



Rhode Island Lighthouse Schools

EVALUATION

FALL 2019



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## Introduction

In September 2017 three schools—Captain Isaac Paine (CIP) in Foster, Barrington Middle School (BMS) in Barrington, and 360 High School in Providence—launched their innovative plans to expand personalized learning throughout their schools. Through a competitive process these schools were selected to receive financial support (\$200,000 over two years) and strategic partnership to scale personalized learning school-wide. This report summarizes the results of the Rhode Island Office of Innovation Lighthouse Grant evaluation conducted by Education Development Center.



## Overview of Personalized Learning Implementation

At the start of the grant the Office of Innovation set forth overall grant goals (box 2) for each school and worked with school leaders to set school-specific goals given their needs, contexts, and capacity. Each school team then created an implementation plan to meet those goals. The Office of Innovation provided grantees with autonomy in choosing how to scale personalized learning efforts throughout their schools. The Office of Innovation prioritized the tenets of personalized learning outlined in their [personalized learning white paper](#), but was “model agnostic,” judging success neither by the model of personalization schools chose to implement, nor by the type of school (grade level, urbanicity, etc.). In fact, school teams defined personalized learning differently—from a focus on the whole student, to student ownership and project-based learning, to an emphasis on personalized pathways for students.

### Box 1. Methods

The evaluation took place during the school years 2017-18 and 2018-19. This mixed-methods evaluation consisted of three rounds of focus groups at each school and analyses of schools’ annual teacher and student survey outcomes and student achievement results.

## School-Specific Goals and Implementation Approaches

**Captain Isaac Paine Elementary School** (CIP) is located in Foster, Rhode Island and is a rural community. The school serves 277 students in grades PreK-5, 18 percent of whom qualify for free or reduced price lunch. As CIP school leadership describes, “the CIP community embraces creativity, collaboration, continual learning, educating the whole child, and integrating technology to enhance students’ education.”

During the first year as a Lighthouse School, the implementation team’s efforts focused on writing curriculum and creating mastery-based progressions in literacy. The second grant year’s efforts also focused on writing, but also creating additional mastery-based progressions in other content areas. In both years teachers could choose three tenets (from the personalized learning white paper) of personalized learning as their focal areas for implementation in their classrooms.

CIP leaders articulated specific school goals for the Lighthouse grant that relate to students, teachers, and networking (for the complete list, see Appendix A). For example, one student-related goal was: *At least 80% of our students in grades K-5 will respond favorably to Survey Works questions specific to **student engagement** by the end of the 2018-19 school year.*

**Barrington Middle School** (BMS) is located in Barrington, Rhode Island, a suburb of the state’s capital. The grades 6-8 school serves 841 students, six percent of whom qualify for free or reduced price lunch. BMS takes pride in its commitment to “prepare students for the 21st century world with Deeper Learning competencies, building on a strong foundation of core academic knowledge while encouraging critical thinking, collaborative work, learning to learn, and effective communication.”

In both grant years BMS focused on project-based learning. In the first year the projects were implemented in many content areas, but each project focused only on a single content area. In the second year, faculty collaborated across content areas to create interdisciplinary project opportunities. In turn, students created comprehensive, interdisciplinary projects. In the second year BMS also focused efforts on integrating support professionals into the implementation of personalized learning. For example projects see appendix B.

BMS’s school-specific goals related to students and teachers. For example, one student-related goal was: *Student understanding of connections between coursework and real-world.* One goal for teachers was

**Box 2. Lighthouse Schools Grant Goals**

*Overall Grant Goals*

- Implement personalized learning school wide
- Serve as exemplars of PL for other schools and districts

*Common Goals Across the Schools*

- Push thinking around what education can and should be for students in Rhode Island
- Support schools in becoming open-access models for this work
- Broaden and strengthen the network of trusted and trusting schools willing to lean in together.
- Increase academic achievement/proficiency
- Increase student engagement
- Increase teacher efficacy

*Expand Experiential Learning to interdisciplinary units through our Cluster Model.* (For the complete list of BMS’s goals, see Appendix A).

**360 High School** (360) is located in Providence, Rhode Island, which is an urban community. The school currently serves 156 students in grades 9-12, though in the first year of the grant it served only grades 9-11. Most (90%) of the students qualify for free or reduced price lunch.

Throughout the grant period 360 aimed to personalize learning through positive development of youth, exploration of career pathways, and deeper learning opportunities for students. In the first year, 360’s efforts focused on building curriculum, establishing maker spaces, such as a STEAM lab, and establishing a **portrait of a graduate**. In the grant’s second year, implementation focused more specifically on personalized learning and incorporating higher levels of rigor in teaching and learning. These efforts coincided with their portrait of a graduate framework, which was well supported throughout the school.

Leaders at 360 articulated many school-specific grant goals, including goals pertaining to students, teachers, and the school community. For example, a school community goal was: *Families become engaged and empowered with their children in their work in the school and the community.* (For the complete list of 360’s goals, see Appendix A).

## Key Findings

Lighthouse schools acted as models for other schools in Rhode Island and nationally.

True to the name and idea behind the Lighthouse schools grant, the Lighthouse schools hosted many site visits from schools near and far. During the course of the grant, schools hosted over 30 site visits, opening their doors to more than 100 visitors, including over 50 educators and seven elected and appointed state officials. Teams were forthcoming in sharing their successes with others, but also their challenges. One team member offers others the advice to, “share the discovery of what you’re doing, not just the successes, with others.” Another member advises others to implement personalized learning as best they can, even without a grant, realizing that implementation may be slower, but to do the best work possible. Although the schools acted as models, they also sought out their own models and networks, through the assistance of the Office of Innovation staff and other resources.

“I wouldn't make the claim that we have 100% implementation for personalized learning, nor do I ever think we'll be at that place, because I think as you learn more, you get more sophisticated, and then you drill down in a different place.”

*Lighthouse School Leader*

The grant accelerated personalized learning implementation efforts at each school.

To scale personalized learning school-wide Lighthouse schools needed to train staff and procure resources. The grant allowed for comprehensive and rigorous teacher training opportunities that would not have been available to as many staff within the same timeframe without the grant funds. The grant also allowed for the purchase of training materials and additional technology equipment. At one school

the new equipment motivated and inspired staff and students because they felt as though they were truly part of a 21<sup>st</sup> century school.

### Lighthouse schools met their school-specific and grant goals.

Personalized learning implementation varied in its intensity between schools and over the course of the grant. One school experienced a slow start, but at the end of the grant period, all three Lighthouse schools met all or nearly all of their school-specific goals and the grant goal of school-wide implementation. However, two schools were hesitant to characterize their personalized learning status as fully implemented because they acknowledged that there is always room for improvement.



Students at Lighthouse schools benefited from personalized learning activities including increasing their engagement, mastery, and 21<sup>st</sup> century skills.

Lighthouse schools' teachers observed increases in student engagement in the classroom and in students' discussions of their learning with their families over the course of the grant period. Teachers also observed increases in students' problem-solving skills, presentation skills, perseverance, and reflective practices.

### The grant activities influenced the Lighthouse schools' culture, enhancing collaboration among staff.

Over the course of the grant the teacher culture in Lighthouse schools evolved from one that was siloed to one that was extremely collaborative. Lighthouse school teachers sought one another out for interdisciplinary projects, for example, and to discuss personalized learning practices. Structural shifts in the schools supported more collaboration, such as scheduling shifts to allow common planning time, and partnering teachers with confidence in implementing personalized learning with teachers who were less confident. At least one Lighthouse school noticed increases in teacher collaboration on the school's SurveyWorks teacher data—the school's frequency of collaboration between teachers increased seven percentage points from 2017-2018 to 2018-2019.

Family engagement with Lighthouse schools increased, from greater family involvement in school academic events to more frequent conversations about student learning.

Lighthouse schools engaged with students’ families in various ways to showcase students’ learning related to the schools’ personalization efforts. Schools offered open houses, which were extremely well attended, student showcases, and one school offered a series of math, literacy, and science instructional nights. An administrator noted, “It was an awesome way for parents to see the impact this grant and this work has in the classroom and on their kid's learning. We had amazing turn out for those, way more than any other instructional nights that we've done previously.” Teachers observed that students are sharing more with their families about their school activities and are excited to discuss their learning with their families.



### Lessons Learned

The Lighthouse schools grant was a valuable and worthwhile learning experience for the Lighthouse schools and beyond. The Lighthouse school leaders and their teams experienced several challenges in scaling their personalization efforts school wide, such as time, capacity, technology, and assessment (box 3). Despite these challenges the school teams realized many successes, including meeting the grant goal of implementing personalized learning school wide. From these experiences the teams gained valuable insight that will inform their future efforts and can inform other schools that are planning for and already implementing personalized learning. The following lessons learned are organized by their relevance to each phase of personalized learning implementation: planning for and early implementation, and during implementation. The program manager also observed valuable lessons, such as how difficult it was for schools to spend the entire grant amount in just two years (box 4).

**Box 3. Common Challenges Experienced by Lighthouse Schools**

- Lack of time for teacher collaboration
- Limited capacity to implement personalized learning strategies
- Strategic integration and training for use of technology
- Identifying valid assessments and metrics for measuring outcomes
- Grant management (e.g., reporting, finances, equipment procurement)

## Planning for and Early Personalized Learning Implementation

Creating buy-in for school wide personalized learning was enhanced by fostering a shared vision and articulating a common definition of personalized learning.

Lighthouse schools experienced challenges in creating teacher buy-in for personalized learning implementation when teachers had varying levels of understanding of what the term personalized learning meant. One Lighthouse school was immediately successful in generating teacher buy-in because the principal set the vision for the initiative at the beginning of the school year, provided clear definitions of the personalized learning terms used, and had piloted elements of personalized learning the previous year. To enhance buy-in and set the stage for successful implementation, school teams suggest sharing the initiative's vision and definitions of personalized learning at the outset. Moreover, Lighthouse schools emphasized the importance of sharing the vision across schools in the district to integrate personalized learning efforts and to provide students with a consistent learning experience as they progress from elementary to secondary school.

Allowing teachers flexibility and choice in personalized learning implementation contributed to its success.

At one Lighthouse school all teachers worked toward practicing the same three tenets of personalized learning, yet were allowed to select their preferred tenet as part of their professional growth goal. This approach provided teachers with an opportunity to take ownership of the initiative and make it meaningful for them. At another school all teachers were working on project-based learning, but were given flexibility in the content and approach. School teams suggest providing an overarching framework and vision, but providing teachers with their own voice and choice in how they implement personalized learning in their classrooms.

Lighthouse school teams noted the difficult nature of the shift from traditional instruction to using innovative techniques and new technology for personalized learning activities.

To address this concern, school teams recommended having a plan for onboarding new teachers to the culture of personalized learning and enlisting experienced teachers to support new teachers in their introduction to personalized learning implementation and what it can look like in their classroom. Additionally, some teachers in early grades could have benefitted by extra supports for technology integration. For example, implementation of personalized learning activities with technology would have been easier if there were more teachers available in the classroom to support young children.

## During Personalized Learning Implementation

Time for collaboration was both a challenge, yet key to successful personalized learning implementation.

Time was often a barrier for teachers to participate in professional development activities or observe one another, as well as to work on their curricular materials. Lighthouse school teams noted the importance of making time for teachers to collaborate and learn together, as well as to attend relevant trainings to increase their capacity for implementing personalized learning strategies and activities. The grant also allowed for teachers to be paid for additional time that they devoted to grant work, which was appreciated and promoted a culture of respect and support for the work. Lighthouse teams suggest making structural shifts in school schedules to allow teachers the time to observe one another, attend trainings together, and collaborate, such as during common planning time for interdisciplinary teams.

Measuring personalizing learning competencies in students and personalizing learning strategies in practice was a common challenge.

Lighthouse schools struggled to find valid assessments that measured student and teacher outcomes relating to personalized learning. Current assessments, such as local and statewide tests, had either changed during the grant period or did not provide enough detail on the topics of interest. Schools utilized annual survey data, such as teacher and student engagement surveys, but as one leader explained, the results do not reflect reality: “I see most of the kids really meaningfully engaged in what's going on...But, when surveyed, and they're asked about how much they talk about the things that they're learning at school, or how interested are they in what they're learning, those numbers aren't necessarily reflective of what we're observing.” Additionally, Lighthouse schools were challenged in measuring teachers' personalized learning practices because the walkthrough observation tools used were used so infrequently that they did not provide comprehensive information that could be acted upon. The teams managed these challenges by using supplemental local assessments and surveys and by increasing the frequency of teacher observations (while also shortening the walkthrough tool).

## Advice from Lighthouse School Teams for Schools Beginning to Implement Personalized Learning

Given their experiences, Lighthouse school teams offered advice for schools beginning to implement personalized learning. Advice spanned topics ranging from emphasizing a shared vision to fostering collaboration to being your own public relations agent.

- Find the right size and scope and do not over commit to undertaking too many goals.
- Prior to implementation define the specific academic or other competencies that will be the focus of the initiative.

- Know in advance that implementing personalized learning school-wide is a large time commitment and requires shifts in schedules to allow teachers to collaborate, especially interdisciplinary teams.
- Form a plan and provide support for teachers to work together to do cross-curricular planning. Set expectations that cross-curricular planning is important and make time and space for teachers to collaborate.
- Plan for onboarding new teachers to the culture of personalized learning. Enlist experienced teachers to support new teachers, including observations of them as model classrooms.
- Prioritize personalized learning implementation throughout the school so teachers know to make time for this work.
- Consider ways to support kindergarten and first grade teachers with implementing technology in classrooms. Ensure there are staff who are able to support these classrooms when teachers are looking to implement technology, so there are more adults to support young children with these activities.
- Carefully plan and develop the metrics for measuring personalized learning competencies.
- Ensure a culture of respect, professionalism, and trust in the faculty.

#### Box 4. Lessons Learned from the Lighthouse Challenge

- *A heavy lift for schools:* The start-up process for schools was an arduous task between one-on-one meetings, site visits, and data collection, on top of regular administrative duties.
- *School budget friendly initiatives:* For some schools, a lump dollar sum proved difficult to spend down, which could be mitigated if challenges and initiatives like this are aligned with school budget timelines in the future.
- *Strategic spending:* A focus on coaching, professional development, and creating opportunities for common planning time helped schools progress further and faster in their work.
- *Lighthouse Schools are more than bright spots:* Schools continuously sought networking support to connect with others doing this work. They felt like they were leading the field in the area and wanted to connect with others. At the same time, they opened their doors to others in RI that were further behind them so that they could serve as an exemplar for practice.

## Looking Ahead

Lighthouse schools plan to continue school wide implementation of personalized learning into the future, expanding upon current efforts.

The Lighthouse school teams plan to capitalize on their momentum through continued and expanded implementation of personalized learning activities. Schools' plans include activities such as utilizing Maker Spaces, encouraging more student voice in the learning process, providing additional teacher training from teacher leaders, and increasing interdisciplinary teacher collaboration by re-designing the school schedule. One school will continue its use of a continuous improvement process, which it began during the grant, to refine their supports and meet teachers' individual needs regarding personalized learning implementation. The process already proved beneficial in uncovering strategies that did not work well, such as using personalized learning plans in early grades, which the school will no longer implement moving forward.

Lighthouse schools will utilize federal and local funds to sustain their personalized learning implementation.

Although the Lighthouse school teams understand that their progress may not be as rapid as it was during the grant period due to a decrease in funds for efforts, such as providing intensive teacher training, they plan to sustain the work using other funding sources. For example, two schools plan to utilize federal funds, such as Title II funds, to assist in covering the costs of teacher training, but will also rely heavily on low-cost options such as using teacher leaders to coach novice teachers on personalized learning instructional strategies and curriculum development. One Lighthouse school voiced concern regarding the cost of equipment, such as maintaining 3D printer spools, and plans to utilize both federal and local funds to cover such expenses.

# Appendix A

Each Lighthouse School set school-specific goals for the grant period. The following tables include each school’s goals and status towards completion.

CAPTAIN ISAAC PAINE GOALS		STATUS
Student Outcomes	For each year of the grant, there will be a 5% decrease in the number of students below proficiency on local <b>literacy and math assessments</b> and a 10% decrease in the number of students below proficiency in literacy and math based upon the state assessment system.	Green
	At least 80% of our students in grades K-5 will respond favorably to Survey Works questions specific to <b>student engagement</b> by the end of the 2018-19 school year.	Red
Teacher Outcomes	By the close of the grant (2018-19), there will be a 20% increase in teacher’s satisfaction and feelings of <b>self-efficacy</b> as measured by Survey Works questions specific to resources and ability to reach unique learners, input on school-wide decision making, and positive collegial attitudes.	Green
	Classroom teachers will have at least 70% of their walkthrough data using the Highlander Institute’s <b>Blended Learning Best Practices</b> Walkthrough Tool fall within the “There is some evidence of this” or “There is a great deal of evidence of this” during the last two walkthroughs conducted during the 2018-19 school year.	Green
Other Outcomes	At the end of the grant’s duration, CIP will have hosted at least <b>15 site visits</b> from different school teams across the state.	Green

BARRINGTON MIDDLE SCHOOL GOALS		STATUS
Student Outcomes	Student demonstration of the Deeper Learning Competencies	Green
	Student understanding of connections between coursework and real-world	Green
	Student demonstration of the Design Thinking Process	Green
	Student Demonstration of the tenets of Project Based Learning	Green
Teacher Outcomes	Making Experiential Learning Visible: Build a 6-8 continuum of student experiential learning through guaranteed and viable units of study	Green
	Expand Experiential Learning to interdisciplinary units through our Cluster Model	Green
	Explicit instruction of the Deeper Learning Competencies	Green
	Development of the following bridge to high school pathways: T.V. Production, Pre-Engineering, STEAM, Art, Music, Business Entrepreneurship, and Science Research.	Yellow

360 HIGH SCHOOL GOALS		STATUS
<b>Student Outcomes</b>	Students show growth in math/reading	
	Personalized Education Plans are a living document with proof of revision	
	Integrated Exhibitions of Learning are interdisciplinary with evidence of deeper learning	
	50% students enrolled in Advanced Course Network/dual-enrollment	
	Students are enrolled in PSAT prep courses	N/A
	Students have awareness and are engaged in problem-based learning, service learning and/or deeper learning	
<b>Teacher Outcomes</b>	Curriculum development for three labs	
	Monitoring/supporting students to realize full potential of Personalized Education Plans	
	Facilitator-Teacher interaction is that of a coach and a guide	
<b>School Community Outcomes</b>	Community acts as stakeholder in student education	
	360 is a beacon of civic involvement in the community	
	Families become engaged and empowered with their children in their work in the school and the community	
	Families will be involved with the development of the school and the education of students	

## Appendix B

### Examples of Personalized Learning in Practice

The following are examples from each school of personalized learning coursework and/or projects that were implemented during the grant period.

#### Captain Isaac Paine

*Fluency Goals* are set each trimester and are tied to students Personalized Learning Plans. For example, in fourth grade students have a playlist of items that they need to do for math and one of them is fluency. They set a multiplication goal that they work on daily and they are given a choice in how they will practice reaching the goal. The teacher also provides choices for ways in which the students can work on their fluency at home, with family support. At the end of the trimester students reflect to see if they met their goal. If they did not, they determine what steps they need to do next and consider why they didn't meet the goal. This process allows students to take ownership of their learning.

*Nature Trail Design Challenge* is a community-oriented project for fifth grade students that involves revitalizing a nature trail behind the school. Students were tasked with promoting the use of the trail system and had to determine the barriers to its lack of use. Once students identified those barriers they worked to address them, such as by cleaning the trails and also creating maps that highlight the actual trail and the habitats. One educator noted, "The idea of giving back to the school, giving them ownership of it, and something that's really going to be used in the future is helpful instead of just a project for a project's sake."

## Barrington Middle School

*Interdisciplinary Math & Science Project:* Two classrooms (math and science) paired together during the first trimester several times for a Mars Mission project. During the project students helped each other work with 3D printers, circuits, drones, and built a rover. The project culmination was a student showcase that was open to the school community and families. It was also live streamed to an elementary school in the district. At the event students used a Lego mat to simulate what it would be like for a rover to be on mars. Students used to rover to perform different missions. A teacher explained that at the student showcase a drone didn't work, but the student exercised her problem solving skills that she'd been taught and was able to address the problem. The school connected with NASA about the event, and NASA sent the students special badges.

### Example Best Practice

BMS has implemented "salons" where teachers can have a safe space to share ideas, and they've seen teachers get into one another's classrooms more. Teachers are more able to act upon good ideas that they have that foster interdisciplinary work.

*Interdisciplinary Math, Writing, & History Project:* For this project students measured the speed of cars driving by the school and their homes and figured out how many were speeding. They shared the information with the local police department by writing letters and also sent letters to town officials. In History class, students learned about how to change laws and advocate for changes to laws such as speed limits. The police chief responded and plans to use the information to deploy patrol cars where students noticed the most incidents of speeding. The teacher plans to do this project again and have students compare the data.

*Interdisciplinary Measurement Project:* In this math and social studies project students measured their front and back yards as part of a geometry unit. Then students designed their ideal backyard. In social studies class the students learned about zoning and other relevant laws.

[100 Places to Visit in your Lifetime](#) is an 8<sup>th</sup> grade deeper learning project that involved students researching, synthesizing, and curating content on a website. Students created travel journals with their recommendations for what to do at a particular destination, hotel information, points of interest, the area's geography, and currency information. Students led the research and website development and presented their projects to their peers.

In the *Genius Hour* project students get to decide about something that they're passionate to learn about. Students present on their learning.

The *UN Sustainable Goals* project entailed students adopting one of the goals and learning around it, and exploring the different cultures virtually.

*Business America* is a sixth grade project where students create a product using recyclable materials. Students present on their projects.

## 360 High School

*Student Exhibitions* are for students in grades 9 and 10 that offer an opportunity for students to reflect on their learning, challenges and strengths in terms of the areas of the profile of a graduate, and their goals.

This process is personalized in that students have the ability to choose what they showcase. Students present their exhibition to a jury at the end of the year and their presentations are graded with a common rubric that addresses academic content, social competencies, and personal competencies.

*Classroom Projects* incorporate student voice and choice. For example, in the engineering class students are given a broad problem to solve along with the rubric criteria for which their work will be graded, and they are encouraged to find their own solution to the problem. One teacher noted, "Often the solutions are quite different. Using the groups native intelligence and capacities, some choose one direction, some choose another direction. But in the end they are able to show evidence that they did solve the problem, even if it's not as efficient or as pretty. There are choices that they make and they should be able to articulate what they are."