



**SOUTH  
CAROLINA**

# Playbook

FOR  
**PERSONALIZED,  
COMPETENCY-BASED LEARNING**

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A Companion Resource to  
South Carolina's Education Flexibility Guide



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# An Introduction to Personalized, Competency-Based Learning in South Carolina

**Personalized, competency-based learning** is an approach to education transformation in which learning environments and experiences center student strengths, needs and interests, and provide young people with the differentiated supports they need to achieve the knowledge, skills and characteristics identified in the Profile of a South Carolina Graduate.<sup>1</sup>

This systemic approach to teaching and learning leads to educational environments that [empower and equip students, tap into the science of learning and development](#), promote [relevant and relationship-based learning experiences](#) and support ongoing [educator learning and professional growth](#). When implemented with fidelity, this approach meets the unique needs of each student, bolstering student agency and ownership over learning while empowering teachers to be learning facilitators with the freedom to be creative, flexible, experiential and project-based.

Educators across South Carolina and the US have been working on personalized and competency-based learning for years. Recently, the South Carolina Department of Education strengthened and added to the [policy supports that enable and encourage personalized, competency-based learning](#), making it easier for you and your school or district to start, spread and scale this student-centered and student-driven approach.

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1. This definition is adapted from [South Carolina's Education Flexibility Guide: Possibilities to Personalize Learning](#)

# South Carolina Department of Education's Office of Personalized Learning

The South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE) has an Office of Personalized Learning, dedicated to personalized, competency-based learning. The [#PersonalizeSC](#) team is made up of former education administrators and teachers who know the power and potential of personalized, competency-based learning because they have seen it in action and practiced it themselves. The office offers educators a resource-packed [website](#), [blog](#), [professional development offerings](#), [social media](#) and [podcast](#). These on-demand supports are available to you, your school(s) and your district for free.

In 2021, the SCDE Office of Personalized Learning released the updated [South Carolina Framework for Personalized, Competency-Based Learning](#), which defines and describes “personalized, competency-based learning” in this way:

Personalized, competency-based learning embeds equity within the culture, structure and pedagogy of schools...**student ownership is at the core** of creating equitable learning experiences through flexible learning environments, co-designed learner profiles and learning pathways. The Profile of the [South Carolina] Graduate competencies are infused into instructional practices and priority is placed on meeting the needs of every learner, every day.

This framework is a starting place for your team as you envision and deepen what personalized, competency-based learning looks like at your school(s), system-wide and with your students.

At the heart of this framework is students' ownership over their learning and mastery of the Profile of a South Carolina Graduate competencies. In the [framework](#), student ownership is described in this way:

**Student ownership supports self-directed, empowered learners who are actively engaged in driving their own success.** Self-awareness and self-assessment of learning are supported by educators in a culture of trust and transparency. Students can explain what they are learning, why they are learning it and how they will demonstrate their learning.

As described in the framework, there are three key concepts that encourage and enable personalized, competency-based learning: learning pathways, learner profiles and flexible learning environments. These can and should be implemented at the classroom, school and district levels. When activated, these concepts empower students, offering them ownership over their learning and mastery of the competencies in the [Profile of the South Carolina Graduate](#).

Following the release of the personalized, competency-based learning framework, SCDE published a comprehensive policy guide.

[South Carolina's Education Flexibility Guide: Possibilities to Personalize Learning](#) identifies and describes the full range of policies, provisions and permissions South Carolina schools can use to start, spread and scale personalized, competency-based learning efforts – from single school pilots to system-wide adoption.

**This “flex guide” is an essential resource for your team and a go-to for various policy options you can use to pursue personalized, competency-based learning.**

Taken together, the SCDE Office of Personalized Learning framework and the policy flex guide are a powerful primer on the possibilities of personalized, competency-based learning in your district and school(s). The South Carolina Playbook for Personalized, Competency-Based Learning is a new resource that should be viewed as a companion piece to the flex guide, full of field examples, advice from state and national leaders who have done this work and recommendations on policy flexibilities you can use to take the next step on your journey.

The [Makin' It Personal](#) podcast is an original #PersonalizeSC production, with half-hour episodes that will inspire, inform and equip you on your journey to personalize learning for your students and in your schools.

### What does it mean to be competency-based?

**South Carolina Competencies** are tools for defining and measuring growth toward the World Class Knowledge, Skills and Life and Career Characteristics of the Profile of the South Carolina Graduate through transferable skills, strategies and processes. Competencies and standards work in partnership as a connection across disciplines to ensure academic goals and personal success skills are measurable and transferable.

## Planning and Reflection Questions

- » *How does your district and/or school(s) define personalized, competency-based learning? If you want to create a definition, [start here](#).*
- » *Review the [South Carolina Framework for Personalized, Competency-Based Learning](#). Based on the framework:*
  - *How are you prioritizing student ownership of learning?*
  - *What opportunities do students have to develop and master the Profile of a South Carolina Graduate competencies?*
  - *How are you using learning pathways, learner profiles and flexible learning environments to foster student ownership of learning?*

# How to Use This Playbook

This playbook pulls together actionable advice, stories, resources and reflection questions to help you plan ways to implement, operationalize and deliver personalized, competency-based learning at the district and school levels. This resource is best used as a team planning guide, although it can be used for individual reflection.

If you are just getting started with personalized, competency-based learning, consider beginning with a quick read of the entire playbook. As you read, flag areas of interest and activities your school or district may already undertake. Many districts and schools implement a range of personalized and competency-based principles and practices even if they don't label them as such.

If you are already implementing or scaling personalized learning experiences, consider starting with the example area that best matches your shared vision and current areas of focus. From there, pick and choose sections that make sense for your school(s) and students.

If you choose to read through the entire playbook, you will notice some repetition across state policy sections. We've designed

the playbook so each example area can be read without needing to reference other sections. If you start with one example area, know that you aren't missing out on key policy strategies.

Throughout this playbook, we use icons to suggest whether a section is most appropriate for schools starting, spreading or scaling personalized, competency-based learning. This should not limit you from reading any section of the playbook, but it can help teams in the early and emerging stages of implementation. You will also note that within each section, there are references to the examples in the **Imagine if...?** section. Unless stated otherwise, they are referencing the **Imagine if...?** section in that particular example area.

## Establishing a Planning and Design Team

You may already have a district and/or school leadership team thinking about personalized, competency-based learning or related student-centered approaches. If so, that's the group to work through this playbook with. If not, you may want to assemble or mobilize a group to serve as your personalized and competency-based learning leadership team, working group or professional learning community (PLC).

We believe each of the following stakeholders are essential to this process and by including them early on, you will develop a robust and representative plan for personalized, competency-based learning at your school(s):

- » District decision-maker (e.g., superintendent)
- » School administrator (e.g., principal)
- » Special education director or lead educator
- » Instructional specialist or interventionist
- » Teachers
- » Student support staff
- » Parent representative(s)
- » Student representative(s)

Consider engaging individuals who are interested and excited about the possibilities of personalized, competency-based learning, especially if they have experience and success with this type of education already. As your team meets and plans, think about how you want to work with staff from the [SCDE Office of Personalized Learning](#). We are available to answer your questions, point you towards specific resources, and offer ongoing support.

## Companion Resources to the Playbook

Your planning team can use this playbook as an action tool and reflection guide to support professional learning, inform team meetings, facilitate planning and guide decision-making. Whenever you use the playbook, have these two additional resources readily available:

- » [South Carolina's Education Flexibility Guide: Possibilities to Personalize Learning](#)
- » [KnowledgeWorks' Finding Your Path: A Navigation Tool for Scaling Personalized, Competency-Based Learning](#)

These publications offer depth, details and direction on policy, systems transformation and structure that this playbook does not cover. Meanwhile, this playbook supports

practical planning and implementation at the school level that these documents don't fully include. As a result, these three resources work best when used together.



Photo by Allison Shelley/The Verbatim Agency for EDUimages

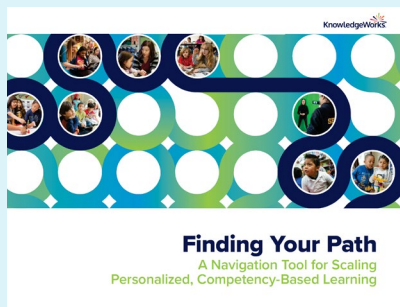
## Planning and Reflection Questions

- » *How is your district or school prioritizing student-centered and personalized learning? Reflect on your progress to-date and discuss your vision for what personalized, competency-based learning could look like at the end of this school year, in 5 years and in 10 years. What is the shared vision that emerged from that discussion?*
- » *Who is the decision-making team leading your personalized, competency-based learning efforts? Look back at the **“Establish Your Planning Team”** section and consider who – if anyone – may be missing.*
- » *Find time to read/review the two companion resources for this playbook. Save those resources so they are easily accessible any time you reference and use this playbook.*

# Finding Your Path

## to Personalized, Competency-Based Learning

Whether you are seeking to start, spread or scale personalized, competency-based learning at your school or district, you will benefit from knowing what path you are on, what others like you have learned, and what you will need for the journey ahead.



In 2021, KnowledgeWorks produced an updated resource used by districts and schools across South Carolina and the US to grow personalized, competency-based learning efforts. *Finding Your Path: A Navigation Tool for Scaling Personalized, Competency-Based Learning* is a roadmap to help your team assess where you are and plot a path forward that builds the 12 conditions needed for equitable, aligned and sustained school and systems transformation.

*If you haven't done so, pause reading the playbook and review [Finding Your Path](#). After reading/reviewing [Finding Your Path](#), consider reaching out to the SCDE Office of Personalized Learning and district leadership if you want to complete an opportunity analysis, as described in the publication. This is a district-level process that supports districts in analyzing where they are in personalized, competency-based learning and what they need to move forward.*

# Assessing Strengths and Readiness

Based on your reflections so far, where is your district or school overall on the path to personalized, competency-based learning?

– 1 –


Review evidence of what you have underway at your school(s) and in your classrooms.

What are your strengths and gaps pertaining to personalized and competency-based learning?

What have you tried that has worked and are there efforts that haven't worked?

– 2 –

Select the one that best describes your district and/or school(s)



**STARTING**  
Emerging, early implementation



**SPREADING**  
Spreading key concepts and practices across a school and/or district



**SCALING**  
System wide transformation and district wide scope

This playbook can assist you at every stage of your personalized, competency-based learning journey. When you get to a section of the playbook, decide whether it is right for your team, interests, vision and implementation stage. As with personalized learning with your students, move ahead whenever you are ready.

## Planning and Reflection Questions

- » *Are you going through this playbook thinking about a single school, multiple schools or a district?*
- » *Where on the path did you place your district and/or school? As you review the 12 conditions from [Finding Your Path](#), what are your strengths and challenges?*
- » *If you discussed [Finding Your Path](#) as a group, were there divergent opinions? What do those differences mean as you move forward and which of the 12 conditions need to be prioritized?*



# Five Examples

## of How to Start, Spread and Scale Personalized, Competency-Based Learning

In early 2022, SCDE conducted a listening tour of South Carolina school districts to surface questions and better understand local visions and plans for personalized, competency-based learning. Five examples of how to start, spread and scale personalized, competency-based learning emerged from those focus groups and were affirmed in accompanying interviews with personalized learning leaders across the US:

- 1** Pilot Schools and School-Wide Adoption
- 2** Multiple Pathways to Graduation
- 3** Expanded Learning
- 4** District and School Improvement
- 5** District-Wide Scale and Adoption

These examples are not an exhaustive list, or mutually exclusive. They are commonly used by districts and schools on their own or in combination. This next section of the playbook defines and unpacks each example, including:

- » Field examples
- » A description of what the example can look like in practice
- » **Imagine if...?** highlights from schools and districts to visualize what this could look like in practice
- » Suggested state policy flexibilities to help implement the example
- » Questions for planning and reflection

Your team can focus on one example or several, based on your shared vision and strategy.

The **Imagine if...?** highlights in each example are drawn from interviews conducted for this project, as well as the collective work of the field. Many thanks to the Aurora Institute's [CompetencyWorks blog](#), the Learner-Centered Collaborative's [Case Studies](#), and KnowledgeWorks [resource page](#). Please note, some of the examples provided represent "snapshots" for illustrative purposes and were recorded at specific moments in time. These examples may or may not reflect the practices within a specifically cited school or district at the time when you read about them.

This playbook was designed to inspire you to think creatively about what personalized, competency-based learning can look like. Use the examples, stories, advice and policy recommendations to rethink and challenge what's possible in your schools and classrooms.



## Pilot Programs and School-Wide Adoption

[Red Bank Elementary](#) is a language immersion school in the Lexington I school district that was one of the first schools in South Carolina to take a school-wide approach to personalized, competency-based learning.

Red Bank's journey began in 2008, when school leadership and faculty collectively saw a need to prioritize the continuous quality of the educational experience for students as they moved from one grade level to the next. As is typical in many schools, success seemed dependent on who their teachers were and what went on in the classroom. There wasn't enough consistency regarding the interpretation of standards and grading practices across classes and grade levels. Consequently, as teachers followed pacing guides for instructional purposes, some students were behind while others had to repeat work they had already mastered.

Red Bank envisioned a school where students could be at different points in their learning journeys and speed up or slow down as needed. To get there, Red Bank started by creating learning progressions to make clear what students needed to know and do, by when and how they could demonstrate it. School leadership developed a strategic

plan that prioritized a shift to personalized learning. As a grassroots movement, teachers were allowed to decide where they wanted to begin, but everyone agreed to start somewhere. For example, some teachers chose to begin with math while others began with ELA instruction.

For Red Bank, this happened inside their building and not as a part of a larger district effort. They worked with national consulting partners, like the [ReInventing Schools Coalition](#), who had years of experience in personalized and competency-based learning. They researched and read about effective personalized learning approaches in [Alaska](#) and [Maine](#), and made it a point to regularly update their superintendent and central office staff.

Marie Watson, retired Red Bank Elementary principal, has this advice for teams who decide to pilot personalized, competency-based learning at the school level:

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*Make the decision. Trust the process. Keep the focus. So many things will come at you, and you must vet everything against whether it is personalized, competency-based learning and how it fits through that lens. There will be bumps along the way and things you don't know. Ask questions and dive into the answers. Whatever happens, keep moving forward.*

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# 1

Red Bank shows the benefits of engaging school leadership and teachers together. Consider how to give teachers flexibility and freedom to decide where to begin, as long as they each start somewhere. This example has many benefits, and has been done successfully by many in the [personalized, competency-based learning community](#).

Small pilots and single school innovation can enable a level of innovation, experimentation and continuous improvement that often takes longer with multiple schools or an entire district. You may move faster and have more success if you begin with staff who are willing and want to do this work, and then move to those who are curious but perhaps more cautious. See the Northern Cass example in the **Imagine if...?** section for an idea of what this could look like.

At the elementary level, consider starting with a single area of focus, like a content area or practice. Some schools grow their personalized learning program one subject or grade at a time, starting with math or ELA, or with a group of first graders and then moving to second grade, and so on. Others

implement strategies through looping and/or multi-age, multi-grade classrooms. Red Bank Elementary and McComb School District in the **Imagine if...?** section provide ideas for what this can look like.

At the middle school level, consider starting with a teaching team or specific subject like ELA or social studies. Some schools start with specials like physical education and art. Given how common team teaching is in middle school, you may elect to have one team adopt this approach. In this case, you could begin with the earliest grade and eventually grow to include 8th grade. Pioneer Ridge Middle School in the **Imagine if...?** section provides an idea of what this could look like.

At the high school level, consider starting with a subject-area department, grade level or electives. Some upper-level art courses and many career and technical education (CTE) or work-based learning courses are already partly personalized, student-driven and competency-based.<sup>2</sup> Farmington High School in the **Imagine if...?** section provides an idea of how this could happen in a school pilot.

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2. CTE and work-based learning are explored in more depth in the “multiple pathways to graduation” example area.

# 1

# Imagine if...?

Here are some ideas of what pilot programs and school-wide adoption can look like in practice:

## Whole School

[Northern Cass School District](#) in North Dakota leveraged an existing leadership development program with twenty educators to begin conversations about personalized learning. Superintendent Cory Steiner credits these conversations with launching the district's movement towards personalized learning.

## Elementary Schools

[Red Bank Elementary began their work](#) with book studies during summer retreats, which led to teachers self selecting what subjects they would start with as well as collaboration with external partners.

[McComb School District](#) in Mississippi decided to [personalize their elementary schools one grade at a time](#). They used [kindergarten at an early childhood center](#) and [first grade at a local elementary school](#) to introduce personalized, competency-based learning. The district also launched a [new elementary school](#) that now serves grades 1-6.

## Middle Schools

[Pioneer Ridge Middle School](#) in Minnesota exemplifies a [“start small” approach](#). This school began with a small 6th grade pilot program of 60 students and three teachers that operated within the existing school day structure, in alignment with the state's existing requirements. As it's grown, one of the school's hallmarks has become flexible scheduling. This offers students agency in how they schedule their day. Students can self-select into various seminars and small-group opportunities and choose what subjects they take each day.

## High Schools

In [Farmington High School](#) in Minnesota, the English Department decided to [increase personalization](#) by allowing students more freedom to select the texts they would read. This evolved into personalized and competency-based activities, such as students leading their own book groups and larger passion projects involving expert interviews, non-fiction writing and hands-on activities presented during an exhibition night. Today, the district has [created its own](#) K-12 competencies and rubrics for use by educators from elementary through high school.

# 1

## Advice From the Field

If you pursue personalized, competency-based learning at the school level you must **continuously inform, involve and invest in families and students**. There will be questions and concerns about the transition and what it means for the classroom experience, assignments, grading, assessments and more.

Students and families need time to learn about personalized, competency-based learning and what it means for them. Concerns may be heightened about perceived barriers in high school, when college readiness, advanced classes and post-secondary planning become priorities. Families whose children receive special education will also have questions. Although accommodations should be individualized, schoolwide changes can disrupt existing plans and strategies.

[Mark Tinkham](#), longtime principal of Hall-Dale Middle & High School – personalized schools in the RSU 2 district in Maine – recommends **being proactive with families about your plans**. He suggests meeting with them at school, at home and in the community. In his experience, it has helped to ask families which aspects of the school day, culture and traditions they want to keep. For Hall-Dale, these conversations led them to

retain the honor roll, but convert it to a Latin System (e.g., cum laude, summa cum laude), which is a better fit for a personalized and competency-based approach.

To this day, Mark and his team regularly **meet with students and look for ways to include them in decision making**. Student input and understanding is prioritized, and students are welcome to work with teachers as partners on personalized learning plans. Mark advises that plans should aim to improve the student experience while honoring family and community needs.

Mark also recommends **using professional learning communities (PLCs) or similar structures to plan, check progress, reflect and improve**. This is a strategy several education leaders we interviewed use and recommend. PLCs can deepen staff buy-in, improve understanding and enable your vision to be shared from inception through implementation.

## State Policies that Encourage and Enable Pilot Programs and School-Wide Adoption

### Allowable in all South Carolina Schools

When taking your first steps towards piloting personalized, competency-based learning in schools, it's important to know your district can already undertake various steps without needing any new flexibilities from the state. For example, Red Bank Elementary has undertaken all of its transformative efforts to date without needing any additional flexibilities from state statute or regulation.

Here are a few additional actions from the **Imagine if...?** section that your school or district can do right now without additional policy permissions:

» **Initial Planning and**

**Design Conversations**

Conversations about personalized, competency-based learning, like those that took place in Red Bank, Northern Cass and Hill-Dale Middle & High School, don't require any flexibility from the state. These are important launching points for further action.

» **Community Engagement**

Small pilots within a school need to be done with the community, not to them. This is especially true when seeking school-wide adoption. Stakeholders responsible for implementing and participating in these changes – including students, parents, teachers and other community members – should be engaged frequently and regularly. [A guide](#) created by Education Elements and The Learning Accelerator provides a four-phase approach for starting engagement along with examples of districts who have done this.

» **Engaging Outside Experts as Guest Instructors**

Bringing experts into the classroom for a portion of a course, whether that be to lead a small segment of a single lesson or to team-teach an entire interdisciplinary unit, can lead to meaningful learning experiences. This might look like the author of a children's book videoconferencing in for an engaging ELA lesson on how to craft a good hook or a computer engineer coming in and teaching a series of lessons with the school's STEAM coordinator on how to rewire a motherboard. The possibilities are endless and can help learners identify strengths and interests that extend far beyond the traditional classroom.

» **Teacher Professional Development**

Whether you're implementing a small pilot or scaling school-wide, teachers need support to effectively implement the innovations you adopt. The SCDE [Office of Personalized Learning](#) offers various professional learning experiences, regardless of your level of experience in personalized, competency-based learning. Make sure to reach out to [personalizedlearning@ed.sc.gov](mailto:personalizedlearning@ed.sc.gov) to learn more.

» **Starting with a Single Subject**

Shifting school practices like Farmington or allowing teachers to self-select their starting point like Red Bank are easy first steps that can happen within existing statute and regulation.

» **Creating Learning Progressions**

Like Red Bank or Farmington, any school or district could create their own Profile of a Graduate, learning progression or aligned competencies to be incorporated into strategic planning. If you choose to go this route, you should also make sure they align to the [South Carolina Profile of a Graduate](#) and the [aligned competencies](#).

» **Pilot Programs**

Your district could begin implementing personalized, competency-based learning through small pilot programs like Pioneer Ridge or start with a grade at a time like McComb School District, as long as the implementation takes place within the statutory requirements of an instructional day.

» **Credit for Mastery in Elementary and Middle Schools**

South Carolina high schools have regulations around total hours of instruction required for students to earn course credit, and elementary and middle schools have requirements for what constitutes an instructional day. State Board of Education Regulations [43-231 \(III\)](#) and [43-232 \(II\)](#) state that elementary

and middle schools can implement innovative approaches to education so long as they are approved by the local board and incorporated into the school and district plan. High schools can award credit for mastery based on South Carolina’s competencies without the need to request extra flexibility, so long as they adhere to the regulation of the required six-hour school day.

## Requires Special Permission

As you pilot personalized, competency-based learning, or begin to implement a school-wide approach, there are situations where you may need to apply to the state for statutory flexibility or a waiver. Here are a few examples:

» **Credit for Mastery**

[North Charleston High School](#) wanted to let students move at their own pace and earn credit based on when they mastered material, rather than time spent in class. They requested flexibility from [State Board of Education Regulation 43-234 II \(B\)](#), which governs how schools can award high school academic credit. If you want to offer credit based on mastery of competencies and learning progressions like those developed by Farmington, you need to request this flexibility.

» **Credit for Learning Outside the Classroom**

If North Charleston wanted to go further and give students a way to earn credit for community experiences like internships or apprenticeships, they would need to leverage [State Board of Education Regulation 43-234 II \(C\)](#) to create a proficiency-based system that gives students a path to earn credit through community- and work-based learning.

» **Increasing Teacher Prep Time**

A school may want to pilot approaches that offer students new course offerings, like the seminars and small group opportunities at Pioneer Ridge. If this results in teachers needing more than four preps, you would need to request flexibility from [State Board of Education Regulation 43-205\(IV\)\(B\)\(3\)\(c\)](#).

» **Changing the Length of the School Day**

A middle school wanting to reduce the standard weekly instructional time students get while offering more opportunities for freedom and exploration, similar to Pioneer Ridge Middle, may need to request flexibility from [State Board Regulation 43-232\(I\)](#) governing the required number of minutes in an instructional day.

These lists are not exhaustive. Included at the end of this playbook is an appendix with a list of state regulations from which districts have frequently requested flexibility when planning their personalized, competency-based learning approach.

# 1

## Mechanisms for Flexibility

You have three main mechanisms to ask for widespread flexibility from state statute and regulation to support pilot programs and school-wide implementation:

1. South Carolina's [Schools of Innovation flexibility](#) (Section 59-19-350) gives districts and schools the freedom to implement personalized, competency-based learning at the individual school level, either through a pilot program or school wide adoption
2. You can leverage the [district strategic plan or school renewal plan](#) processes to implement personalized learning elements at individual schools without adopting a whole school model; this is further explored in the District and School Improvement example area
3. You can create or expand your [proficiency-based system](#) beyond credit recovery to include credit for prior

learning and/or initial credit, which allows you to give high school students credit for mastery of content in a school setting or in the broader community

If you want to leverage either the schools of innovation or the impediments to district strategic or school renewal plans flexibilities, you can [apply here](#). To utilize a proficiency-based system flexibility, you can [apply here](#). To see if there are other policy provisions and flexibility that fit your needs, you can review the South Carolina [Education Flexibility Guide](#). To contact South Carolina's Office of Personalized Learning, email [personalizedlearning@ed.sc.gov](mailto:personalizedlearning@ed.sc.gov).

## Questions for Planning and Reflection

- » *Were you inspired by any of the examples in this section? What about them inspired you, and what from them would you like to try?*
- » *What is the vision for transformation you want to see at the school you are considering or are already adopting personalized, competency-based learning practices?*
- » *Who at your school wants to practice personalized and competency-based learning? Who is curious but may be more cautious? Is there anyone who may be unwilling to move in this direction? Consider what you can do to cultivate the mindsets, beliefs and shared vision needed to move this work forward.*
- » *What is your strategy to grow and spread personalized, competency-based learning at your school? How can you ensure the process and plan promote transparency, equity and access for all stakeholders to have agency and voice? How do you specifically plan to engage students and families?*
- » *Which state policies do you want to use as you pursue a pilot program or school wide adoption? Go through the [flex guide](#) and decide what you need to apply (or apply for).*

## Multiple Pathways to Graduation

[Boston Day and Evening Academy](#) (BDEA) is a public charter school that has been practicing personalized, competency-based learning for years.

This high school supports young people in Boston who struggle to stay and succeed in more traditional high school environments. Whereas a traditional high school typically assigns students to grades based on age and credits, BDEA assigns students to courses based on demonstrated skills. While traditional high schools have classes that last from 6-12 months, BDEA runs a trimester model with courses lasting 11 weeks with opportunities for students to skip or repeat courses based on individual needs. And while traditional high schools might use an A-F grading scale, BDEA has a “no fail” policy that ensures students have as many opportunities as they need to become competent or highly competent in coursework before graduation.

BDEA offers students flexible schedules including daytime sessions that look and feel like a more traditional high school, as well as evening sessions that run from around 12-5 PM and support high schoolers who work or want a later start and end time. When a student decides to enroll, they are interviewed and go through a week-long orientation. During that time, BDEA staff review student transcripts, assess prior learning and collaborate with students to develop a learning roadmap that shows what credit they have and what classes they need to take and pass to graduate. The creation and implementation of this roadmap is a partnership, from enrollment through graduation.

According to BDEA graduate and former staff member, Amanda Shabowich, BDEA offers a high school option other than traditional high school for students who are serious about school, want to graduate and have to manage adult responsibilities and realities. BDEA offers a collegiate culture, where students can manage their own schedules and be on a personal pathway to graduation.

[Multiple pathways to graduation](#) are rigorous and relevant educational options beyond a traditional high school environment or schedule that students can pursue to satisfy graduation requirements and master the Profile of a South Carolina Graduate competencies. Multiple pathways include but are not limited to alternative education, virtual learning, middle and early college models and career and technical education programs (CTE).

Multiple pathways can happen within or outside of a comprehensive school environment. They tend to be smaller programs that serve students with a variety of academic, social and emotional needs. Typically, they include opportunities for students to engage in hands-on, real-world learning and may include dual credit options and expanded learning like work-based or community-based learning. Multiple pathways offer students a combination of highly personalized academic learning and comprehensive support. Because these

## 2

programs serve high school students, they should always include comprehensive postsecondary planning and college and career preparation (including dual-credit possibilities).

The best multiple pathways programs meet students where they are academically and provide students with a personalized learning pathway that shows what they need to graduate. In South Carolina, this could be a backwards planning tool for students' Individual Graduation Plans that maps to the [Profile of the South Carolina Graduate](#) and/or diploma [Seals of Distinction](#). Charleston County Schools, Whittier Community Schools and Kettle Moraine Schools are examples in the **Imagine if...?** section that show what this could look like.

Alternative education programs can offer students personalized, competency-based learning through a high school diploma program that is highly individualized and freed from prohibitive time or course constraints, based on The Profile of the South Carolina Graduate competencies and localized graduation requirements. Consider the [BDEA](#) and [Big Picture Learning](#) models for what high-quality, personalized alternative education looks like and includes. Check out the R-5 example in the **Imagine if...?** section for an additional example of what this looks like in practice.

Career academy and career and technical education (CTE) programs can start with one career pathway or a [career cluster](#). [Consider an industry or area that has vetted industry standards and professional competencies](#). Industries that include apprenticeships and work-based learning are primed for personalized, competency-based learning and teachers with industry experience may already understand this approach to teaching and on-the-job training. Within existing CTE programs, you can build in personalized learning opportunities and experiences through self-directed pathways and experiential or project-based learning. These programs can also leverage [dual enrollment](#) opportunities to allow high school students to earn credit towards a degree, diploma or certificate in a technical program. Check out the Bismarck Public Schools example in the **Imagine if...?** section for an idea of what this looks like.

Virtual learning programs can use technology to support student learning experiences rather than drive it. In these programs, it is vital to keep the “person” centered in the personalized learning model. Virtual learning is not always personalized or competency-based, although there are many high-quality options that are. Check out Laurel Springs, Fusion Academy, Virtual Learning Academy Charter School and Spark Online Academy examples in the **Imagine if...?** section for ideas of what this looks like.

# 2 Imagine if...?

Here are some ideas of what pilot programs and school-wide adoption can look like in practice:

## General Examples

In South Carolina, the [Charleston County School District Center for Advanced Studies](#) “bridge[s] the gap between high school and college” and provides technical skills and training beyond what is typically offered in a high school through three facilities that provide a variety of coursework.

[Whittier Community School](#) in Alaska allows students to complete [personalized service projects](#) such as running a city-wide food drive or volunteering at a conservation center during school hours to meet course standards.

In [Kettle Moraine School District](#) in Wisconsin, the district’s nationally recognized [high school of health sciences](#) has built partnerships with medical providers to personalize student learning. In one example, teams of students participate in an [AP research seminar](#) with college-level medical students to pursue scientific questions and complete a data analysis with an accompanying poster session and publication.

## Alternative Education Programs

[R-5 Alternative High School](#) in Colorado is structured to [meet the diversity of their students’ needs](#). Students at R-5 participate in some type of collegiate, volunteer or work-based learning experience and pursue mastery of competencies to demonstrate learning. This enables students who need a non-traditional high school pathway to pursue a schooling option other than their GED or credit recovery classes.

## Career Academies and CTE

[Bismarck Public Schools](#) in North Dakota combines a career academy model with

personalized learning. The district’s [Empower\[Ed\]](#) program gives high school students an alternative pathway to demonstrate subject mastery for courses like English 11 and 12. They do this by demonstrating skills needed for these courses through [community-based projects](#) like creating libraries, building social media platforms or designing makerspaces for local elementary schools. Students in this program [have agency](#) to determine what they work on during the school day.

## Virtual Learning Programs

An example of virtual learning includes [The Academy](#) at [Laurel Springs School](#) in Pennsylvania, which offers self-paced and personalized instruction for college credit classes.

[Spark Online Academy](#) in Colorado, which began in 2021 with elementary and middle grades and now serves high school, is a multi-district online and blended learning school. The school is designed around personalized learning strategies, including the district’s [Profile of a Graduate](#), and incorporates graduation portfolios for high school students that develop skills sought by colleges and employers. The Academy plans to create hybrid learning opportunities for in-person work such as labs, studio days and project-based work.

[Fusion Academy](#), which operates over 80 campuses, takes a personalized approach to learning and offers 1:1 teaching in-person, hybrid or fully online.

The [Virtual Learning Academy Charter School](#) (VLACS) offers a fully customizable online middle and high school that students can access anytime and anywhere in the world.

# 2

## Advice from the Field

Rebecca Midles of Getting Smart has been designing, leading and supporting personalized, competency-based learning across the US for more than two decades. Her work has ranged from starting a small competency-based school in rural Alaska, leading innovative efforts at the Lindsay Unified School district in California and district-wide transformation in a suburban school district in Colorado. Midles has learned which questions teams must address to create multiple pathways to graduation that are high-quality, personalized and competency-based.

Here are the questions that Midles recommends your team consider:

- » What obstacles could we face?
- » What is our compelling case for doing this?
- » What do we think our future needs will be?
- » Where is the interest, excitement and energy to do this?

Additionally, think about your planning team for multiple pathways models. In a multiple pathways to graduation program, core staff often include counselors, advisors and off-site work-based learning supervisors. Your planning team should reflect the comprehensive and flexible learning environment and student-centered experience you are seeking to implement or scale.

## State Policies that Encourage and Enable Multiple Pathways to Graduation

### Allowable in all South Carolina Schools

If you've already read the Pilot Programs example area, we have similar good news here — there's a lot you can also do without needing new exemptions or additional flexibility. Here are some actions from the **Imagine if...?** section that your district or school could do right now:

- » **Community Engagement**

Changes in student pathways to graduation need to be done in partnership with parents and students. Parents, teachers and students should be engaged in the design of a multiple pathways program. You can also consider ways to engage businesses and higher education as they play a crucial role in work-based learning and future employment opportunities. [A guide](#) created by Education Elements and The

Learning Accelerator provides a four-phase approach, along with examples of school districts that have done this.

- » **Teacher Professional Development**

When it comes to creating multiple pathways programs, teacher buy-in is essential. Whether creating virtual learning programs or career academies, teachers need training to effectively implement the innovations you adopt. This training needs to be incorporated into existing professional development

structures. You can leverage the SCDE [Office of Personalized Learning](#) professional learning experiences for this, regardless of your level of experience in personalized, competency-based learning. Reach out to [personalizedlearning@ed.sc.gov](mailto:personalizedlearning@ed.sc.gov) to learn more.

» **Leverage Personalized Student Plans**

South Carolina has a [statutory requirement](#) regarding individual graduation plans, which must, among other things, align career goals and a student's course of study and include experience-based, career-oriented learning experiences. Similar to BDEA's approach of building a learning roadmap, these plans can be leveraged to help schools identify where additional opportunities need to be created to meet student needs.

» **Create Additional Pathways Opportunities**

There's nothing in state statute or regulation stopping you from creating more pathways to graduation within existing structures. Even opportunities like Kettle Moraine's research seminar can be implemented without needing additional exemptions or flexibility. As a first step, schools and districts can expand offerings in CTE and dual enrollment.

» **Increase Virtual Offerings**

[VirtualSC](#) already supports the Profile of a South Carolina Graduate and offers a wide variety of courses to students in grades 7-12, including those with end of course exams, advanced placement coursework and CTE. All of these courses are taught by full-time teachers with a highly-qualified rating in their subject area, presenting an excellent opportunity to meet every student's needs.

» **Develop Community Partnerships**

Building partnerships to create more opportunities for students doesn't require extra flexibility. These partnerships can serve as an important launching point for opportunities like receiving credit for community-based experiences.

» **Time and Calendar Flexibilities**

Your school and district have some flexibility to change instructional time and calendar requirements within existing state statutes. [South Carolina Statute 59-1-425](#) establishes the date for opening schools, but does not preclude the use of a trimester system or alternative school hours like the structure used by BDEA. It does require at least six instructional hours in an instructional day. This statute also allows for a local board to vary instructional hours across schools, which could enable a school with an alternative structure and schedule within a district.

# 2

## Requires Special Permission

There are many ways to create multiple pathways to graduation that leverage personalized, competency-based learning approaches. Here are some situations where you may need to apply for flexibility from a state statute or regulation:

» **Increased Time Flexibility**

If you want to replicate examples like Bismarck’s Empower[Ed] or create fully remote opportunities like Spark Online Academy, allowing students to spend significant time participating in community-based learning outside of classroom instruction – and think the in-school instructional day might go below six hours – you may need to request flexibility from [South Carolina Statute 59-1-425](#). You will likely also need to request flexibility from State Board of Education regulation [43-231](#), [43-232](#) and/or [43-234](#), depending on whether the school is an elementary, middle or high school.

» **Credit Through Non-Traditional Means**  
[State Board of Education Regulation 43-234](#) specifies the types of course credits that a student must earn for graduation. If your district wants to award credit for courses through alternative means – like Bismarck or Whittier – you may have to use a combination of requesting flexibility from this regulation, [applying to create a locally designed course](#) and/or creating a proficiency-based system under the same regulation (see Mechanisms for Flexibility for more details).

» **Credit for Prior Learning**  
Multiple pathways often means allowing students to receive credit based on demonstrated skills, which may occur outside of a traditional classroom setting. If your district wants to award credit in this

manner, consider creating a proficiency-based system under [State Board of Education Regulation 43-234](#) to allow students to earn credit for prior learning.

» **Credit for Mastery**

Districts that want to imitate BDEA and allow students to move through coursework at their own pace and skip or repeat courses based on needs may need to request flexibility from [State Board of Education Regulation 43-234 II \(B\)](#), which governs how schools can award high school academic credit. In Charleston County, [North Charleston High School](#) submitted an application requesting this flexibility.

» **Engaging Outside Experts as Teachers**

Multiple pathway approaches often benefit from outside experts serving as teachers. If you want to adopt this approach, you can consider whether your school or district should request flexibility from [State Board of Education Regulation 43-62](#) governing certification requirements for educators or whether it would need to request an Adjunct Certificate laid out in South Carolina’s [Specialized Alternative Certification Guidelines](#).

These lists are not exhaustive. Included at the end of this playbook is an appendix with a list of state regulations from which districts have frequently requested flexibility when planning their personalized, competency-based learning approach.

# 2

## Mechanisms for Flexibility

South Carolina offers many resources for supporting multiple pathways to graduation in [CTE, aligned dual enrollment opportunities and work-based learning](#). South Carolina also offers statewide virtual learning through [VirtualSC](#), which [served](#) over 28,000 students in 2021.

Additionally, students have incentives to pursue multiple pathways through seeking [Seals of Distinction](#), some of which reward college-level coursework or career readiness indicators such as earning industry-recognized credentials. Your district or school could strategically leverage this opportunity to provide new graduation pathways that are personalized and competency-based in CTE.

There are four main mechanisms to ask for flexibility or exemption from state statute and regulation to pursue personalized and competency-based learning through multiple pathways to graduation:

1. South Carolina's [Schools of Innovation flexibility](#) (Section 59-19-350) gives districts and schools the freedom to implement personalized, competency-based learning at the school level, either through a pilot program or school-wide adoption. This can be your primary mechanism for requesting as many flexibilities you need.
2. You can leverage the [district strategic plan or school renewal plan](#) to implement personalized learning at individual schools without adopting a whole school model. This would be most useful for a district-wide approach where flexibility is needed.
3. You can create a [proficiency-based system](#) to give high school students credit for content mastery either in a school setting or the broader community. The proficiency-based system is very applicable for multiple pathways programs because you can award credit for prior learning or initial credit for coursework that may be non-traditional, as well as full or partial units of credit.
4. You can apply to create a [locally designed subject area course](#). The course must be aligned with state academic standards for that particular subject area. Courses that would give elective credits are not required to go through this approval process.

If you want to leverage either the schools of innovation or the impediments to district strategic or school renewal plans flexibilities, you can apply here [apply here](#). To utilize a proficiency-based system flexibility, you can [apply here](#). To see if there are other policy provisions and flexibilities that fit your needs, you can review the South Carolina [Education Flexibility Guide](#). To contact South Carolina's Office of Personalized Learning, email [personalizedlearning@ed.sc.gov](mailto:personalizedlearning@ed.sc.gov).

# 2

## Questions for Feedback and Planning

- » *Were you inspired by any of the examples in this section? What about them inspired you, and what do you want to try?*
- » *What multiple pathways to graduation options do you want your personalized, competency-based learning planning and implementation to focus on?*
- » *Consider Midles' questions under "Advice from the Field." Go through these questions for your multiple pathways program(s). Are there new planning team members or outside expertise you need to bring in?*
- » *Which [policy flexibilities](#) will support your plans in this example area?*



Photo by Allison Shelley for EDUimages

## Expanded Learning

In Spartanburg County, educators, youth development leaders, employers, civic leaders and other local stakeholders are working together to prioritize the academic achievement and well-being of children and youth. A core part of this cradle-to-career effort is new and strengthened partnerships between schools and out-of-school time providers, including before-school, after-school and summer programs.

The [Spartanburg Academic Movement](#) (SAM) is the backbone entity for this “collective impact” effort. Initiated in 2008 and incorporated as a nonprofit in 2013, SAM is run by the former superintendent of Spartanburg County School District, Russell Booker. SAM partnerships include seven area school districts, local colleges and universities, faith and community groups and employers. According to SAM’s website, these leaders share a vision and agenda for transforming their children into “educated, independent adults.”

Through this shared vision, increasingly aligned educational and enrichment opportunities are possible and so are opportunities for students to learn and

develop the Profile of a South Carolina Graduate competencies, in a variety of ways and settings. Specifically, [there are groups working together as “action tables”](#) that promote school readiness, third grade reading, middle grade math, high school graduation and postsecondary success.

Dr. Booker sees community-school partnerships as vital to the academic success and healthy development of children. He and his team are actively engaging more than 30 out-of-school time collaboratives, which means local children are experiencing more and better learning from the adults and settings that can best meet their needs and interests. Dr. Booker’s advice to district leaders is this:

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*Coming out of the pandemic, it’s hard to keep your head above water. Trust others to come alongside and make the work easier. Kids will have the learning environments they need, and you will have the support you need.*

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[Expanded learning environments](#) extend beyond the school building, school day or standard curriculum. These include before-, after-school and summer programs, as well as opportunities for students to engage in design challenges, genius hours or community-based problem solving. In some districts, this includes structured programming that happens during recess. Personalized, competency-based learning works well in these contexts because it aligns to [positive youth development](#), which is the research base used by many programs that happen before and after school or during the summer.

Because expanded learning tends to happen beyond the school building or hours, this example activates two core principles of personalized, competency-based learning: anytime, anywhere learning and student ownership. With anytime, anywhere learning, students are always learning, whether that's in school, at home, in community or somewhere else. If they master content or a competency and can demonstrate it, they should get credit for it.

Student ownership means students have agency over their own learning, and educators serve as guides and facilitators. In expanded learning, students can engage in hands-on and experiential learning, often based on personal interests and pursuits.

As a result, expanded learning can be a great place for districts and schools to infuse personalized, competency-based learning. This example works for those who are considering personalization for specific school-based opportunities such as [summer school](#), [genius hour](#), passion projects or [after-school programs](#). It also works well for [learning that happens outside the school building](#) such as service learning, community-

based learning and work-based learning. Expanded learning is an opportunity to partner with youth development providers, community leaders and local employers, or to prioritize personalized, competency-based learning within a community schools model.

Expanded learning can also be a powerful and effective community-school partnership strategy that supports young people across a variety of settings as they learn and master the competencies of the Profile of a South Carolina Graduate. In communities like Spartanburg, there are opportunities to connect existing community-school partnerships and initiatives (e.g., SAM) that align learning that happens at school with learning happening outside of school. The competencies from the Profile of a South Carolina Graduate provide these places and partnerships with common language and vision for the students they share.

**At the elementary level**, you can start with personalized learning opportunities woven into the day or week (e.g., career exploration, genius hour, design challenges). You can revise existing lesson plans to bring in real-world challenges and projects and build in opportunities where students get individualized support. You can bring in outside speakers and local leaders who can invite students to come up with solutions to real problems. Check out the Cajon Valley School District and Capital City EL examples in the **Imagine if...?** section for ideas of what this could look like.

**At the middle school level**, you can do everything listed for elementary school, and also go further, providing opportunities like integrating off-site learning opportunities in the community. Check out the Hawai'i and Embark Education examples in the **Imagine if...?** section for ideas of what this could look like.

# 3

**At the high school level**, you can do everything listed for elementary and middle school, plus integrate work-based learning and after-school/weekend jobs. In a fully personalized, competency-based model, students who want or need to work are able to demonstrate what they learn on the job and get credit for content or skills mastery. Many industries and individual jobs have professional or technical competencies or employability skills that align with high school core classes, CTE classes and/or electives. Check out the Kettle Moraine, Odyssey STEM Academy, Batesburg-Leesville and Capital City examples in the **Imagine if...?** section for ideas of what this could look like.

As you read through the following **Imagine if...** examples, consider the ways in which students have voice and choice in what they want to learn and what interests them. This empowers students, giving them agency over their educational environments and experiences.



Photo by Allison Shelley/The Verbatim Agency for EDUimages

# 3 Imagine if...?

As you read through the following examples, consider the ways in which students have voice and choice in what they want to learn and what interests them. This empowers students, giving them agency over their educational environments and experiences.

## General Examples

Schools across the country have embraced EL education (formerly expeditionary learning), a core part of which is the learning expedition. This gives students an opportunity to engage in field work, community service and work with experts in various subject areas. At schools like [Capital City Public Charter School](#) in Washington, DC, preschool students might explore the building to identify the most important parts or older elementary learners might craft performances exploring the importance of human rights. South Carolina has a number of EL schools, including [River Bluff High School](#) and [Meadow Glen Middle](#) in Lexington, that employ an expeditionary approach.

[Big Picture Learning](#) is a national network of schools providing students with a powerful model of personalized, competency-based learning that includes in-school and in-community educational experiences. [The Big Picture model](#) matches students with an advisor (like a homeroom teacher) and an advisory (like a homeroom class) who stay together from year-to-year, as well as opportunities to engage in “open-walled experiences” where students see how their “interests intersect with the real world” through internships and community-based learning. Over time, students work their way through learning progressions that include a wide variety of educational experiences that are relevant and relationships-based.

## Elementary Examples

In the [Cajon Valley School District](#) in California, students have days and assignments dedicated to self- and career-exploration, including the opportunity to meet with professionals and explore their personal strengths and interests. Through expanded learning opportunities, they can [reimagine recess](#), [after-school programming](#) or [summer school](#).

## Middle School

In Hawai'i, public school students engage in [HĀ community days](#) where they take field trips to cultural sites and community organizations to engage in learning opportunities that center Hawaiian history, language, culture and agricultural and aquaponics practices.

In Colorado, a business-embedded micro-school called [Embark Education](#) gives middle school students an opportunity to incorporate shifts working in one of two businesses into their school day. Students have an incredible amount of agency to schedule their week to meet their individual needs.

# 3

## High School

Students in [Kettle Moraine’s High School of Health Sciences engage with college medical students](#) to explore a scientific research question such as the relationship between food deserts and health challenges.

At [Odyssey STEM Academy](#) in California, students [complete multiple internships](#) prior to graduating, which include learning that occurs outside the classroom. During their freshman year, students will spend two full days a week off campus for a period of several weeks.

[Batesburg-Leesville High School](#) in South Carolina [restructured their lunch hour](#) to help students get personalized support through one-on-one tutoring, retaking quizzes or spending more time studying.

Returning to [Capital City](#), all high school seniors design their own independent senior expedition research project based around a topic of interest to them. This results in an extensive research paper and accompanying presentation. Capital City has made this a graduation requirement for their school.

## Advice From the Field

Expanded learning comes with endless creativity and opportunities for innovation. Before moving forward, it is important to determine what policies and permissions you need from your district and the state to recognize learning and award credit for experiences that occur beyond the school building and school hours.

Deion Jordan, director of teaching and learning at KnowledgeWorks, is a former school leader and the director of competencies at Crosstown High School in Memphis, an XQ Super School. According to Jordan, team-teaching was an important strategy for making expanded and community-based learning possible.

In Crosstown’s team teaching model, which they call “never teach alone,” one teacher supports whole class needs so a second

teacher can support individuals and small groups. This level of attention enables teachers to connect with students on what they are learning in and out of school. For Jordan, it provided opportunities for one teacher to remain in the school building with a group of students while another took students on field trips, with opportunities to engage in community-based learning. These experiences can be matched to students’ needs and interests, offering a level of personalization not possible otherwise.

## State Policies that Encourage and Enable Expanded Learning

### Allowable in all South Carolina Schools

While resources, staffing and time may represent challenges to implementation, many of these examples can be pursued within the bounds of existing state statute and regulation. Here are a few of the different categories your school or district could explore:

- » **Community Engagement**

Creating new expanded learning opportunities means changes in the way schools operate. To ensure that students and families are able to take full advantage of these new opportunities, it's essential to engage them in the design process. Taking this step doesn't require any flexibility from state statute or regulation. [A guide](#) created by Education Elements and The Learning Accelerator provides a four phase approach, along with examples of districts who have done this.
- » **Teacher Professional Development**

Some extended learning opportunities highlighted here require teacher engagement, and that necessitates buy-in and training. The SCDE [Office of Personalized Learning](#) offers a variety of professional learning experiences, regardless of your level of engagement in personalized, competency-based learning. Reach out to [personalizedlearning@ed.sc.gov](mailto:personalizedlearning@ed.sc.gov) to learn more.
- » **Expand Existing Learning Offerings**

Many of the expanded learning opportunities highlighted are already offered at schools and districts and can be pursued within existing statutory and regulatory structures. These include examples such as expanded summer school offerings, genius hours, after-school programs or creating time for passion projects. The highlights from Capital City and Batesburg-Leesville, for example, could be enacted within existing structures.
- » **Career Exploration Activities**

Many opportunities to give students more exposure to career exploration can be pursued without needing to request any flexibility from the state, so long as they occur within the existing calendar day. Some flexibility exists in this area as well. [State Board of Education Regulation 43-62](#) allows for the use of content area experts to fill limited instructional needs as adjuncts and the state has a [CTE Work-Based Certification](#) that makes it easier for adults with specified industry experience to teach in a South Carolina Public School while they pursue their certification. The Cajon highlight serves as an example of what could be done without necessitating additional flexibilities.
- » **Expeditionary Learning**

Schools and districts interested in more intensive approaches could do so without requesting additional flexibilities, so long as they take place within the constraints of the existing school day and rely on traditionally certified faculty to supervise the course. The expeditions at Capital City or the more intensive research experience at Kettle Moraine are examples of this.
- » **Graduation Requirements**

There is nothing stopping a South Carolina high school from embedding elements of a capstone project into existing courses required for graduation as outlined in state law under [State Board of Education Regulation 43-234](#). Another option could be a district developing a local recognition for successful completion of a capstone project.

# 3

## Requires Special Permission

Many of these expanded learning opportunities could be taken further to provide more personalized opportunities for students. If you decide to go this route, here are several situations where your school or district may need to apply for flexibility from state statute or regulation:

» **Engaging Experts as Instructors**

You could build on what districts like Cajon have done and engage external experts from the community in direct instruction during the school day for more extensive periods of time. This could be done in traditional classes or by engaging industry experts. In both these cases, you would need to consider whether you should request flexibility from [State Board of Education Regulation 43-62](#) governing certification requirements to do so.

» **Credit Through Non-Traditional Means**

Say your school or district wanted to go further than just creating internships and decided to allow students to earn credits toward graduation from their participation. [State Board of Education Regulation 43-234](#) specifies the types of course credits that a student must earn for graduation at the high school level. If your district wanted to award credit for experiences like those from Kettle Moraine or Embark Education, you have several options. You might request flexibility from this regulation, apply to create a locally designed course or create a proficiency-based system under that same regulation (see the District and School Improvement section for more details).

» **Increased Time Flexibility**

Several of the examples under expanded learning require modifications to the school day. If you want to allow students significantly more agency or

opportunities outside the classroom to engage with their communities or pursue work-based learning experiences, you may need to request flexibility from [South Carolina Statute 59-1-425](#) if instructional hours vary from what is required by the state statute. The school or district would also need to request flexibility from State Board of Education regulation [43-231](#), [43-232](#) or [43-234](#), depending on whether the school in question is an elementary, middle or high school. The highlights from Odyssey STEM Academy or Embark Education serve as examples.

» **Credit for Extended Learning Opportunities**

There are a number of examples included in this section that could be used to provide students with course credit. For example, your district could decide to award credit for expanded learning opportunities like internships. You might also want to allow students to meet graduation course requirements through a capstone project like that offered at Capital City. At the high school level, [State Board of Education Regulation 43-234](#) specifies the types of course credits that a student must earn for graduation. Depending on the type of experience you are considering for credit, you may need to request some combination of flexibilities from this regulation, apply to create a locally designed course and/or create a proficiency-based system under

this regulation. The proficiency-based system is valuable as it allows for the awarding of partial credit units. The highlights from Odyssey STEM or the research project at Kettle Moraine are examples of this.

These lists are not exhaustive. Included at the end of this playbook is an appendix with a list of state regulations from which districts have frequently requested flexibility when planning their personalized, competency-based learning approach.

## Mechanisms for Flexibility

You have four main mechanisms to ask for flexibility from state statute and regulation regarding expanded learning opportunities:

1. South Carolina's [Schools of Innovation flexibility](#) (Section 59-19-350) gives districts and schools the freedom to implement personalized, competency-based learning at the individual school level, either through a pilot program or school-wide adoption. This would allow for individual schools to apply for flexibility in several of the instances highlighted in the "When You Need Flexibility to Go Further" section.
2. You can leverage the [district strategic plan or school renewal plan](#) processes to implement personalized learning elements at individual schools without adopting a whole school model. This would be helpful when adopting a whole district expanded learning approach. We explore this further in the District and School Improvement example area (the next section in the playbook).
3. You can create a [proficiency-based system](#) that allows you to give high school students credit for mastery of content either in a school setting or in the broader community. The proficiency-based system is much more applicable as it gives high schools in particular an opportunity to award credit either for prior learning or for initial credit, and can also be used to award either full or partial units of credit.
4. You can apply to create a [locally-designed subject area course](#). The course must be aligned with state academic standards for that particular subject area. Courses that would give elective credits are not required to go through this approval process.

If you want to leverage either the schools of innovation or the impediments to district strategic or school renewal plans flexibilities, you can [apply here](#). To utilize a proficiency-based system flexibility, you can [apply here](#). To see if there are other policy provisions and flexibility that fit your needs, you can review the South Carolina [Education Flexibility Guide](#). To contact the SCDE Office of Personalized Learning, please reach out to [personalizedlearning@ed.sc.gov](mailto:personalizedlearning@ed.sc.gov).

# 3

## Questions for Planning and Reflection

- » *Were you inspired by any of the examples in this section? What about them inspired you, and what might you want to replicate from them?*
- » *Think about your district or school. How are students able to engage in anytime, anywhere learning beyond the walls of the classroom and get credit for it?*
- » *Look through your team's shared vision and plan for personalized, competency-based learning. Where are there opportunities for students to engage in anytime, anywhere learning that expands beyond the school building, school day, and typical school schedule?*
- » *Which staff or community partners need to be involved in conversations and planning for personalized, competency-based expanded learning opportunities (e.g., before- and after-school, summer school, field trips)?*
- » *Of the examples listed, which one do you want to try this year? Are there others you want to build towards? Work as a team to prioritize these strategies. Which do you think require flexibility from the state? Refer to the [flex guide](#) and decide what you need to pursue or learn more about.*



## District and School Improvement

Several years ago, [Dr. Sheila Quinn](#) transitioned from SCDE, where she served as deputy state superintendent for innovation and effectiveness and started the Office of Personalized Learning, to become superintendent of the Clover School District.

Under Dr. Quinn’s leadership, Clover prioritized personalized, competency-based learning as a district-wide strategy for improvement. The district initiated the move towards personalized, competency-based learning with a mini-conference focused on “recapturing the classroom.” To start, district leaders encouraged every school and staff member to prioritize getting to know their students and understanding the culture and climate in their buildings. District leadership found their different grade bands had to utilize unique approaches in order to adapt to their students and stakeholders.

From there, the focus moved to developing learner pathways and common language. Especially critical were definitions for terms, including personalized learning and competencies. Although innovation and excellence were happening across the district, there was no cohesive language and framework to connect everything and ensure consistency and coordination across environments and experiences.

The development of shared language along with learner pathways ushered in more opportunities for students to understand and own their learning and for staff to focus on important knowledge, skills and dispositions in addition to content. Across the district, staff noticed students and parents chatting about

what they were learning and advocating for what they needed.

Today, Clover is progressing from their initial wave of district-wide improvement to more ongoing and sustained personalized, competency-based learning efforts that are innovative and continuously improve by design. The district has organized their work around 3Rs: relate, rediscover and redefine. Relate to your learners and what you know. Rediscover what you already know and do well. Redefine outcomes for the work moving forward.

Personalized, competency-based learning can have a substantive impact on schools and districts. Research illustrates stronger relationships between students and teachers, positively impacting [student experience and academic achievement](#) and improving [academic performance](#) and [engagement](#). See the Lindsay Unified example in the **Imagine if...?** section for data on the impact this approach can have on school improvement.

Before setting out, the first thing your school or district should do is evaluate what you want to improve and how adopting personalized, competency-based approaches can help you achieve these goals. But what does personalized, competency-

based learning look like when it is adopted across multiple schools in a district, and what are characteristics shared among elementary, middle, high and alternative school environments? While every school and educational setting will look slightly different, there are some commonalities that districts and schools can pursue to improve the learning environments and experiences for students.

As school and district leadership identify priorities and opportunities within district- and school-wide improvement plans and strategic plans, there are several categories that can be targeted for innovation and improvement.

### **School Culture**

Traditional learning happens inside the classroom with minimal accommodation of student interest or learning needs. In a personalized, competency-based classroom or school setting, students have access to a wide range of experiences at school, online and in the community. Schools foster a sense of belonging, embrace a growth mindset and the importance of relationships for meaningful, relevant learning experiences. Check out the Building 21, Farmington Area Public Schools, Noble High School and TRI Academy examples in the **Imagine if...?** section for ideas of what this could look like.

### **Instruction**

Traditional classrooms are typically set up with a single teacher who designs and delivers instructional curriculum aligned to an overwhelming number of standards with very little differentiation. In a personalized, competency-based classroom or school setting, educators work collaboratively with community partners and students to develop unique learning plans for each student based

on their interests and learning needs, as well as real-time data. Individual learning pathways accommodate student interests and learning needs. See the Crosstown High example in the **Imagine if...?** section for an idea of what this could look like.

### **Assessment Systems**

Traditional school settings evaluate and classify students with a single assessment opportunity, either at the end of a unit or the school year. In a personalized, competency-based classroom or school setting, formative assessments guide daily instruction while students partner with teachers to decide when and how to show what they've learned, and have multiple opportunities to demonstrate mastery. Check out the Francis W. Parker and Windsor Locks examples in the **Imagine if...?** section for ideas of what this could look like.

### **College- and Career-Readiness**

Traditional educational settings generally expect students to master grade-level college- and career-ready standards, and may take minimal steps beyond this such as giving students incentives to earn industry-recognized credentials. In a personalized, competency-based classroom or school setting, students are expected to master higher-level competencies that are aligned to college- and career-ready standards with clear, transferable learning objectives. Students may do this through traditional coursework or through participation in experiences in a community or workplace setting. For more examples and ideas for how schools and districts can provide access to a diverse range of learning experiences, we highly recommend that you visit the **Imagine if...?** section of Multiple Pathways to Graduation and Expanded Learning.

# 4

## Learning Pace

Traditional instruction advances students at the pace of the general classroom, regardless of mastery. Students move on even if they haven't learned all the material, receiving a lower letter grade that simply isn't failing. At the school-level, all students advance in age-defined cohorts every year and are only held back if they are deemed to have failed to learn a significant amount of content. In a personalized, competency-based classroom or school setting, students have access to the customized supports they need both in- and out-of-school to ensure that they get what they need, when they need it. Students can advance when they are ready, regardless of age or the time of year. See the Francis W. Parker and Whittier Community Schools examples in the **Imagine if...?** section for ideas of what this could look like.

## Grading Policies

Traditional grades are norm-referenced and reflect course standards. These are typically based on weighted quarters and a final exam. In a personalized, competency-based classroom or school setting, grades instead reflect the degree of mastery of competencies. They are not final and are instead treated as one point along a student's journey to mastery. If students do not earn course credit, records indicate competencies that need to be re-learned instead of the entire course. Grading can look different from community to community. Check out the Kenowa Hills and Kettle Moraine examples in the **Imagine if...?** section for ideas of what this could look like.



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# Imagine if...?

Here are a few ideas in each of the areas highlighted in this example area of what this could look like.

## Student Impact

[Lindsay Unified in California](#) demonstrates the **impact** of personalized, competency-based learning in a small rural district where 91 percent of students are identified as low income. Over a three-year period, the district grew by seven percent in ELA and 5 percent in math regarding the number of students meeting or exceeding standards. Additionally, the district improved from the 33rd to the 87th percentile rank in ELA achievement and ranked first in ELA growth when compared to similar districts statewide. Lastly, the district's high school graduation rate increased to 94 percent, attendance was maintained at 96 percent and 71 percent of high school graduates enrolled in college following graduation.

## School Culture

[Building 21](#) in Philadelphia **provides excellent examples** of a personalized school culture. At Building 21, students have personalized learning plans and competency portfolios that show their progress in real time. Students have an opportunity to attend multi-week studios organized around real-world themes that help them demonstrate progress towards targeted competencies.

[Farmington Area Public Schools](#) in Minnesota has implemented **personalized learner profiles** for all students from kindergarten through high school. Students answer a series of questions to create the profile. Teachers report this activity helps students better understand themselves and helps them better serve their students.

[Noble High School in Maine](#) has created **multiple support strategies** for students to ensure they meet learning outcomes. The school reviews every 8th and 9th grader's progress every week,

and faculty use this review to identify students in need of support.

[TRI Academy](#) in Ohio holds a **weekly town hall** that includes dozens of students, teachers, the principal and secretary to discuss plans and objectives for the week. The town hall has proved instrumental in establishing school codes of conduct and designing longer-term passion projects for students.

## Instruction

At [Crosstown High in Tennessee](#), classrooms have two educators so that one can support students participating in community learning experiences. See the "Advice from the Field" discussion in Expanded Learning for more details.

## Assessment Systems

At the [Francis W. Parker Charter Essential School](#) in Massachusetts, students meet the **criteria for excellence** through both coursework and performance assessments, which leads to what they call a "gateway" that marks when a learner has proven that they're ready for more challenging coursework.

At [Windsor Locks Middle School](#) in Connecticut, teachers are **given binders** with data on each of their incoming students to help them prepare to meet their needs.

## Learning Pace

At [Francis W. Parker Charter Essential School](#), students are divided into divisions, rather than grade levels. Divisions roughly correspond to grades 7-8, 9-10 and 11-12. Classes are a "heterogeneous mix of 15 to 30 students whose ages span several years." Once a student

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demonstrates proficiency in one domain, they can progress to the next division.

[Whittier Community School](#) in Alaska provides individual learning plans that give students opportunities to revisit and master standards even after they have been taught them in class. Students can do this through a variety of mechanisms such as remote assignments, service learning projects, mini-seminar courses or college courses.

## Grading Policies

Some schools and districts may choose to adopt a proficiency-based grading level using a 1-4 scale, such as the [Early Childhood Center of Kenowa Hills in Michigan](#).

Other districts may elect to stick with the more familiar A-F grading system, such as [Kettle Moraine's High School of Health Sciences](#), while still implementing personalized, competency-based practices. Regardless, it is highly recommended to tackle grading later in your school or district's scaling efforts as this can be a flash point for controversy.

## Advice From the Field

In 2018, Crosstown High School opened as an XQ Super School in Memphis, Tennessee. This new school model benefited from a national platform and private funds that supported community-based school design and engagement. At the time, Deion Jordan, KnowledgeWorks teaching and learning director, was a teacher at Crosstown and involved in the initial planning process.

According to Jordan, the planning team decided early that education transformation should be community- and youth-driven. They brought prospective students, families and community members together to share what they wanted and describe what would not work for them. Young people told the planning team they wanted an improved school experience with project-based learning and tests that helped them learn and get better. They wanted learning that was hands-on and active rather than lectures that required sitting at desks for extended periods of time.

Because of what they learned, the planning team improved their design and developed a school model that was innovative and responsive to student needs and interests. The school started a commitment to be personalized with these four pillars:

(1) relationship-driven, (2) competency-based, (3) project-based, (4) diverse by design.

To develop professional competence in these pillars, the Crosstown staff committed to their own continuous improvement. The staff engaged intensely in their own learning and development.

For Jordan and his colleagues, shared vision, culture and holistic leadership were keys to their success. Shared vision included being accountable to a strategic plan and committing to constant improvement. Culture was about having learning designed by and for students. Shared leadership enabled staff to distribute the learning, innovating, action and accountability across a group of capable individuals.

# 4

## State Policies and Processes that Encourage and Enable School Improvement and Innovation Efforts that Focus on Personalized, Competency-Based Learning

### Allowable in all South Carolina Schools

While resources, staffing and time may represent challenges to implementing the examples in this section, many of these can be pursued within the bounds of existing state statute and regulation. Here are a few of the different categories your school or district could explore:

» **Community Engagement**

When it comes to district and school improvement, one constant is that shifts in education systems and structures need to be done with the community, not to them. That's why it is absolutely essential to engage a wide range of stakeholders early and regularly in this process. In South Carolina, this could be done through the district strategic planning or renewal process. [A guide](#) created by Education Elements and The Learning Accelerator provides a four-phase approach, along with examples of districts who have done this. And community engagement can also start within the school itself, like the TRI Academy's town hall system.

» **Teacher Professional Development**

Even the best intended school improvement strategies won't take hold without educator buy-in. Teachers need to have ownership and be trained to effectively implement whatever innovations you ultimately decide to adopt as part of school and district improvement. The SCDE [Office of Personalized Learning](#) offers a variety of professional learning experiences, regardless of your level of engagement in personalized, competency-based learning. Reach out to [personalizedlearning@ed.sc.gov](mailto:personalizedlearning@ed.sc.gov) to learn more.

» **Classroom Level Implementation**

There's nothing stopping you from implementing mastery-based learning within individual classrooms across your district today. You can pursue strategies, including adding multiple teachers to a classroom, without needing to request any flexibility from state law. Crosstown provides an example of this. Additionally, you could allow students to have multiple opportunities to demonstrate proficiency in content, so long as students still receive a grade at the end of the course within the existing structures of the school year. Whittier gives you some ideas of what this could look like.

» **Proficiency-Based Grading**

South Carolina does have a [legislatively mandated universal grading policy](#). However, there are still ways to engage with alternative grading practices based on proficiency-based grading even within this system. Your school or district can adopt a proficiency-based grading scale provided you also establish a procedure to convert the results back into the state's 10-point letter grade system. [Kenowa Hills](#) from the **Imagine if...?** section provides an example of this. There is also nothing in the universal grading policy prohibiting districts from using the A-F system for proficiency-based grading, similar to Kettle Moraine.

- » **Personalized Learning Plans**  
[South Carolina statute](#) already requires individual graduation plans for students. This mechanism could be leveraged by districts to more closely track student progress in real time. Noble and Building 21 provide examples of this. You could go further and expand the concept of a personalized learning plan across all grades like Farmington.
- » **Studios**  
 You could easily adopt a single school or district-wide studio approach to allow students more agency to engage with content that interests them. This would be similar to Building 21 or the pilot programs in Pioneer Ridge from Pilot Programs and School Wide Adoption. So long as these studios were incorporated into the existing school structure, no additional flexibility would be needed.
- » **Assessment Practices**  
 While your district will need to continue to adhere to state assessment practices, there's a lot you can still do within your

building. Formative assessment practices can be implemented at the classroom, school or district level without requiring any flexibility from the state. The Windsor and Parker highlights provide examples of this.

- » **Rethinking Age Cohorts**  
 If the Parker example in this section got you excited, there's more good news, especially for elementary and middle school. Under state statute and regulation you could implement rethinking age cohorts, so long as your district continues to meet other requirements related to subject areas to be covered, state grade level testing for the grade level to which they are assigned and teacher requirements. As highlighted in Pilot Programs and School Wide Adoption, elementary or middle schools can adopt innovative approaches under State Board of Education Regulation [43-231 \(III\)](#) or [43-232 \(II\)](#). If you want to go further with this, see the next District Wide Scale and Adoption section.

## Requires Special Permission

Many of the examples of school and district improvement in this section could be taken much further and in ways where additional flexibility would be required. If you decide to go this route, here are several situations where your school or district may need to apply for flexibility from state statute or regulation:

- » **Proficiency-Based Grading**  
 You may want to adopt a grading policy that does not require either converting proficiency-based grades to letter grades, or using letter grades to denote proficiency. If you decide to go that route, you would need to request flexibility from [South Carolina Statute 59-5-68](#), which requires the state board of education to adopt a uniform grade scale. If

done through a group of schools, the Innovative School Waiver would be the best strategy (see the District Wide Scale and Adoption section).

- » **Expanded Studios**  
 If you wanted to go further with Building 21's studio approach in your school or district, to the point where instruction would drop below the 6 hours daily

required under state regulation, you may need to use either a school of innovation waiver request or district strategic plan or school renewal plan waiver request to waive State Board of Education Regulations governing the minimum hours of content area instruction articulated in [43-231](#), [43-232](#) or [43-234](#) for elementary, middle or high school. If these studios would put teachers over their normal prep hours, you might also need to request flexibility from teacher workload requirements as articulated by [State Board of Education Regulation 43-205](#).

» **Alternative Means of Mastery**

If you wanted to provide your high school students with alternative means of demonstrating content mastery for either in- or out-of-school experiences, such as those detailed in Multiple Pathways to Graduation and Expanded Learning, you could create a proficiency-based system under [State Board of Education Regulation 43-234 \(II\) \(C\)](#). This would allow you to give students either initial credit for a course the first time they took it, or credit for prior learning that may have occurred elsewhere.

» **Rethinking Age Cohorts**

Maybe the flexibilities afforded to elementary and middle schools aren't enough, and you're looking to go even further and rethink the whole way that students advance through school. Depending on how you design your approach, there are a number of regulations and statutes that you may need to consider that cover educator licensure and program requirements for elementary, middle and high schools. Since every approach will look different, it's highly recommended that you consult with [SCDE's Office of Personalized Learning](#) if you're thinking of taking this step.

These lists are not exhaustive. Included at the end of this playbook is an appendix with a list of state regulations from which districts have frequently requested flexibility when planning their personalized, competency-based learning approach.

## Mechanisms for Flexibility

The path for districts and schools to become fully personalized and competency-based can already be done through school improvement processes and strategic plans and priorities, as well as many of the flexibilities that have been highlighted in previous sections:

» School improvement processes, from local strategic plans to state-mandated school improvement plans (SIPs), are a way for districts and schools to prioritize personalized, competency-based learning. In these cases, the shared vision and plan should directly address areas of growth and concern. Using a SIP to focus on more student-

centered opportunities is a common and promising strategy. For example, districts and schools can use their SIP process to plan for spreading and scaling personalized and competency-based learning approaches, or strengthening more individualized supports for students, such as tiered intervention and mentoring programs.

- » Your district can use federal dollars to support school improvement and innovation through personalized, competency-based learning. Those dollars typically flow through the district (e.g., Title I, [ESSER III](#)) and may apply to district wide rather than school-specific efforts. One exception is the [federal Charter Schools \(CSP\) Program](#), which supports the planning, design and initial implementation of individual public charter schools.
- » At the district level, you can consider federal and state funding to support your efforts. This could include the creative use of federal rescue dollars, funds you receive through the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), or competitive federal grant programs (e.g., Promise Neighborhoods, Community Schools).
- » At the school level, you can consider public and private grant opportunities and special designations that support and fund schoolwide improvement, transformation and innovation. Public dollars include those listed above, as well as CSP funding if you're starting or scaling a public charter school. Occasionally, private foundations will support the expansion of personalized and competency-based learning efforts. For example, the [XQ "Super School"](#) competition in 2016 funded innovative school models, as have certain fellowship programs for school leaders. There are also designations you can seek that will make your district or school more competitive for funding and better positioned to innovate, such as becoming a [National Blue Ribbon](#) school.

Additionally, schools and districts can continue to draw on the flexibilities that have been highlighted throughout this guide to seek additional flexibilities where they are needed. These include:

- » The [Schools of Innovation flexibility](#) (Section 59-19-350), which gives districts and schools the freedom to implement personalized, competency-based learning at the individual school level, either through a pilot program or school wide adoption. This could be used in conjunction with an SIP.
- » You can also leverage the [district strategic plan or school renewal plan](#) processes detailed under [State Board of Education Regulation 43-261](#) to implement personalized learning elements without adopting a whole school model. The regulation contains a clause allowing any district board of trustees to request flexibility from any regulation (but NOT statute!) that would "impede the implementation of an approved district strategic plan or school renewal plan." This would be helpful when adopting a district-wide expanded learning approach.
- » You can create a [proficiency-based system](#) that allows you to give high school students credit for mastery of content either in a school setting or in the broader community. The proficiency-based system flexibility is much more applicable in this example area as it gives high schools in particular an opportunity to award credit either for prior learning or for initial credit, and can also be used to award either full or partial units of credit.

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If you want to leverage either the schools of innovation or the impediments to district strategic or school renewal plans flexibilities, you can [apply here](#). To utilize a proficiency-based system flexibility, you can [apply here](#). To see if there are other policy provisions and

flexibility that fit your needs, you can review the South Carolina [Education Flexibility Guide](#). To contact the SCDE Office of Personalized Learning, please reach out to [personalizedlearning@ed.sc.gov](mailto:personalizedlearning@ed.sc.gov).

## Questions for Planning and Reflection

- » *Were you inspired by any of the examples in this section? What about them inspired you, and what might you want to replicate?*
- » *Review your current strategic and school improvement plans. Where are there opportunities and priorities that overlap with or specifically target personalized, competency-based learning?*
- » *What are ways you can elevate personalized, competency-based learning in school and district improvement processes?*
- » *Review the federal and state funding streams that support your district and school as well as private funding support. Which existing funding streams could be used to support personalized, competency-based efforts? Look through the [Federal Register](#) to see if there are open and prospective competitive grant opportunities that you can apply for to support your efforts.*
- » *What outside assistance do you need to grow personalized, competency-based learning through school improvement or innovation processes? Consider reaching out to the SCDE Office of Personalized Learning for help identifying organizations that can partner with you to aid in your efforts.*



## District-Wide Scale and Adoption

In the 2017-2018 school year, [Lexington County School District 3](#) joined the SCDE Office of Personalized Learning’s initial cohort of districts and schools seeking to become more personalized and competency-based.

Through this, the school district partnered with two coaches from [KnowledgeWorks](#), who provided Lexington 3 staff with ongoing professional learning on personalized, competency-based education, offering outside perspective and close partnership to district and school leadership as they developed and progressed on their [path to personalization](#).

For Lexington 3, this journey started, spread and scaled at the district level. At the same time, classroom teachers began learning about and using student-centered practices. In the beginning, this was done through participation in the statewide cohort run by SCDE Office of Personalized Learning and KnowledgeWorks. This created opportunities for teachers from across the district to learn and engage with personalized, competency-based learning at an introductory level. Each school selected an area of interest and implementation – for example, one school focused on making learning environments more flexible and another focused on student ownership of learning.

Five years later, Lexington 3 has a districtwide vision of “empower[ing] learners to set goals that engage and demonstrate mastery at a pace that fits their needs with rigor and support” and they have determined three district-wide priorities supported by

strong relationships: (1) learner agency, (2) responsive instruction and (3) authentic learning. They are beginning to think about what this transformation means for assessment.

For districtwide transformation and ongoing adoption, Lexington 3 benefited from state support, expert coaching and the use of the [Finding Your Path: A Navigation Tool for Scaling Personalized, Competency-Based Learning](#) as an organizing tool for planning and implementation. Early on, they learned that district-wide scale means personalized progress and performance for each school and staff member – you can’t expect everyone to do this work at the same time, at the same pace or at the same level of implementation.

District-wide scale and adoption refers to districts that commit to personalized, competency-based learning as the way teaching and learning happens, across all schools and settings. This process takes time and signals permanency on the path to personalized, competency-based learning. And don’t forget, it’s been shown to lead to stronger outcomes for students when implemented with fidelity. See the example of Lindsay Unified in District and School Improvement for additional impacts.

By the time districts scale up, there is less experimentation and more focus on quality and consistency in implementation. These districts ensure personalization and competency-based learning is happening with all students and staff. See the Kettle Moraine and Charleston County examples in the **Imagine if...?** section for ideas of what this professional development could look like.

District-wide scale and adoption should mean there is evidence of personalization, student-centered practices and competency-based learning in the culture and ethos

of the district and in every single learning environment and experience. Everyone in the district should be able to communicate what personalized, competency-based learning is and why it's important. This includes staff, students, families, community members and school board members. In South Carolina, this also means that the district uses the [South Carolina Profile of a Graduate](#) competencies as the basis for these conversations. Check out the Henry County Schools and Kettle Moraine School District examples in the **Imagine if...?** section for ideas on what this could look like.

As Theresa Ewald, former assistant superintendent of Kettle Moraine, shared:

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*Educators from other places visit Kettle Moraine thinking they'll see strategies and show up and see the whole ethos, climate and culture are different.*

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This work is easier when undertaken in collaboration with districts going down a similar path. See the Davis and Juab example from Utah in the **Imagine if...?** section for an idea of what this could look like.

At the stage of district-wide scale and adoption, student, caregiver and community engagement are crucial, and their engagement is integrated into all levels

of decision-making. In places like Kettle Moraine, RSU 2 (described in Pilot Programs and Schoolwide Adoption), and Crosstown High School (described in District and School Improvement), this means having processes for regular communication and feedback. It also means making it politically and practically possible to have students and community members sit on the school board, advisories and any other decision-making bodies.

# 5 Imagine if...?

Here are a few ideas in each of the areas highlighted in this example area of what this could look like.

## Professional Development

At [Kettle Moraine School District](#) in Wisconsin, educators' [professional development](#) is fully personalized and competency-based. Kettle Moraine teachers earn career pathway opportunities based on their competencies and demonstrated learning. There are no required professional development hours, but there is personalized professional support.

[Charleston County School District](#) in South Carolina has [moved to a more personalized approach](#) to its professional development initiatives.

## Leveraging Local Strengths

In [Henry County Schools in Georgia](#), the district [leaned into their history of school autonomy](#) to facilitate their transformation. They set the expectations that the transition to personalized, competency-based learning would begin within a certain time frame and follow a five-part model of what personalized learning means. Schools were then given the freedom to determine how to meet those goals in ways that worked for them along with both financial and personnel support from the district.

[Kettle Moraine School District](#) took a [similar approach](#) to Henry. All schools in the district share a common mission and vision and are aligned around a common culture and eight common structures including graduate profiles, micro-schools, a common learning progression, cross-district content teams, K-8 habits of mind, a district-wide LMS, rethinking facilities and development of teacher microcredentials within personalized learning. But even within these structures, schools were given autonomy to respond to students in what they created as they sought to scale the work.

## Cross-District Collaboration

In Utah, two districts, [Davis](#) and [Juab](#), [leveraged each other's strengths](#) to implement personalized, competency-based learning. While Davis served over 73,000 students and Juab served approximately 2,700, both districts were able to add value to the other. For example, Davis was able to benefit from Juab's nimbleness in consolidating content into "power standards," while Juab benefited from the feedback from Davis' much larger team. Both districts are better off for the collaboration.

## Advice From the Field

Seeing personalized, competency-based learning as the de facto approach to teaching and learning across a district is inspiring. These districts have moved away from traditional and time-based approaches designed to meet farm and factory needs to approaches designed to meet student needs.

In Kettle Moraine, that inspiration looks like a commitment to student ownership that is strong enough for students to act as the primary communicators of their learning. Young students send videos home and older students send emails – sharing what they know and can do, and what they need to move ahead. When students become the communicators of their progress instead of teachers, it is a sign that learning is student-driven and students feel empowered.

It also means that there is a layered approach to learning. As Ewald described it, “while teachers dig deep with kids, administrators dig deep with teachers.” This leads to a culture of continuous learning and improvement and helps foster a love of learning. In these districts, administrator and educator buy-in and engagement tend to be high.

When asked to reflect on the progress and success of Kettle Moraine and what it means for other districts, Ewald had this advice:

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*Start with a cadre of those who are ready and wanting to do this work. This should happen at the student, staff, and leadership levels simultaneously. Ensure you have a leader at the helm who has grit and commitment to design and implement the plan. Be OK if people leave. Some staff and families won't want to be a part of this type of learning environment and that's their choice. Don't let it hold back your progress.*

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Mark Tinkham at RSU 2 had similar advice:

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*This is 10-year work. Ten years ago, [school superintendent] said this is the direction we're going in, and everything we do continues to revolve around that and move in that direction. This work must be led by a strong person who is politically savvy. That leader needs “firemen” – people who can listen and extract what is being said by various parties, deal with crises and put out fires and heated people along the way.*

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Personalized, competency-based learning can be confusing for those who have never seen this approach in action. Because of that, you should prepare for possible pushback. When you scale this approach district-wide, it requires ample pre-planning and processing with a wide range of stakeholders, including those who are hesitant about moving forward. It also requires tremendous buy-in, capacity to withstand trial and error and an ability to embrace transitions as much as transformation.

## State Policies that Enable and Encourage District-Wide Scale and Adoption

### Allowable in all South Carolina Schools

Whether your district has already implemented personalized, competency-based learning or you're just getting started, it is important to know that your district has a number of steps that it can take without requesting any flexibilities from the state. Here are a few additional actions that your school or district could do right now without needing to ask for any flexibility:

» **Community Engagement**

Perhaps even more true in district-wide scaling than any other area, a district-wide shift to personalized, competency-based learning must be done with the community, not to them. That's why it is absolutely essential to engage stakeholders, including parents, teachers, students, businesses, higher education and other community members early and regularly in this process. Taking this step doesn't require any flexibility from state statute or regulation. [A guide](#) created by Education Elements and The Learning Accelerator provides a four phase approach, along with examples of districts who have done this.

» **Teacher Professional Development**

If there's one constant we see in the examples in this section, it's the essential nature of rethinking professional development. Whether you're just getting started or building on smaller scale innovations, teachers need to be trained to effectively implement whatever innovations you ultimately decide to adopt. There's good news here - the SCDE [Office of Personalized Learning](#) offers a variety of professional learning experiences, regardless of your level of engagement in personalized, competency-based learning. Reach out

to [personalizedlearning@ed.sc.gov](mailto:personalizedlearning@ed.sc.gov) to learn more.

» **Credit for Mastery in Elementary and Middle Schools**

High schools have requirements around how many hours of instruction are required in order for students to be able to earn credit. However, there's no similar requirement for elementary or middle schools. State Board of Education Regulations [43-231 \(III\)](#) and [43-232 \(II\)](#) specifically say that elementary and middle schools can implement innovative approaches to education so long as they are approved by the local board of trustees and are incorporated into the school and district plan. These schools could award credit for mastery based on South Carolina's competencies without the need to request any extra flexibility.

» **Differentiation Within Schools**

If you're excited to scale personalized learning but want to allow for autonomy and flexibility to innovate on the part of your schools, there's much that can already be done under existing state statute and regulation. This playbook contains a wide range of activities that schools and districts can undertake without requiring flexibility and we highly recommend reviewing those sections

and sharing them with your schools so they can envision what is possible.

» **Partnering with Other Districts**

You don't need to do it alone. There are many benefits to partnering with other schools and districts undertaking this work. And you don't need any

permission from the state to engage in these types of conversations. Davis and Juab in Utah serve as an example of this. As a starting point, we suggest reaching out to the SCDE Office of Personalized learning to see if there are any districts who have or are undertaking similar work.

## Requires Special Permission

There are times when you might need to go further and avail yourself of the flexibilities from statute and regulation that South Carolina provides. Here are some examples where you might need to do this when scaling or expanding personalized, competency-based learning district-wide:

» **Credit for Mastery**

Lexington 3 wanted to let students move at their own pace and earn credit based on when they had mastered the material, rather than the amount of time spent sitting in class. They requested flexibility from [State Board of Education Regulation 43-234 II \(B\)](#), which governs how schools can award high school academic credit. You could consider using the schools of innovation waiver or district strategic planning process for such a waiver.

» **Instructional Time Requirements**

Maybe you want to go further with your exploration of credit by mastery, even in an elementary or middle school, and provide opportunities that would reduce the length of the traditional school day, or even give students time outside of the classroom to pursue independent study opportunities. South Carolina State Board of Education Regulations [43-231](#), [43-232](#) and [43-234](#) all require the school day to be at minimum six hours for elementary, middle and high schools, which would require flexibility. Lexington specifically requested a waiver from 43-231 and 43-234 in scaling its work district-wide.

» **Credit for Learning Outside the Classroom**

Let's say that a high school like Lexington wanted to go further than credit for mastery and give students a way to earn credit for experiences in their community through things like internships or apprenticeships. The district could leverage [State Board of Education Regulation 43-234 II \(C\)](#) to create a proficiency-based system that gives students a path to earn credit in these types of experiences.

» **Alternative Means of Mastery**

If you wanted to provide your high school students with alternative means of providing content mastery for either in- or out-of-school experiences, you could create a proficiency-based system under [State Board of Education Regulation 43-234](#). This would allow you to give students either initial credit for a course the first time they took it, or credit for prior learning that may have occurred elsewhere.

# 5

## Mechanisms for Flexibility

You have several mechanisms to ask for flexibility from state statute and regulation to scale personalized, competency-based learning district-wide.

- » South Carolina’s [Schools of Innovation flexibility](#) (Section 59-19-350), the [district strategic plan and school renewal plan](#) processes, the [proficiency-based system](#) regulation and the [locally designed subject area course](#) are detailed in previous sections.
- » The 2022-23 [State Appropriation Act](#) gives districts the authority to submit a waiver application to the South Carolina State Board of Education to implement competency-based education district-wide. Districts may submit a waiver to the state until the waiver expires on June 30, 2023. Reach out to [staff at the SCDE Office of Personalized Learning](#) for more information.

If you want to leverage either the schools of innovation or the impediments to district strategic or school renewal plans flexibilities, you can [apply here](#). To utilize a proficiency-based system flexibility, you can [apply here](#). To see if there are other policy provisions and flexibility that fit your needs, you can review the South Carolina [Education Flexibility Guide](#). To contact the SCDE Office of Personalized Learning, please reach out to [personalizedlearning@ed.sc.gov](mailto:personalizedlearning@ed.sc.gov).

## Questions for Planning and Reflection

- » *Were you inspired by any of the examples in this section? What about them inspired you, and what might you want to replicate?*
- » *Based on what you’ve read in this section, do you believe your district is ready for district-wide scale and adoption? Take some time as a team to discuss the benefits and challenges that come with this decision.*
- » *In your district, who is your politically savvy leader and who are your “firefighters?” What role are they and should they be playing in your work towards personalized, competency-based learning?*
- » *What are the ways you engage stakeholders in these efforts? Are there new processes, systems or structures your team needs to build in order to inform and involve them in this process, especially as you consider scale and sustainability?*
- » *As you move towards full, systemic transformation what flexibilities and supports do you need from the state?*

# Final Tips

## from Fellow Travelers on the Path to Personalization

In developing this playbook, we interviewed nearly 20 national and state leaders in personalized, competency-based learning. Here are six pieces of advice we heard from every leader we spoke to:

### 1. Start small

Begin with pilots and low-risk experimentation. It is easier to start small and grow bigger, than the reverse. Look for a part of your school or district where this work is already happening or almost happening. These “ripe” spaces are great spaces to start.

### 2. Begin with the willing and wanting

The best way to attract new supporters is to show them where it’s working and have them discover why it’s worth doing it themselves. Start your personalized, competency-based learning efforts with people who are eager and excited, and who want to experiment and work together. Once they get results, others will be more curious and want to join.

### 3. Encourage your planning team to take risks and compensate them for their time

The shift to personalized, competency-based learning is complex and time-consuming. Much of the initial design work will need to be built into the work day or take place outside of normal working hours. Staff must feel supported and should be compensated for the time they invest in planning and implementing personalized, competency-based learning. Make sure your actions communicate your values and encourage staff to try new things and pay them for their creative leadership and dedication to this work.

#### 4. Engage district leadership, community, families and students early and often

This work must be done with communities, not to them. Engage every district and school stakeholder group as often as you can. Be proactive in your communications, anticipate pre- and post-meeting conversations and establish formal structures like advisory boards for ongoing involvement and shared decision-making. Design communications and collateral for everyone so there is broad-based understanding about what these efforts are and mean for students and your school community.

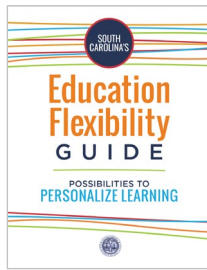
#### 5. Use technology to enable, not to drive

Virtual and online learning are not always personalized or competency-based. It can be high-, low- or no-tech. Don't assume your virtual offerings and platforms can do personalization and competency-based learning for you. Instead, view technology as an enabler, not a driver, of personalized, competency-based learning.

#### 6. Consider shared leadership and co-teaching models

The path to personalization is a journey that takes energy, investment, commitment, time and teamwork. It works better when it's done by a team. Look for opportunities to engage in distributed leadership and shared teaching models. Take advantage of resources like the [Center for Teaching Quality](#) and the [SCDE Office of Educator Effectiveness and Leadership Development](#). Engage district leaders throughout the process to avoid disconnects between school and district priorities and strategies.

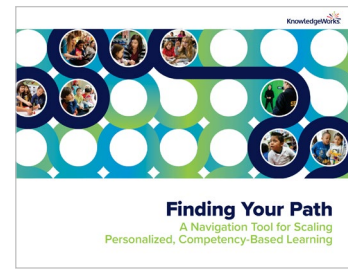
## Recommended Reading



South Carolina's  
Education  
Flexibility Guide



Profile of a South  
Carolina Graduate



Finding Your Path: A Navigation  
Tool for Scaling Personalized,  
Competency-Based Learning  
*(powered by KnowledgeWorks)*

## Organizations with Additional Resources

- » [South Carolina Department of Education  
Office of Personalized Learning](#)
- » [Assessment for Learning Project](#)
- » [Aurora Institute](#)
- » [Center for Innovation in Education](#)
- » [Center for Teaching Quality](#)
- » [Competency Works  
\*\(powered by Aurora Institute\)\*](#)
- » [Getting Smart](#)
- » [Next Generation Learning Challenge](#)
- » [reDesign](#)
- » [Science of Learning and Development  
\(SoLD\) Alliance](#)

# State Regulations and Statutes of Interest

State Board of Education Regulation and State Statute from which you may need flexibility. This is a collection of the many of the statutes and regulations cited throughout this resources. This is not intended to be an exhaustive list.

## State Regulations:

- » 43-62 Regarding Teacher Certification  
<https://www.ed.sc.gov/index.cfm?LinkServID=2842FBBA-A972-E485-8CA2A5359C7C6870>
- » 43-63 Regarding Career and Technology Education Work-Based Certification  
<https://www.ed.sc.gov/index.cfm?LinkServID=61045CB7-95F8-BA82-7684E4AC8F9A9926>
- » 43-205 Regarding Administrative and Professional Personnel Qualifications, Duties and Workloads  
<https://www.ed.sc.gov/state-board/state-board-of-education/about-state-board/regulations-table-of-contents/sbe-regulaiton-43-205-administrative-and-professional-personnel-qualifications-duties-and-workloads/>
- » 43-231 - Regarding Defined Programing for K-5 Education  
<https://www.ed.sc.gov/index.cfm?LinkServID=600A9A82-F9EC-1DCA-88BDAF20428CA255>
- » 43-232 Regarding Defined Programing for 6-8 Education  
<https://www.ed.sc.gov/index.cfm?LinkServID=5FF25362-F5C8-29C3-F6843BC097C273FA>
- » 43-234 Regarding Defined Programing for Grades 9-12 and Graduation Requirements.  
<https://www.ed.sc.gov/index.cfm?LinkServID=605ECD73-ACD2-2226-D69DE28436D6BBB0>
- » 43-240 Regarding Summer School Programs  
<https://www.ed.sc.gov/index.cfm?LinkServID=60CFF18C-E5C4-1D16-3D68655E9288D155>
- » 43-261 Regarding District and School Planning  
<https://www.ed.sc.gov/index.cfm?LinkServID=62146E29-9C60-3DD6-10349BC4C02A93DE>

## State Statutes:

- » Section 59, Chapter 1 - General Provisions 1 <https://www.scstatehouse.gov/code/t59c001.php>
  - 59-1-425 Beginning and length of school term; make-up days; waiver; instructional days.
- » Section 59, Chapter 5 - State Board of Education
  - 59-5-68 - Uniform Grading Scale <https://www.scstatehouse.gov/code/t59c005.php>



This guide was developed in collaboration with:



KnowledgeWorks is a national nonprofit organization advancing a future of learning that ensures each student graduates ready for what's next. For more than 20 years, we've been partnering with states, communities and leaders across the country to imagine, build and sustain vibrant learning communities. Through evidence-based practices and a commitment to equitable outcomes, we're creating the future of learning, together.