schools allow them to learn what they want, based on individual goals. Also, students, teachers, and families can access data regarding learning mastery in a way that boosts motivation and often achievement.

Personalized learning at scale also benefits teachers. Because students are able to set their own pace for learning, students can move on to more challenging prompts or problem sets without waiting on peers. Consequently, teachers can spend more time with students who may need additional help, or they can allocate resources to spend time with students ready for additional challenges.<sup>5</sup>

### Expanded Access for Students

There are many ways in which expanded student access benefits both students and the schools they attend. With increased course access, students are able to personalize their learning in a way that meets their own goals—from remediation to acceleration, and everything in between. Online and blended learning offer students the capability to access learning opportunities that are not available in their school or district. They can access curriculum otherwise unavailable, due to the lack of certified teachers in that area or financial realities that make courses too expensive to offer (e.g., world languages or advanced math).

### LearnBop Proven to Increase Math Performance through Personalized Learning

LearnBop simulates a one-to-one tutoring experience that allows students to master fundamental math concepts at their own pace. An exclusive partner of FuelEd, LearnBop helps students identify any necessary knowledge they may lack when attempting a math problem and also helps them access prior knowledge. LearnBop proves a useful tool for closing the math achievement gap, saving time when it comes to teaching more effectively and efficiently. LearnBop enables teachers to see a picture of their students’ progress within and across grade levels, while identifying mastery levels of standards-aligned math concepts. Students’ understanding of math concepts is measured in “Mastery,” defined as the probability that the student has learned the concept. LearnBop calculates mastery based upon a reputable statistics model and sets the threshold at 90 percent, the point at which teachers can confidently believe the student has truly mastered the concept. LearnBop has been proven to improve performance for subjects like a middle school class in Brooklyn, New York, where the majority of students went from failing the state test, which was aligned to the Common Core State Standards, to passing it—in just eight months.<sup>4</sup>

“Daniel Mahlandt, coordinator of virtual education within the Ephrata Area School District in Pennsylvania, broadly defines personalized learning as using any kind of data—academic, social, emotional, and safety—to inform educators about a student’s needs. A successful program requires good data management to track student achievement and to provide an up-to-date progress report.”<sup>6</sup>

Trigg County High School, located in a very rural district in Kentucky that's largely populated by farmers and tobacco growers, serves just over 600 students. Principal Shannon Burcham is proud of "the expanded opportunities" he can now offer students, noting that it's "awesome to have access to 19 AP® courses. That's atypical for a small rural district."

Online and blended learning can also extend the learning day beyond the bell schedule, serve students who are homebound or interested in pursuing more home-based learning options, and help students pursue interests and fill educational gaps as they advance through K-12, striving toward college and career readiness. "Anytime, anywhere learning" means students can access content outside the school day for a range of purposes—from after school credit recovery to at-home enrichment.

Steve Cassity explains that the Independence School District leverages technology by experimenting with a blended model in what they call "Focus"—the high school version of homeroom. During that time, students access online learning to pursue interests and hobbies such as chemistry, biology, and art.

Increased course access means ensuring that students learn what they want and have some control over their own learning plan, goals, and courses of study. This increased access can lead to a higher level of motivation and engagement, especially when students take courses directly aligned with their interests. Students who may not have been engaged in more traditional coursework can now excel when given an expanding array of options.

In the past, when parents, students, and teachers asked Cassity about courses beyond those appearing on the traditional schedule, he had to say "no" to their requests more often than he wanted. Now, he explains, "One thing I really enjoy is my ability to say 'yes' to almost every request, because there are so many courses offered. Now, if the counselor comes to me and asks, 'We have a student who wants an accounting class; can we do that?'—this partnership allows me to say yes to fulfill almost any need."



Steve Cassity wears many hats in the

Independence School District (ISD) in Missouri; he serves as a teacher, FuelEd coordinator, and athletic coach. Like many districts, the entry point into online and blended learning at ISD stemmed from serving special student populations—for credit recovery and homebound students as well as for enrichment activities geared toward high achievers. ISD's program continues to grow and expand as teachers realize they can serve more students, and as students realize they can access a vast selection of new and interesting courses. Cassity identifies a number of elements that prove important to success: innovative leaders, an investment in professional development, and a plan to start small and to build as best practices reach completion.

**"One thing I really enjoy is my ability to say yes to almost every request because there are so many courses offered. . . . This partnership allows me to say yes to fulfill almost any need."**



# SCALING PERSONALIZED LEARNING — CREATING A FRAMEWORK

As a school or district prepares to scale personalized learning, a useful framework can involve answering questions and holding conversations related to the five phases of blended learning implementation. In FuelEd's *Blended Programs Workbook for Personalized Learning in Your Classroom*, the five phases of blended learning implementation are defined as: Strategy, Alignment, Plan, Implement, and Review. Any school or district looking to scale should spend time on each phase to ensure strong implementation, alignment, and ultimate success.

**Strategy:** A first step in scale of personalized learning involves defining strategies for success. Questions to ask include: What does success look like at scale? How is this work aligned to existing district or school goals and challenges? How does personalized learning at scale help address these key goals or challenges? Being clear about goals related to scaling and connecting them back to key district initiatives will help keep the work focused and grounded.

**Alignment:** The second stage—alignment—means ensuring that strategies from the first phase are supported by key stakeholders. Personalizing at scale requires support beyond the classroom. Questions to ask include: Who is supporting the work? What are the key elements to making this work successful at scale? Finally, it's important to identify the right team.

Tres Tyvand, student coordinator of the Bend-La Pine Schools Online Plus Program, says, “You don't want to alienate anyone politically or socially. Identify your stakeholders early in the process, and determine your blended learning proponents and opponents. If you have a vocal group of teachers or parents who are in opposition to blended learning, think about what you can do to gain their support. Identify a trusted peer within the affected group or a respected leader. Gain their support, and use them to help you gain support, buy-in, and momentum for your blended learning effort.”<sup>7</sup>

**Plan:** The third phase—planning for scale—includes having key conversations as a team to help ensure success. For example, what blended learning models do you already offer, and what do you want to do specifically to implement at scale? A variety of blended learning models exist that may take place at a school, including rotation, flex, enriched virtual, or a la carte.<sup>8</sup> What already works well, and what can be expanded? How often are students at the school versus in other locations? What percentage of the students' time is spent on and off campus? What has already worked well in the blended learning program? What best practices can be expanded for scale?

**Implement:** The implementation phase proves the true key to success, and it is especially important for thinking about programs at scale. What technology do you already have? What do you still need? What dedicated spaces are available? What other spaces do you need? Further considerations include increased curriculum and content, a strong learning management system (LMS), instructors, tech support, resources, and ongoing professional development. Thinking this through ahead of time can lead to increased success when scaling.

**Review:** The final step is to analyze progress at the individual, small group, and whole group levels to help you figure out ways to grow and scale programming for maximized results. Topics to think about in the review phase include various measures of student success, such as assessments and evaluations, data and reporting, as well as student and instructor feedback.

It is important to review student growth and progress of the program. Programs should regularly reflect and return to the mission and goals of the district. At Trigg County Schools, this meant creating space for reflection, being honest about areas of weakness, and setting goals to continue improvement. As Principal Shannon Burcham and teacher Michelle Strickland expanded their program, big lessons emerged from experimenting with different student processes, such as scheduling their courses versus giving them more flexibility. They also learned that the assumption of technology being a universal solution was the wrong approach. “We’ve acknowledged that not everything works for every kid. Some students function better in the classroom setting, and some work most meaningfully and efficiently on the computer.” At Shandon High School in California, math teacher Ray Jellison explains that staff members constantly reevaluate their offerings, which are totally driven by student demand. He comments, “We decide as the needs of our students are identified. We’re flexible year to year, based on what individual students need.”

Using these five stages of blended learning implementation can provide a useful framework for moving from small scale to larger scale implementation at the school or district level. Asking the questions in each of the five phases can help ensure that the appropriate steps are taken to have successful implementation at scale.



Ray Jellison is an experienced math teacher at

Shandon High School—a high school in small district in a rural farming town in California. When the master schedule revealed an open period in Jellison’s day, he had the opportunity to research curriculum and content options during that block. With the important goal of addressing “urgent needs” related to gaps in mathematical knowledge that prevent high school students from succeeding, he landed on LearnBop (a FuelEd partner) as the solution. The program, still early in its implementation efforts, now involves all eighth grade students, all lower-level math students at the high school level, and students in credit recovery, with an expansion goal of one day serving all students. LearnBop isn’t the only blended and online learning approach at Shandon. Students also access advanced math courses online such as FuelEd’s AP Calculus.”

# SIX LESSONS FROM THE TRENCHES ON SCALING PERSONALIZED LEARNING

Thousands of schools and districts offer some form of personalized blended and online learning. But this is still a relatively new frontier, and only a percentage of those schools have gone on to successfully scale their offerings. Our Getting Smart team worked with FuelEd to identify six programs to interview in order to understand important “lessons learned” in scaling personalized learning.



## 1 Simplify the Teacher and Student Experience

**Simplified Student Experience:** Students need a simplified, streamlined experience. If they can access coursework online with ease, and if the technology works simply in a variety of locations (at school, at home, and at the library without tech assistance), the students can make focused

online time more efficient and effective. This eliminates the need for tech assistance and also ensures that no barriers prevent the start of coursework. This is particularly important to teachers and instructors helping students with the content. If a teacher spends too much time on technology that isn’t working well for a student, there is less time to focus on instruction. This translates to less support for students who may be struggling to learn new content or looking to move ahead to more advanced concepts.

The user experience in both blended and fully online programs needs to allow students to work independently. As teacher Steve Cassity describes, “You can handle many more students in a FuelEd classroom because a lot of the learning is done independently. Every student isn’t calling me to his or her desk every day. They’re going through the information, taking notes, and completing assignments. Students can handle a lot more, too, because disruptions are minimized. They can study and take notes at home, and things like quizzes, exams, and passcodes are protected.” Karen Weintraub, principal of Evergreen Flex Academy in Vancouver, Washington, reiterates this point about the student experience with FuelEd’s PEAK™ Personalized Learning Platform. “The platform makes learning accessible and organized for these students. We are so grateful for it.” When the student experience is simple and works well, there is more time for instruction and support.

“Our district is fortunate to have leadership that sees the future of education and has made an investment in that vision. This takes innovative leaders like Dr. Herl and Dr. MacLaughlin with the vision to make the investment in the technology and professional development that makes it possible to serve our students in a comprehensive manner.”

—Teacher and FuelEd Coordinator Steve Cassity

“From a leadership perspective, when things get stressful, we don’t backtrack to what we thought worked in a brick-and-mortar setting, because that wouldn’t allow us to get where we are going. I’d never go back—because of the creativity, thinking outside of the box, and the problem solving.”

—David Knoche, principal at Falcon Virtual Academy in Colorado Springs

**Simplified Administrator/Teacher Experience:** Administrators need access to data about the coursework and students at the touch of a keyboard. If data is divided between various platforms, it can make administrators’ jobs that much more difficult. The same rings true for teachers. Teachers need a simplified experience where they can track their students’ progress, determine students’ strengths and needs, and chart appropriate times and places for assessment and instructional interventions. Principal David Knoche appreciates the PEAK platform. He explains that, for Falcon Academy, “PEAK helps with an overall temperature check and to manage emotional and academic stability of the school.” Principal Karen Weintraub describes the power this gives to Evergreen Flex Academy teachers: “They really know and understand what the kids are using. The platform organizes what the kids do and don’t do. We’re even more on top of what kids are doing now.”

Technology that includes a streamlined dashboard allows for more student support; it is important to maintain a dashboard for the program coordinators that allows them to view each student’s progress and identify which students are struggling or are achieving. The ability to systematically generate and distribute progress reports and student notices about grades and assignments effectively frees up time for the program coordinators to collaborate and spend time with these students.”<sup>9</sup>



## 2 Customize Courses and Content

If a school or district wants to offer a variety of courses to many students, it is vital that those in charge have the ability to customize the content. Many of the people we talked to appreciated that they could create and assign teacher-created material alongside the FuelEd content. Others appreciated being able to customize both content and assessments. Evergreen Flex Academy Principal Weintraub describes her experience with PEAK as “a great blend” of a product that provides courses and content fully built “out of the box” and one that allows teachers to “start from scratch” and build their own content.

Some of the specific teacher customizations we learned about included bringing in rich media content from such sources as YouTube® and Khan Academy®<sup>10</sup>. In a unified dashboard, teachers can actually track whether or not students access that content. Teachers can also insert assessments within the content in order to gain new insights into student performance. The assessment results then populate a unified dashboard that gives teachers, students, and families the full picture. Teachers are also able to share the content they create within their district and across various schools for which FuelEd is also a partner.



Karen Weintraub  
is principal of  
Evergreen Flex

Academy, a school that serves grades K–8 in Evergreen Public Schools, the fifth largest school district in Washington. The school is built upon an important partnership between home and school, with online learning serving as the common ground. The school values parents as Learning Coaches, since teachers work to personalize individual learning experiences for kids. Weintraub appreciates the role that technology plays in creating a solid picture of what kids are learning, and she values the active role teachers maintain in creating and customizing content.



### 3 Partner to Extend Access and Boost Outcomes

School districts need highly effective partnerships to extend personalized access and boost outcomes for all students. At scale, partners help provide extensive options and new, effective ways of delivering instruction.

While most schools are focused on providing core courses in a traditional learning environment, they often don't have the expertise to create and update content, or the technology needed to deliver that content. Partnerships with providers who can take care of some aspects of scaling personalization and increase opportunities to extend access can help alleviate any pain points. Principal David Knoche describes the challenge this way: "We wondered, 'How do we do this?' There was no road map for us."

What does a highly effective partnership mean? In choosing partnerships for scale, it is important to choose providers who customize options to fit the school and who can grow those options over time. If a school or district uses one unified platform such as PEAK for curriculum and reporting, this allows for all grade levels, classrooms, and various implementation modalities to be delivered via one system, thus streamlining the student and educator experience, and simplifying district data collection. Knoche explains the balance of roles this way, "I get to spend a much bigger portion of my day focusing on climate and culture of school. FuelEd takes care of instructional things. And our great teachers really make this happen. It's a good balance."

Scaling personalized learning can mean increased technological and content needs, and finding the right partner can make all the difference. The partnership needs to be one in which the tech is customizable and where there's available support to all constituencies: administrators, mentors, paraprofessionals, teachers, and students (across classrooms or schools). Strong partnerships with providers help ensure that schools and districts can meet their goals and outcomes.



David Knoche is the principal at Falcon Virtual Academy in Colorado Springs—the only K-12 blended learning school in District 49. The state-of-the-art building isn't the only thing innovative about the academy. Grades 7-12 use FuelEd content as their core foundational curriculum. As an online school, there's no mandate for kids to come into the building; however, the academy always teems with students, teachers, and parents. Student experiences vary from in-person labs and hands-on experiences, field trips, and "tinkering/maker sessions" to "i-learning days" that give students direct practice with standards for which assessments have shown they experience challenges. At Falcon, emphasis is placed on engagement and rigor—all powered by a true commitment to acknowledging the ways in which parents, students, teachers, and partners like FuelEd can all come together.

**"I get to spend a much bigger portion of my day focusing on climate and culture of school. FuelEd takes care of instructional things. And our great teachers really make this happen. It's a good balance."**

## Personalized Learning with FuelEd

Fuel Education partners with schools and districts to fuel personalized learning and to transform the education experience inside and outside the classroom in grades pre-K through 12. With access to its PEAK Personalized Learning Platform, districts become empowered to implement and grow their own successful online and blended learning programs. FuelEd has helped more than 2,000 school districts improve student outcomes, better serve diverse student populations, and expand students' educational opportunities by leveraging the power of technology-enabled learning.

FuelEd offers the industry's largest collection of pre-K through high school courses, enabling students to create personalized learning opportunities across numerous content areas.

FuelEd's PEAK Personalized Learning Platform:

- Simplifies administration and empowers teachers to customize courses with an open, easy-to-use platform
- Offers the ability to integrate curricula from FuelEd, Open Education Resources, and other vendors, as well as teacher-created content
- Provides a single, informative view of all online learning activities for the student and the teacher, thus improving reporting and analytics
- Supports teachers with tailored services such as certified instruction and professional development, in addition to customized implementation support and professional services

For math teacher Ray Jellison, working with a partner has helped his school address an urgent need for students—gaps in mathematical content knowledge that yielded “nose dives” in student achievement with middle school grades. LearnBop, a FuelEd partner, has been a powerful force in arming teachers with information about students to fill those holes. As Jellison describes, “The holes are not the same for every student. LearnBop helps us find them. We've learned that students are more successful working below their grade level in the program, to build their confidence as they fill the holes. Teachers can determine the assignments and kids move at their own pace. The best part is the recommendations to the teacher for skills where kids could use additional classroom practice.”

Partnerships between content providers and schools also need to support teachers so they can spend their time working effectively with students. Knoche makes this point when talking about his school's partnership with FuelEd. He says, “We are not taxing our teachers with things they're not trained for or capable of doing.” He continues, “We don't build curriculum; our teachers are here to support families. They're not trained to be instructional designers.” The partnership with FuelEd allows the teachers to do what they do best: teach.

In partnership with content and technology providers, school districts are able to bolster their personalized learning offerings, as well as student outcomes. Choosing the right partner with the appropriate digital tools and resources proves critical. In *Online, Virtual and Blended Learning in Action*, the authors looked at blending learning implementation and effectiveness at Poudre School District Global Academy.

Principal Heather Hiebsch and her team implemented FuelEd curricula to advance student growth, and they saw improvement in test scores for reading, math, and writing on the MAP tests from 2012 to 2014. Although there are many factors when considering the success of Poudre School District Global Academy (teacher effectiveness and parental involvement, to name a few) there is no doubt that choosing the right content provider and tech partner can “make it or break it” for a blended learning or online school.

“The effectiveness of the staff is dependent upon the quality of the content and curriculum being used within the program. According to [Principal] Hiebsch, leveraging the right digital tools, content and resources to truly personalize the learning process for each of their students is the ‘magic bullet’ behind their academic success.”<sup>11</sup>

Principal Hiebsch and her team are not alone in using data to evaluate blended learning program effectiveness. To Principal Knoche, the data served as the key indicator that the school should stay the course on the path to personalized, blended learning. He explains, “We started to look at the data. We were seeing increases across the board with the kids we started with.” With this realization, Knoche points out that improved outcomes for students remained the goal; blended learning was simply the vehicle. “Kids just ate it up. We expanded all the way to K-12 the next year. We had to make learning so engaging that kids would want to come and be a part of it. We started intertwining standards in a highly engaging way, and great teachers made this happen.”



4

## Invest in Your Leaders and Teachers

**Invest in Your Leaders.** For program effectiveness at scale, the district should ensure they have the key stakeholders with visionary leadership on board at every level. This includes the classroom, the school, as well as at the district office. These leaders should be part of all conversations around mission and vision. They should help create strategic plans to address goals, challenges, and gaps, and they should be involved in curriculum review, instructional alignment, and partnership cultivation.<sup>12</sup>

Principal Knoche knows the role of visionary leadership, saying, “Foundationally, you’ve got to love kids. Do you really know what your vision is? Ours was to ‘take care of kids.’ If you can make kid-centered decisions (not adult-centered ones), you can make progress.

**Invest in Your Teachers.** Professional development is important to ensure program effectiveness. In *District Conditions For Scale: A Practical Guide to Scaling Personalized Learning*, the authors state, “Each district should offer a job-embedded professional development program that aligns with the district’s vision for teaching and learning and to student needs. The professional development program should foster a culture of collaboration and continuous improvement while leveraging technology that creates a customized experience for each teacher that is available at any place and time.”<sup>13</sup> This echoes the vision presented in *Preparing Teachers for Deeper Learning*, a report that explores blended, competency-based, and job-embedded teacher professional development.

Recognize that blended and online learning models require adaptations and new skills for teachers. Teacher Steve Cassity offers this advice on implementation and teacher support: “Take the first year to do training. This is a dense program, and there is so much to learn. Then continue professional development and training. Consider building level experts as well as a district level coordinator.”

Unified technology platforms also help support teachers. Avoid some of the common pitfalls that impede teacher (or student) success. For example, try to avoid using different vendors for every solution. Try to determine a single place to access data and reports. Teachers have more time to do what they do best if they are not searching for multiple logins or helping students with tech issues across a variety of platforms and programs.



## 5 Grow with a “Stairstep” Approach

**Stairstep to Growth.** When it comes to scaling, it doesn’t necessarily make sense to scale all at once. Add new programs every semester or year. Do not try to do everything at once. Cassity believes it’s as simple as this: “Start small. Master it. Then expand.”

Our interviews confirmed that approaching expansion in this fashion powerfully impacts the likelihood of success. A common path toward scale involved

## “Start small. Master it. Then Expand.”

### Stairstep Scaling in Action.

One FuelEd client in Oregon started by offering courses not available in the traditional school to a small number of students—only 50. Each year they took another step, in this order:

- Online summer school and credit recovery
- Offering additional courses, including expanded electives, to a much broader group of students
- Full-time online school
- Blending learning for students taking both full-time and supplemental courses, with a dedicated space set aside in the traditional school

This district started by serving just 50 students and over 10 years has grown to now serve 2,700 students or 16 percent of their entire district. Each year, they either added more students to a current program or additional students into a new program—a great example of a district “stairstepping” their way to success with personalized learning at scale.



starting with students at the margins—often using credit recovery for struggling students and access to advanced courses for accelerated students. As students and their families experienced success with new types of learning, and as teachers and staff increased their own proficiency with new tools and content, general awareness and demand grew; soon students across the full spectrum of needs were being served.



## 6 Reward and Recognize Success

Scaling blended and online learning has great rewards, but it won't be simple. Recognize those administrators, teachers, paraprofessionals, and students who find success on a regular basis. Invite parents and community members to share in your victories.

At Falcon Virtual Academy, the school culture thrives on meaningful involvement among students, parents, teachers, staff members, and leaders. Principal Knoche describes the importance of creating a culture of collaboration where successes can be highlighted and shared. “We view parents as advocates for their kids. Let’s do the right thing for their families. So we have a family place,” he comments. “When parents are in the building, we don’t squash that. We want them right in the mix of it. They come. They learn with us. We have a ‘Parent University’ where we train our parents as Learning Coaches.”

## CONCLUSION

Schools and districts are scaling personalized learning so that the benefits can extend to an increasing number of students and teachers. Scaling requires certain conditions for success, including visionary leadership, teacher investment, professional development, technological investment, and powerful partnerships. And never forget to celebrate success!

Choosing the right partner can help schools and districts boost outcomes, increase course access, and offer engaging content to students across all grade levels. The right partner also allows for ease of user experience—by the administrators, teachers, and students. Personalized technology platforms allow for low-effort use and data collection, which can inform best practices for any blended or online model.

Partners like FuelEd help districts scale personalized learning through powerful collaboration. Schools and districts can focus on what they do best: providing excellent curriculum instruction for all students in core subjects. With FuelEd as a partner, schools and districts can provide students blended and online learning that allow for increased course access, a simplified tech experience, and customizable content to facilitate personalized learning at scale.

## ABOUT FUEL EDUCATION

Fuel Education partners with schools and districts to fuel personalized learning and transform the education experience inside and outside the classroom. The company provides innovative solutions for pre-K through 12th grade that empower districts to implement and grow successful online and blended learning programs. Its open, easy-to-use Personalized Learning Platform, PEAK™, simplifies administration and enables teachers to customize courses using their own content, more than 500 courses and titles, third-party partner content, as well as open educational resources. Fuel Education offers the industry's largest catalog of flexible digital curriculum, certified instruction, professional development, and educational services tailored to district and student needs. FuelEd has helped more than 2,000 school districts improve student outcomes, better serve diverse student population, and expand students' educational opportunities by leveraging the power of technology-enabled learning.

To learn more, visit [getfueled.com](http://getfueled.com).

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This paper was prepared with support from and in collaboration with Fuel Education.

We appreciate the time and contributions of all schools highlighted in the FuelEd Features, and we look forward to tracking their stories as they continue to bring online learning opportunities to the students in their care.

Copyediting by Corinne Whiting. Design by Kelley Tanner.

## ENDNOTES

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