

LEADERSHIP IN ACTION

a briefing series for new england's educational leaders

Different students. Different needs. Different learning opportunities. **It's that simple.** Learn more about the [New England Secondary School Consortium](#).

What Are Personalized Learning Pathways?

For decades, high schools have offered students more or less the same traditional selection of choices: this class or that class, a higher-level course or a lower-level course, an academic program or a technical program. All of these learning choices combine to become a particular student's **pathway** to a high school diploma.

Yet because high schools tend to offer only a narrow range of potential pathways, student learning has largely been limited to the handful of educational options provided by the school. But should learning be limited to a small selection of predetermined options or a ninety-minute class? Or should learning be customized to individual needs, interests, and aspirations of students?

Personalized learning pathways empower students to pursue their passions while encouraging them to take more responsibility for their education. Students work with their teachers to blend a variety of educational experiences that satisfy graduation requirements and meet state-required standards, such as career-and-technical, college-level, and online courses, in addition to internships, apprenticeships, and volunteer opportunities that are intentionally designed to integrate with a student's academic learning.

How It Works

- ✓ **The community becomes a classroom.** For more than a century, the traditional classroom has been seen as the only place where students learn. But a room with a chalkboard is not always the best setting for learning about marine life, business, or history, for example, when real oceans, companies, museums, or archeological sites may be located right down the street. When schools embrace the idea that learning can happen beyond the school walls, the entire community becomes a classroom.
- ✓ **Learning can take place anytime.** Why should learning be limited to the handful of hours students spend in class every week? New online education programs, for example, allow students to catch up with their peers if they fall behind or tackle challenging lessons whenever their schedule allows, while learning internships can give students opportunities to earn academic credit on weekends or during school breaks. The school's structure and schedule no longer need to be an obstacle to learning.
- ✓ **Students can design their own education.** Each student is unique. Some are more interested in science, others in math. Some excel at multiple-choice tests, while others are better at writing essays. Some love to read, while others prefer hands-on learning. Some "get it" right away, while others need more time or encouragement. Instead of forcing every student to learn in the same way, personalized pathways are customized to the needs, interests, and aspirations of individual students.
- ✓ **Learning is integrated, not disconnected.** In many schools, students have to choose between a traditional academic program, for example, and a technical program. But why not blend these and other options? Students could take an engineering or robotics course at their regional technical center, English and math at their high school, a science course at the local community college, and an online course that isn't offered by their school. If all students are held to the same learning expectations, but are allowed to achieve those high standards in more creative and personally meaningful ways, every student can design a personalized pathway to graduation that prepares them for life.

Want to Learn More?

Visit the [Leadership in Action website](#) and download *I Want to Know More*, a selection of information and resources for those interested in reading more about how today's students learn.

newenglandssc.org/leadership_in_action