



INNOVATIVE STAFFING TO PERSONALIZE LEARNING: How new teaching roles and blended learning help students succeed

THE CLAYTON CHRISTENSEN INSTITUTE & PUBLIC IMPACT

MAY 2018



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank Erin Mote and Eric Tucker of Brooklyn Laboratory Charter Schools; Lori Treiber and Scott Nolt of Cabarrus County Schools; Scott Frauenheim and Colleen Collins of CICS West Belden; Joe Albers of Cristo Rey San Jose Jesuit High School; John Haynal, Jacquelynn Walker, Deniece Nohara, and Kelly Grondahl of the Clark County School District; Ami Gandhi of Intrinsic Schools; James Dent and Heather Parsons of Navigator Schools; and Erica Jordan-Thomas of Ranson IB Middle School for allowing us to visit their schools and classrooms and interview their staff and students for this project.

This paper is a collaboration between Public Impact and the Clayton Christensen Institute. Sharon Kebschull Barrett of Public Impact and Thomas Arnett of the Christensen Institute are the primary authors. Other contributors include Emily Ayscue Hassel, Bryan C. Hassel, Nita Losoponkul, and Grayson Cooper of Public Impact, and Julia Freeland Fisher, Luis Flores, Hayden Hill, and Meris Stansbury of the Christensen Institute. Beverley Tyndall of Public Impact produced the videos that accompany the case studies about the schools profiled in this paper. To read the case studies and watch the videos, visit <http://publicimpact.com/innovative-staffing-to-personalize-learning>.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary.....	4
Introduction.....	5
Methodology.....	6
Problem Areas: Where Traditional Instruction Fell Short.....	9
New Models: Blended Learning and Innovative Staffing	10
Unlocking time, space, and data with blended learning.....	10
Exploring innovative approaches to staffing.....	11
Creating new roles.....	11
Emphasizing the collaborative power of small teams.....	13
Focusing on deep coaching.....	15
Growing their own educator pipelines.....	16
Shifts in the Student Experience	17
Small group instruction.....	17
Individualized instruction.....	18
Personal relationships	19
Choices in learning.....	20
Other Keys to Quality and Sustainability	21
School leaders who reinforce high standards.....	21
Schedules that allow for collaboration.....	22
Compensation that fits within existing budgets.....	22
Facilities that support team teaching.....	24
Looking Ahead: Scaling Up, Research and Action	25
Achieving scale.....	25
What’s needed next.....	26
Conclusion.....	27
Notes.....	28
About the Institute and Public Impact.....	30

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In today's classrooms, teachers face a tall order. They want to differentiate instruction, develop students' social-emotional skills, and strengthen the bonds among students and caring adults. But addressing all these needs for dozens of students at a time is a herculean task. Many schools have started to help teachers use blended learning as a tool to personalize instruction to the individual needs of their students.

Yet most teachers, including many seeking to adopt blended and personalized learning, remain stuck in a one-teacher, one-classroom model where teachers work largely alone, with only sporadic feedback and support, and new tasks associated with personalizing learning are often added to already overwhelming workloads.

In this paper, we examine how **eight pioneering district, charter, and private schools and school networks with notable student success adopted blended learning and new staffing arrangements to better enable personalized instruction.** Blended learning gave teachers more real-time student learning data so that schools could frequently regroup students, quickly respond to struggling students, and help teachers improve by pinpointing instructional planning and professional development issues. At the same time, innovative staffing arrangements helped the schools personalize learning by providing more students with great teaching. Key elements of these innovative staffing models included:

- **New roles for educators, often as part of a career path allowing development and support.** Roles included *teacher-leaders* of small instructional teams, who often planned and directed the team teachers' instruction, coached the teachers, and analyzed data; *collaborating teachers* who worked in teams and supported one another more than typically happens for classroom teachers in traditional schools; *support staff* who tutored or mentored students, providing more one-on-one or small-group time; and *teachers-in-training*, who supported other teachers and taught while learning on the job.
- **Intensive collaboration on small teaching teams.** Collaboration gave teams broader insights into individual student needs, helped develop their instructional skills faster, and helped improve accountability for student outcomes.
- **Cultures of intensive coaching,** with weekly or even daily observations

and feedback. Roles, responsibilities, and schedules were all designed to support this.

- **Paid fellowships and residencies** that enabled schools to train their own teachers, building the pipeline of future educators.

Other keys to quality and sustainability also went hand in hand with blended learning and innovative staffing. School leaders reinforced high standards, teacher's schedules allowed for school-day collaboration, and many schools provided their staff with higher compensation within existing budgets. Additionally, many schools built or adjusted their facilities—generally not at great expense—to support team teaching.

As schools adopted these new approaches, the student experience changed. With staffing arrangements that supported increased small-group and online study, students had more opportunities to work on individualized, self-paced instruction. Schools also supported student engagement through personal goal-setting with teachers and providing more choices in where and how they learned. Additionally, these arrangements allowed schools to place a premium on enabling multiple adults to form strong relationships with students.

As we and others do more research to test and validate the factors that contributed to success at these schools, what can the field do right now? First, expose school designers and system leaders to examples of innovative staffing to reveal what's possible. Second, create and share a growing set of tools and examples for support.

With the combination of blended learning and new staffing models, schools are starting to unleash their most valuable asset for improving student outcomes: excellent teachers. The organizational inertia of traditional staffing arrangements may take some time to change. But as schools like these produce strong results and then refine and codify their practices, more schools across the country will have the will and the means to follow in their footsteps.

INTRODUCTION

How can schools begin to address all of their students' individual learning needs? Educators want to improve student learning outcomes. They want to do a better job of differentiating instruction. They want to develop students' social-emotional skills. And they want to strengthen their bonds with students and connect them with more adults who care about them and their education.

To fill such a tall order, many schools have moved away from the monolithic factory model of teaching and learning and turned to personalized learning.¹ Research demonstrates (and great teachers can attest) that student-centered teaching strategies—such as tutoring, small-group learning, mastery-based learning, and individualized instruction—can help students excel.² And many schools have turned to blended learning—integrating online learning into brick-and-mortar schools—to help implement these strategies sustainably and effectively.

But as the mixed results from blended learning reveal, high-quality personalized learning requires much more than equipping students with tablets and software.³ Decades of research consistently point to teachers as the most important school-level factor affecting students' educational outcomes.⁴ The greatest impact of blended learning will likely come not from technology alone, but from a redesign of staffing arrangements and instructional models that integrate online learning with excellent teaching.

Most schools, including many of those that are seeking to adopt blended and personalized learning, remain stuck in a one-teacher, one-classroom model. In that model, teachers work largely alone, with only sporadic feedback and support. New tasks associated with personalizing learning—such as analyzing student data, differentiating learning activities for student needs, planning real-world learning experiences, giving individualized feedback, and helping students set customized goals—are often added to already overwhelming workloads. In these schools, teachers of all levels of effectiveness essentially play the same role, and they reach about the same number of students.

Some pioneering schools, however, are breaking away from this norm, adopting blended learning while experimenting with new staffing arrangements to enable personalization. To understand these approaches,

we examined eight schools and school networks that achieved better-than-typical student learning and provided students with more personalized experiences while using new staffing models and blended learning.

These eight sites varied widely in their staffing arrangements, and most continue to analyze their results to determine optimal roles and how those roles work together. In one case, strong third-party research has shown the positive learning impact of adding a “multi-classroom leader” role.⁵ All of the schools need more experience and similar research to identify additional and complementary ways to achieve strong student learning.

Meanwhile, schools across the country can learn from the early patterns we see among forerunners. We hope that this initial descriptive research helps to point other schools, researchers, and technical assistance organizations down productive paths as they aim to better understand how blended learning and innovative staffing arrangements can support personalized learning, improve the student learning experience, and lead to stronger student outcomes.

Innovative staffing arrangements
helped the schools personalize
learning by providing more students
with great teaching.

METHODOLOGY

Public Impact and the Clayton Christensen Institute initially cast a wide net in our search for schools to study. Building on our direct knowledge of schools that met our criteria, we reached out to other thought leaders and organizations with expertise in personalized learning to gather a list of schools that might also be trying innovative staffing models.

After compiling a list of more than 150 schools, we narrowed it to schools that:

1. Used staffing models other than one teacher per class of 20 to 35 students.
2. Used blended learning as part of their approach to personalized instruction.
3. Outperformed schools in their area serving similar demographics based on either student proficiency or student growth.⁶
4. Served economically or racially disadvantaged student populations, as compared with neighboring schools.

Of those who responded to our inquiries and were open to having their staff interviewed, we selected a mix of charter, private, and district-run schools.

During the spring and fall of 2017, we visited seven sites to observe their classrooms and conduct in-person, on-camera interviews with school staff.⁷ Based on the visits and interviews, we compiled a series of school profiles, which were reviewed by the schools for accuracy, and produced videos documenting many of their instructional and staffing models (available on the Public Impact [website](#)).⁸ Below we provide basic details and short descriptions of each of the schools (see Table 1 for an overview of all the profiled schools).

Table 1: Profiled Schools

Name	Type	Grades	Location
Brooklyn Laboratory Charter School (Brooklyn LAB)	Charter	6-9	Brooklyn, NY
Cabarrus County Schools • Central Cabarrus High School (1 classroom) • Jay M. Robinson High School (1 classroom)	District	9-12 9-12	Concord, NC
Chicago International Charter School (CICS) • West Belden	Charter	K-8	Chicago, IL
Clark County School District (CCSD) Franchise Schools • Dr. Owen C. Roundy Elementary School • Vegas Verdes Elementary School • Elaine Wynn Elementary School	District	PK-5	Las Vegas, NV
Cristo Rey San Jose Jesuit High School	Private	9-12	San Jose, CA
Intrinsic Schools	Charter	7-12	Chicago, IL
Navigator Schools • Gilroy Prep School • Hollister Prep School	Charter	K-8	Gillroy and Hollister, CA
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools • Ranson IB Middle School	District	6-8	Charlotte, NC

Brooklyn Laboratory Charter Schools (which refers to itself as LAB) is a charter school network that manages middle and high schools in Brooklyn, New York. LAB provides personalized instruction using a combination of four teaching roles: **lead teachers, learning specialists, resident teachers, and fellows**. This staffing also creates a pathway for recruiting and developing LAB teachers, and allows students to form relationships with multiple adults in the core academic subjects.

In North Carolina's **Cabarrus County Schools**, Lori Treiber and Scott Nolt are **blended-learning teachers** at Central Cabarrus High School and Jay M. Robinson High School, respectively. Each uses a mix of in-person teaching and online learning—either at home or school—to **reach twice as many students** within a specific class period as they would otherwise. Their roles were designed under an initiative called Opportunity Culture.⁹

CICS West Belden, a K-8 charter school that is part of the Chicago International Charter School network, is managed by Distinctive Schools, whose mission is to serve students in underserved communities. The school focuses on ensuring that all students receive consistent, high-quality instruction and have strong, caring relationships with multiple adults at school through a combination of **small-group instruction, online learning, and four main teaching roles: instructional coach, mentor teacher, career teacher, and resident teacher**.

Cristo Rey San Jose Jesuit High School, a private high school in San Jose, California, is part of a network of 32 Catholic schools focused on preparing underserved students for college. The school uses **co-teaching, differentiated teaching roles, tutors**, and online learning software to personalize its math courses according to each student's needs, and administrators give teachers daily observations and weekly coaching to help them improve.

The **Franchise School** model in Clark County School District (which includes Las Vegas and surrounding areas) asks successful principals to lead multiple campuses at once, using what worked at their original or “flagship” school. Veteran principal John Haynal leads a group of three elementary schools focused on using innovative staffing and blended learning to support their students. Their instructional model has three main educator roles: **subject-specialized lead teachers, certified temporary tutors (CTTs)** who monitor online learning, and **growth analysts** who monitor student data and work with teachers to ensure student progress. This staffing arrangement allows strong teachers to reach more students, enables teachers to personalize students' learning through small-group instruction and adaptive software, and creates opportunities for teachers to advance and earn more pay within the franchise.

Intrinsic Schools, a charter school management organization, operates a Chicago school serving middle and high school students that provides personalized instruction using a combination of online learning and **team teaching** in math and English. The school's staffing arrangement gives students personalized instruction and supportive relationships from multiple adults, while fostering teacher development through co-teaching. Intrinsic teachers also receive formal and informal coaching and mentorship from other teachers or administrators.



Decades of research consistently point to teachers as the most important school-level factor affecting students' educational outcomes.

Navigator Schools is a charter school management organization that operates two elementary/middle schools located in Gilroy and Hollister, California, serving a high population of English language learners. The network uses a combination of three roles to provide personalized instruction for its students: **teacher**, **teacher-in-training**, and **small-group instructor**. This staffing creates an internal teacher pipeline that provides teachers with frequent coaching from school administrators and aims to ensure that all students receive consistent, high-quality instruction and support tailored to their learning needs.

Ranson IB Middle School, an Opportunity Culture and International Baccalaureate school in North Carolina's Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, provides personalized instruction using a combination of multi-classroom leaders, small-group teaching, online learning, and a focus on in-the-moment instructional adjustments according to each student's needs.¹⁰ **Multi-classroom leaders (MCLs)** extend the reach of their excellent teaching to more students by leading small teaching teams. MCLs at Ranson write the lesson plans for their teams, co-teach and model lessons, pull out small student groups, observe and coach their team teachers, and lead data analysis for instructional and grouping adjustments.

This paper describes the insights we gained from studying up close the innovative staffing arrangements at each of these schools. We have aimed to identify the challenges that led schools to modify their staffing structures; common features and roles across these schools; and how their approaches shift both the teacher and student experience. We also captured data on how schools use their budgets and facilities to make these shifts.

We cannot say conclusively that personalized learning features of the staffing arrangements in this study have a causal connection to improved student achievement. Only one of the staffing models (Ranson's multi-classroom leadership in Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools) has quantitative research that affirms positive, statistically significant results.¹¹ Nonetheless, all of the schools we studied are achieving promising outcomes and continue to focus on staffing and blended learning as key strategies in their ongoing efforts to improve.

PROBLEM AREAS: WHERE TRADITIONAL INSTRUCTION FELL SHORT

Why did the schools we studied see a need to try something new?

Their leaders were looking for promising ways to address several problems, including:

Struggling students: All the schools served a large proportion of students from historically disadvantaged backgrounds, who often struggle to meet proficiency standards or achieve strong learning growth.¹² With the odds against them, school leaders knew that high-growth learning was paramount for the future learning and economic success of their students. Students faced academic challenges that traditional schools typically found difficult to overcome.

Diverse learning needs: School leaders knew that in traditional classrooms, which rely on whole-class, direct instruction as the primary learning activity, teachers were forced to teach to the needs of the “average” students, while students with learning needs outside the middle often slipped through the cracks. Many traditional schools use teaching strategies such as differentiated instruction to address this problem, but still within the confines of whole-class teaching. Additionally, school leaders knew they needed to find ways to engage *all* students, helping them see their education as something done with, not to, them—fostering student responsibility and an inherent motivation for learning.

Teacher capacity: The school leaders knew that they simply did not have enough teachers capable of leading the high-quality, personalized learning they envisioned. As schools generally do, these schools struggled to staff certain positions where teachers are in short supply, such as math, science, and special education. But personalized learning added another layer of capacity challenges. When the schools needed to hire teachers, few candidates had experience with general personalized learning strategies such as blended learning, data analysis, or team teaching, and most were unfamiliar with the particular brands of personalized learning at each school. Schools also faced other capacity challenges, such as ensuring consistent instruction when they needed to bring in substitute teachers, or finding effective ways to develop less experienced or less skilled staff members so they could support the schools’ programs effectively.



NEW MODELS: BLENDED LEARNING AND INNOVATIVE STAFFING

To grapple with these problems, the schools we studied have adopted a range of new adult roles in tandem with integrating digital learning into their classrooms. After a brief summary of how blended learning shifted their instruction, we focus on the schools' staffing innovations.

Unlocking time, space, and data with blended learning

All of the studied schools used blended learning—formal education programs in which students learn in part through online learning activities that teachers integrate into school-based instruction.¹³ Most used a [Station Rotation](#) model, in which students in a class rotate on a consistent schedule between online and small-group instruction. Several schools used a [Flex](#) model, in which online learning is the backbone of instruction and students move on fluid schedules among learning activities according to their needs. Some schools used both.

Blended learning gave the schools **flexibility to best use their educators' time and talents**. By letting digital resources provide some instruction, individual teachers and educator teams could engage more students, allowing schools to extend the reach of their best teachers within fixed budgets. For example, at Navigator Schools, John Haynal's Clark County Franchise schools, Ranson, and CICS West Belden, teachers broke larger classes into small groups according to current learning needs, then rotated those groups through targeted lessons led by adults and stations in which students work online. Whole-class lessons no longer drove how students and teachers spent their time. At Cristo Rey San Jose Jesuit High School, students spent most of their math class time working through activities in an online curriculum while teachers, mentors, and tutors circulated among them, providing on-demand help to more individual students than they would be able to teach in a typical classroom. One high school teacher from Cabarrus County Schools let students work at home every other day, monitoring their work via online assignments, while he taught other students.

In addition to freeing teachers' time to plan, collaborate, and reach more students, blended learning also gave teachers more **real-time student learning data**. Schools relied on data from online learning software and daily or weekly formative assessments administered online to help

All of the schools studied are achieving promising outcomes and continue to focus on staffing and blended learning as key strategies in their ongoing efforts to improve.



them strategically plan whole-group, small-group, and individual lessons that focus on what each student needed. The data helped the schools **frequently regroup students** and enabled **quick responses to struggling students**. In some cases, the software also provided recommended offline lessons and activities that teachers or support staff could use for targeted small-group instruction.

The data also helped with **instructional planning, collaboration, and professional development**. When teaching teams or teachers and coaches met, data helped them pinpoint what was or wasn't going well, leading to focused conversations about how to respond to student need. And when those responses worked well, teachers could see their progress quickly in the data the software produced.

"We have immediate interventions built into the data," Navigator Vice Principal Debbie Benitez said. "That's one of our pillars that the whole organization was founded on: that we need to be assessing on a daily basis and then provide that intervention as soon as possible."

Exploring innovative approaches to staffing

In addition to using blended learning to unlock data and teacher time, the schools redesigned the key contributor to personalized learning—teacher instruction—through new roles, collaboration, and coaching.

Creating new roles

The schools created a variety of new roles, some shifting the responsibilities of the primary classroom teacher. They then restructured class organization and scheduling to increase collaboration and enable intensive coaching.

Some roles were part of a career path to allow development and a clear structure of support, as well as to build a pipeline of potential future teachers to fill vacancies and support school growth or expansion to additional schools. In other places, the roles were discrete, with a clear change in the main teaching role, but not necessarily a new career path or an enhanced teacher pipeline.

All these new and changed roles aimed to help teachers personalize instruction and form closer, more supportive relationships with their students. These **role changes, plus data gathered in part through digital tools**, helped teachers understand both **what their students know** and more of the reasons **why students might be excelling or stalled**.

"The whole idea was based on metrics and the ability to put people in the right place for the right audience," CCSD Franchise Principal John Haynal said. "You have to give children a well-rounded experience, and to do that you have to give teachers a well-rounded experience."

In the Navigator Schools network, early experiences at the first school, Gilroy Prep, proved

crucial to creating the core tenets of their staffing model. “It became very clear to us early on that we needed to get outstanding adults in front of the students to drive student achievement, and we started out at Gilroy Prep back in 2011 with just a humdinger team, and got ourselves really used to having excellent instructors,” said James Dent, chief academic officer. The school also assigned paraprofessionals and a teacher-in-training to pull out intervention groups, and educators quickly saw the value of teaching in small groups. As Dent began informally coaching teachers, the school also realized the value of intensive, on-the-spot coaching, with everyone using a common language for it, so much so that they convinced their board that “our mission to drive student achievement is to develop outstanding educators and principals,” Dent said.

At Cristo Rey, leaders realized that pursuing personalization with just one teacher puts too many responsibilities on one person, who then will “go to the lowest common denominator, which is making sure the students are making [just] adequate progress,” Principal Joe Albers said. And even when highly effective teachers can do all that great personalization requires, the burnout rate is high, making this unsustainable. “So, we wanted to be really creative in terms of how we staff that out to really ensure that we are having the students make that progress that they need to make.”

Although roles varied among the schools, they generally fell into four categories:



Teacher-Leaders are teachers who lead instructional teams. Duties vary, but may include planning and directing instruction, determining others’ roles, modeling, observing, coaching, and analyzing data. These positions are often the most selective and based on quality of past instruction. Some teacher-leaders teach, as well. This includes such roles as:

- Teaching team leader (such as multi-classroom leader or growth analyst): Directs and develops a small teaching team.
- Instructional coach: Develops other teachers on the job, often focused on a particular area of content instruction.
- Teacher mentor: Develops other teachers on the job, often new teachers.



Collaborating Teachers are teachers who are usually certified and teaching designated students as in traditional schools, but who also collaborate with and have more help from others, and whose roles may differ from typical classroom teachers. Duties and selection criteria vary. This includes such roles as:

- Teacher: Leads classroom instruction.
- Co-teacher: Works in collaboration with one or more teachers on a team.
- Team teacher: Works on a team with a formal teacher-leader.
- Specialized elementary teacher: Teaches one or two content areas (such as math and science or English language arts and social studies).
- Integrated special education teacher: Focuses on students with special needs, generally as part of a teaching team that shares responsibility for student progress.



Support Staff are typically non-certified staff members who support teachers by supervising students, providing more one-on-one or small-group time with an adult, and/or mentoring students—forming closer relationships and helping students develop habits of success and social-emotional skills. Duties and selection criteria vary. This includes such roles as:

- Tutor: Teaches small groups and individual students; certification may not be required.
- Computer lab supervisor: Supervises/supports technology-based instruction.
- Teaching assistant: Supervises skills practice and projects, online or offline, and may teach small groups. (Reach associates, the advanced teaching assistants at many Opportunity Culture schools, are examples of this role.)
- Student mentor: Develops students’ non-academic skills and success habits. In some cases, teachers in the categories above may perform this role as well.



Teachers-in-training are teachers who are not yet certified or are newly certified, who support other teachers and teach while learning on the job. Duties and selection criteria vary.

This includes such roles as:

- Novice teacher: Certified adult learning the full range of teaching skills on the job.
- Resident or fellow: Non-certified adult learning teaching skills on the job full time.
- Student teacher: Adult still in a traditional teacher preparation program and learning teaching basics.

Specialization into distinct roles allowed instructional teams to focus the talents of individual team members on responsibilities where those talents are most needed. According to Okema Owen Simpson, an MCL at Ranson, all of the MCLs at her school plan the lessons. “The idea is that we are the expert teacher, so we have the content knowledge, as well as knowledge around pedagogy and best practices, in order for... [the teachers we lead] to deliver a sound lesson to our students,” Simpson said.

CICS West Belden, the Franchise schools, and Ranson also assign responsibility for student data analysis to certain roles within their teams. Those team members then advise teachers on instructional strategies based on that data. “Being able to spot learning issues for both an entire grade and for individual students to take back to teachers has helped lessen the load on them,” said Stephanie Bugash, a growth analyst at one of the CCSD Franchise schools.

Different roles within a team may also help teachers focus on specific responsibilities. For example, elementary teachers at Navigator, CICS West Belden, and the Franchise schools specialize in either English language arts (ELA) or math instruction so that they can hone their expertise for teaching certain content areas and plan fewer lessons each day. At Cristo Rey, leaders developed new staffing roles to focus educators’ attention, dividing math responsibilities between math teachers and a newly created “math coach” role to provide more intensive support to students.

Emphasizing the collaborative power of small teams

Going far beyond professional learning communities, the schools used **intensive team collaboration** and, in many cases, co-teaching, to help educators in various roles collaborate on students’ needs and refine their instructional expertise.

In multiple interviews, teachers stressed that “these are *our* kids.” Most of the schools rejected the notion of every teacher owning his or her own classroom. Interdependence was an important key to making collaboration happen. Teams didn’t collaborate just for the sake of social interaction and professional learning. Instead, the team members shared accountability for learning outcomes and relied on one another for their collective success. For example, MCLs at Ranson prepared the lesson plans for the teachers they led, and formal evaluations of the MCLs were based on the student learning outcomes of those teachers.

In many cases, common learning spaces and shared classes of students compelled collaboration. For example, the math teachers, math coaches, and tutors at Cristo Rey shared responsibility for 60 students at a time in a large, open learning space; three-teacher pods at Intrinsic did likewise. Thus, teams were more like members of a basketball team than relay sprinters at a track meet. Although they often had specialized roles and responsibilities, their work was not divisible into clean handoffs where one person’s work ended and the next person’s work began.

Schools **kept their teams small**—generally with a core of two to six teachers, and sometimes supporting staff—and that **small size appears critical to success**, along with good communication and enough time for the intensive work the team members must do together. For example, Brooklyn LAB used a co-teaching team of a lead and resident teacher for a class of about 30 students. Similarly, the teams at both Clark County’s Franchise schools and Navigator’s schools had two subject-specializing lead elementary teachers for about 60 students, plus a non-certified support staff member. Some of these teams also had support from a lead teacher or a teacher-in-training. Ranson’s MCLs typically led teams of four teachers, spending their days primarily observing, coaching, creating all lesson plans, and working with students.

In the high schools, small teaching teams shared students in large, open learning spaces. Cristo Rey's two math teachers co-taught in a large space that holds two classes of students simultaneously, who worked largely online and in small groups. Intrinsic grouped its teaching teams in "pods" (large, open, flexible spaces), in which three pod teachers—usually one veteran teacher with three or more years of experience and strong teaching skills, one novice teacher, and one special education teacher—shared responsibility for teaching 60 students during each 90-minute class block.

Collaboration gave educator teams broader insights into individual needs of their students, and gave students more opportunities to find an adult in each class with whom they naturally connected. "When we personalize learning for students, it's with the understanding that they learn better with a certain fellow leading their small-group tutoring," said Brooklyn LAB co-founder Erin Mote. "Once they feel connected to the community, it can unlock a whole facet of academic success."

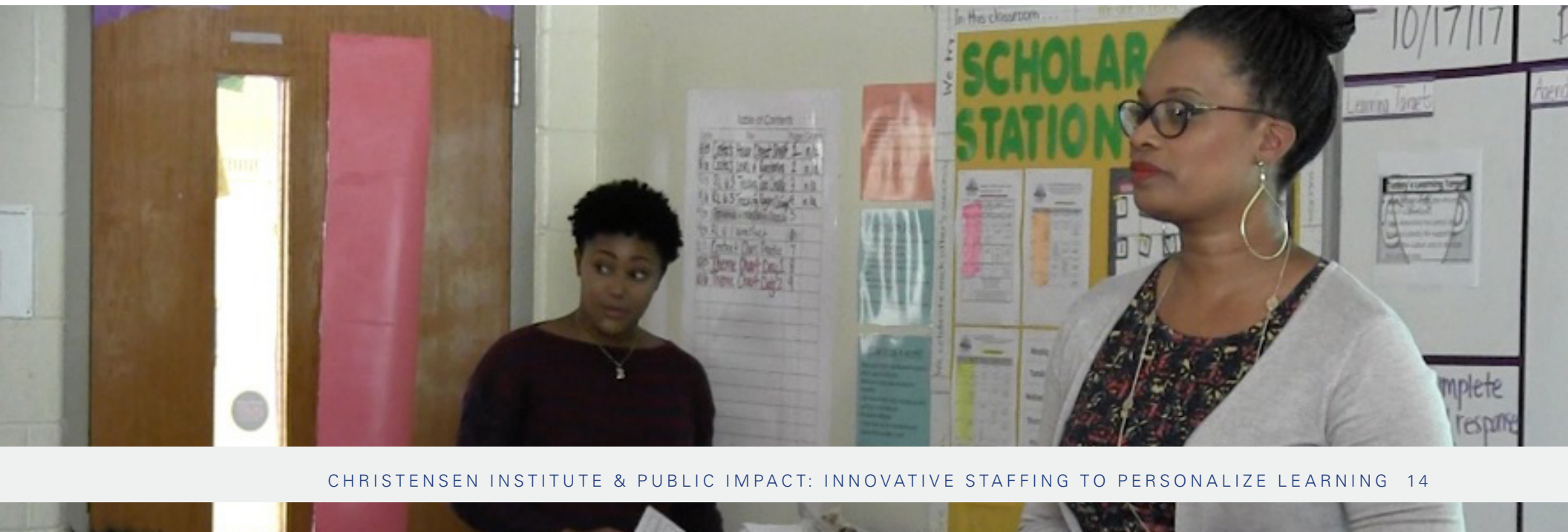
Collaboration also meant that **teachers did not feel as isolated** in their work as they often can in traditional schools.¹⁴ As CICS West Belden teacher Christina Hanna explained, "We say that we're kind of married in a sense because we're together at all times. We're texting each other at all

times, planning together, and so it takes a lot of communication."

Collaboration proved to be a powerful **catalyst of teacher development**. Although the teachers and other staff members spent some time planning and analyzing data on their own, the formal and informal opportunities from being on a team and working in the same or nearby spaces had a powerful effect.

"We collaborate a lot to talk about 'what worked well; what do you need help with?'" said Donna Childers, a teacher at CCSD Franchise school Wynn Elementary. "A lot of times, especially when we're analyzing our data, if someone's done very well in one aspect, one standard, that's when we get to sit down and say, 'Hey, how did you teach that? What tools did you use? Can you share with us? Can you come in and model it for me? Can I come see you do it?'"

The culture shift of sharing responsibilities and collaborating with team members also helped **improve accountability for student outcomes**. When everyone—including coaches—had responsibility for all of a team's students, discussing student learning data became less intimidating.



Most schools used intensive coaching far beyond traditional training seminars or professional learning community meetings.

Focusing on deep coaching

To further support teachers and improve instruction, most of the schools used intensive coaching far beyond traditional training seminars or professional learning community meetings.

Heather Parsons, now principal at Navigator's Hollister Prep, recalled how James Dent made coaching a regular part of her development when she was a teacher. "He knew inherently that teachers had to be coached, just like the 49ers still need to be coached every day at practice," Parsons said. "He was in my classroom all the time, and I welcomed him because I wanted to develop. During that time, my growth was exponential compared to when I was left alone in a classroom for several years."

Most other schools also made regular observation and coaching a staple of their staff members' workweek.

Unlike traditional schools where observations occur only several times a year,¹⁵ most of these schools used **weekly or even daily observations and coaching**. Cristo Rey's administrative team, for example, observed teachers every day, then met with them once a week to discuss how to improve classroom management and instruction. Navigator's administrators also observed teachers daily, with administrators coaching teachers during classroom observations. Ranson's MCLs use walkie-talkies to give teachers live feedback and guidance through a headset as they teach a lesson—a method called Real Time Teacher Coaching, created by professional development organization CT3. Similarly, teachers at Intrinsic receive regular observations and feedback from an administrator, a department head, or a teacher mentor.

To make regular coaching an ingrained part of their cultures, schools deliberately **designed coaching into the roles, responsibilities, and schedules** of their staff members. CICS West Belden specifically hired teacher mentors and instructional coaches to focus on educator development. At Navigator, principals and assistant principals spent about 70 percent of their time coaching teachers, and a top-notch small-group instructor coached the other small-group instructors. Ranson's MCLs develop detailed daily and weekly schedules enabling them to provide intensive observations and coaching multiple times a week, sometimes daily, to their team teachers. And in several of the schools, students have a weekly early-release day so that teachers can meet with their coaches and focus on professional learning and collaboration for several uninterrupted hours.

"Our model is so different from a traditional classroom that we really needed to have coaching available from people who have lived it and worked in that model," said Becca Wicker, an assistant principal at Intrinsic. "We built the master schedule so that in [the coach's] planning period, they would be able to conduct observations, followed by a coaching meeting."

In all cases, the schools took deliberate measures to reinforce a strong culture focused on rigor by ensuring that their **instructional philosophies were consistent and clear throughout the schools**. Navigator fostered this consistency by instituting coaching throughout the organization, starting

The “next man up” strategy prepared strong staff members to move up as jobs in the schools became available.

from the very top: The CEO coached principals, who coached assistant principals, who coached teachers and the small-group instructor coach. In the Franchise schools, John Haynal coached the school leaders for each of the three schools he oversees—so that methods and expectations stayed consistent, ensuring that each student received the level of rigor he expected regardless of location. This consistency also allowed teachers to move more easily among the schools as they advance. Similarly, the Ranson principal coached the two assistant principals, then the three of them individually coached the MCLs each week. Additionally, all MCLs used rubrics that set clear standards for instructional rigor, achievement, and classroom management.

Growing their own educator pipelines

Schools focused on innovative staffing and personalization often saw the need to train their own teachers—especially to ensure fewer disruptions and more consistency in instruction—and create ways to retain and advance novice teachers.

Many of the schools turned to **paid fellowships and residencies** that allowed them to train future teachers.

For example, Brooklyn LAB had a fully developed pipeline, beginning with recruiting people from the school’s surrounding community for a one-year paid fellowship focused on small-group instruction. Some fellows could then move on to a two-year paid residency, during which they co-taught with a lead teacher and led small groups while getting a master’s degree and certification. Graduates of the residency program then became eligible for regular teaching positions.

Similarly, CICS West Belden hired up to four resident teachers each year through partnerships with teacher preparation programs. Navigator recruited teachers-in-training through CalStateTEACH, the California State University’s online teacher education program, to both fill a need for substitute teachers who were familiar with Navigator’s approaches and ensure that new teachers were prepared to lead their own classrooms effectively when they were hired at Navigator.

The schools also focused on **retaining and advancing novice and more-experienced teachers**. The roles of MCL at Ranson and instructional coach and mentor teacher at CICS West Belden meant teachers could advance to leadership responsibilities and increased compensation while still working directly with students. John Haynal created a “next man up” strategy that identified strong staff members and prepared them to move up as a job became available at any of his Franchise schools. As he took on additional schools, he could also reassign teachers from a current school to “seed” the new, nearby school, ensuring consistent personalized learning practices throughout the Franchise.

SHIFTS IN THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE: SMALLER GROUPS, MORE ADULT CONNECTIONS

In addition to shifting the day-to-day roles of teachers and other adults, blended learning and new staffing models also enabled the schools to alter the way students experience learning. School personnel believed these new student learning experiences helped produce their strong student learning results.

Small-group instruction

In all of the studied schools, blended learning and new staffing arrangements enabled **greater opportunities for valuable small-group instruction**. For example, in the Franchise schools, Assistant Principal Deniece Nohara said that personalization starts with small groups, backed up by the computer programs that provide skill-based lessons and the data teachers need to create small groups. “The computer is a great tool, but it can never replace the teacher, and a lot of the personalized learning from our teachers comes from the relationships that they form with the kids,” Nohara said.

Small groups gave students individualized support and relationships that helped them see success is possible. “Students notice when you notice them,” said Ellen Rayburn, an MCL at Ranson. “Students who are struggling—they know they’re struggling. They’ve been struggling for years. So when they see us ... saying ‘I’ve noticed this about you and it’s going to end now, and I got you,’ ... it really opens up students that have been frustrated for years.”

On the flip side, **schools could be more strategic in how they used whole-group instruction**. In many cases, they used whole-group instruction in small amounts to introduce new topics or address common learning needs or challenges.

“I think [whole-group and small-group] have to go hand in hand,” Vegas Verdes teacher Deryn Cattaneo said. “Because without that whole-group experience, where every single student is exposed to the knowledge, my small group would be pointless, because I wouldn’t know which students to help on a particular skill. They all need it, so you’re not going to give them whole-group instruction in their small group. That small group is meant to look at each student and identify their personal needs and assist them, and without that whole group, I can’t make my small group successful.”



Blended learning and innovative staffing allowed schools to give their students more individualized attention from adults than traditional instruction typically affords.

Individualized instruction

One of the most heralded benefits of blended learning is how it creates opportunities for students to have individualized learning experiences that start to approach the ideal of high-frequency tutoring. Educators note that adaptive and self-paced online learning resources cannot be a perfect substitute for learning individually from another person.

“There’s no ed-tech tool that’s a silver bullet, as much as some ed-tech tools might want you to believe,” said Francisco Castillo, director of blended learning at Cristo Rey. “It’s impossible to replace a good teacher, it’s impossible to replace a good role model, [and] it’s impossible to replace someone who’s taking time out of their day to come spend time with you to help you on a particular writing or reading or math assignment.”

But, these schools’ educators say, online work can give students engaging new opportunities for **individualized, self-paced instruction** and practice on basic content and skills.

Most of the schools used adaptive software for some portion of the day, so students could learn new skills or practice teacher-taught skills at their own pace. “This program has really helped a lot of students,” Cristo Rey student Kaela Quinto said. “I went through the course of algebra in one month, and then after that it took me about three months into the school year to finish geometry. So I finished two math levels within the course of four or five months, which is something that you don’t normally see. ... This school has really given us the opportunity to excel past where we are.”

Hollister Principal Heather Parsons said that when students use adaptive online programs, teachers can trust that students’ learning gaps and need for skills practice are being addressed “or, conversely, that students are being pushed into a higher level because that program is constantly taking data, analyzing that data, figuring out where the student’s areas of opportunities are, figuring out how far they can push them on, and doing that.”

Parsons added, “It’s an engagement factor, too. Students love to be on technology, so if we had three or four centers that didn’t involve technology, well then, your engagement is going to go down. So I come back to engagement being the most important thing for student achievement.”

Blended learning and innovative staffing also allowed schools to give their students **more individualized attention from adults** than traditional instruction typically affords. Cabarrus County teacher Scott Nolt said that putting his entire class materials online gave him the opportunity to work more individually with students. “I talk to my students now more than I ever did before. I’m not at the front of the classroom explaining stuff all the time. I’m not lecturing for 30 to 45 minutes, and so, I’m going around and I’m explaining things, and I’m talking to the students, and I’m showing them I’m engaged in what they’re doing and their work.”

The data from online programs let Cristo Rey teacher Jessica Flores provide individual, immediate attention. “You will see me constantly running back to my computer, and with the program I constantly can see what they’re doing and how well they’re doing. ... So I check that maybe every 10, 15 minutes so I can go and say, ‘OK, this kid is going to burn out if I don’t go over there and help him,’” Flores said. “And we sit down and work through it together.”

Personal relationships

With the new staffing arrangements, **students also had more adults in the classroom to help and care about them.** For example, students at Brooklyn LAB, in addition to spending time with lead teachers, also spend significant portions of the day in seven- to 12-person groups with LAB’s teaching fellows. Navigator, Cristo Rey, and the Franchise schools were similarly deliberate about adding adults to provide individualized attention through their small-group instructors, tutors, and coaches. “Sometimes tutors make awesome relationships with students, and the students can’t wait for the tutor to come for that day, so then, I use [the tutors] also to make sure that students know that they’re being watched and that they can always ask for help,” Cristo Rey’s Flores said.

At Intrinsic, according to ninth-grader Rakhel Mazin, the teachers are “pretty friendly people, and you can always feel that if there’s something that you need to talk about or something that you have an issue with, you can always go to them ... and they’ll be able to, like, help you out with it and discuss it.”

Schools may need to be mindful about how many adults work with each student.¹⁶ But having many eyes on each student helps keep students from falling through the cracks; increases the chances of forming a strong, positive connection with at least one adult; and decreases the odds that a student will go through a year with just one “really bad fit” teacher. Multiple adults, instead of just one classroom teacher, worked with students in nearly all of the schools studied.

For example, Intrinsic students learned in classes with three teachers at a time for ELA and math; CICS West Belden students often had two teachers plus one or two interventionists in the room with them at once;

and elementary students in the Navigator and Franchise schools learned with a humanities teacher, a math and science teacher, and a small-group instructor or tutor over the course of each school day.

Small-group meetings gave teachers multiple opportunities to learn about their students’ aspirations and encourage them to aim high. CICS West Belden students started each day with “community time” for reflection and sharing. “We sit around and we share with each other ... a lot of getting to know them and having conversations: What are you up to? What are you about? What did you do this weekend? How did it go?” teacher Sami Smith said.

Taking that a step further, Cristo Rey put students into small advisory groups with a teacher who stays with the students throughout their high school years, helping teachers understand broader issues in their students’ lives and guiding them in planning for their futures.

Some of the profiled schools also focused on **building strong relationships among students**, enabled by small-group sessions, group projects, or peer tutoring. For example, Lori Treiber, one of the blended-learning teachers in Cabarrus County, structured small-group projects to require students to take responsibility for their level of participation, with each group’s students creating a detailed contract at the outset. Cristo Rey used peer tutoring in all grades to both help struggling students and reduce the amount of learning that happens individually online, so that students stay connected with one another and do not burn out by being online for many hours.

CICS West Belden’s combined class of third- and fourth-graders also encouraged students helping one another: “If a third-grader needs help, they will ask a fourth-grader to help them, and I like helping little kids that are younger than me,” student Lucas Guzman said.

At Navigator, the Gilroy campus saw a need to move to more student-led work with middle-schoolers to increase student engagement. According to James Dent, when students began leading small groups, teachers saw sixth- and seventh-graders shift from an attitude of, “‘Ah, it’s this type of instruction still,’ to ‘oh, it’s my friend John teaching me right now—I better not be a schmuck, and so, I’m going to get engaged,’ and they re-engage with their peers so well. And what is really developing is leadership in our students, the ability to truly collaborate, problem-solving at levels that they weren’t before, [and] producing original work.”

Choices in learning

New approaches to instruction and staffing also created opportunities for students to take more responsibility for their learning—and gave them more choice in when, how, and where they learned. Students in some of the schools could choose what learning goals to set, where to work, or what to work on (online work, assignments, or products). Those choices kept students motivated—without lowering the bar of expectations—and taught students crucial skills of responsibility, time management, and planning.

CICS West Belden science teacher Sami Smith tried to give her students “endless choice” in what they produced for an assignment, as long as they showed the skills and concepts they learned. They could also choose where they wanted to work within the classroom, which had multiple seating options. Cabarrus County teacher Scott Nolt gave students choice in how they completed assignments, how deep to go into a topic, how often to resubmit assignments, and, within limits, how to pace their work. In the same district, students in Lori Treiber’s class received a high degree of choice in the amount of work they did and the assignments they completed.

In younger grades, students often had fewer choices in product or where they learned, but more choice in the learning goals they set for themselves. “At the beginning of the year, we have a contract with our students ... and we go into great detail in the contract talks about our expectations for them and our belief of what they should be able to accomplish,” Franchise teacher Donna Childers said. Childers tells each student, “This is what I think you should be able to accomplish, but that’s my idea, what do you think you can do?” She meets with students weekly to discuss their progress and whether they should adjust their goals accordingly—“and they are brutally honest with themselves,” she added.

At Cristo Rey, Jessica Flores said that as a teacher, she’s able to be more of a guide for her students as they work at their own pace, stepping in for more direct instruction when needed. “I’m there to kind of have the lantern on the side showing them the guiding light, but not necessarily telling them always exactly what to do. They are the drivers now of the car, and I’m just kind of giving them directions in the back,” Flores said.

Choices kept students motivated—without lowering the bar of expectations—and taught students crucial skills of responsibility, time management, and planning.

OTHER KEYS TO QUALITY AND SUSTAINABILITY

Blended learning and new staffing arrangements are not the only key factors for enabling a personalized student experience. These strategies work in concert with other important considerations, including school leadership, schedules, compensation within budgets, and facilities.

School leaders who reinforce high standards

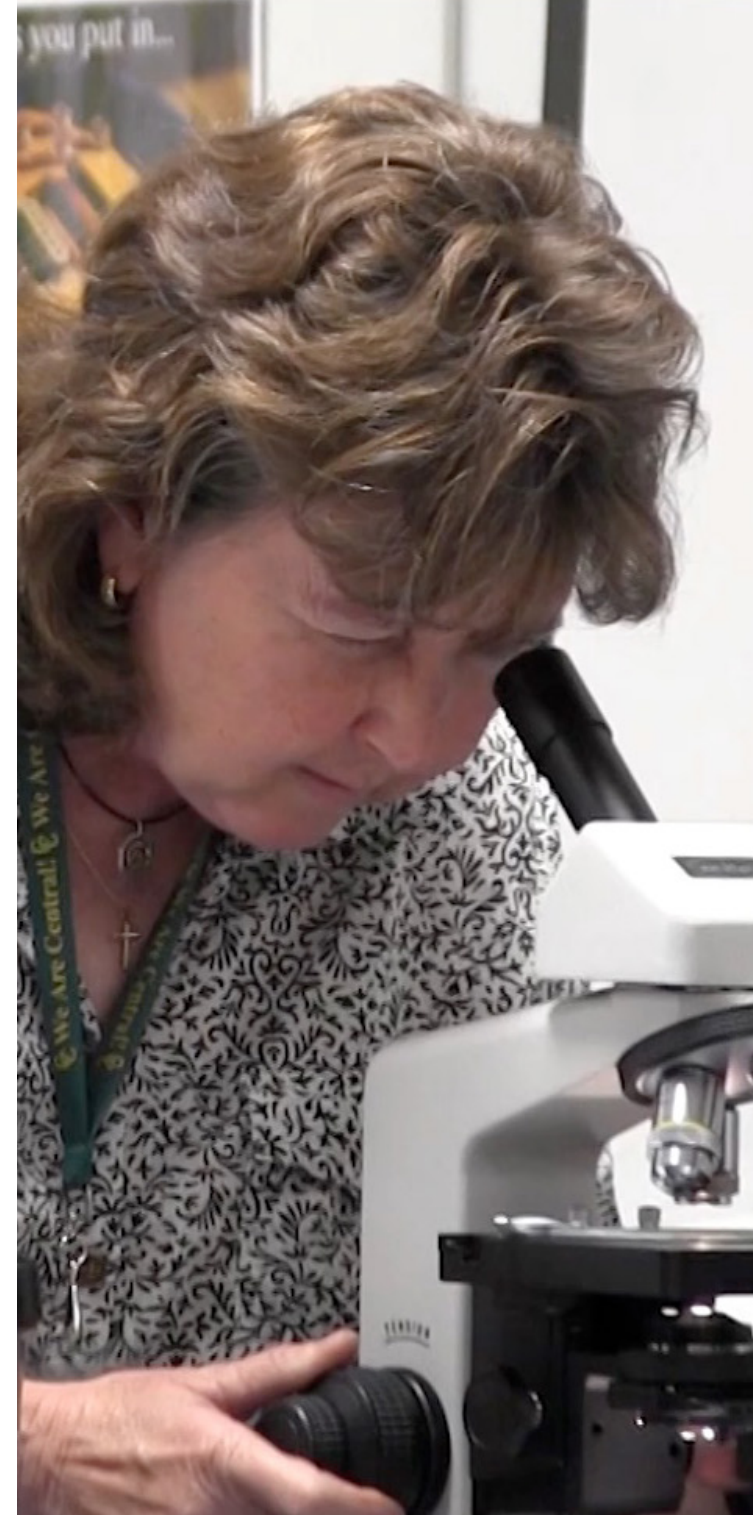
Although current approaches to personalized learning may resemble personalized models from earlier years—some Montessori, open, or progressive schools, for example—one differentiator stands out: the school leaders' emphasis on high standards. School leaders—either a principal or an instructional team of leaders—deliberately created and reinforced practices to ensure that their staff maintained consistent, rigorous, high-quality instruction with a focus on high academic standards.

For example, John Haynal deliberately reinforced a common set of schoolwide expectations in his three Franchise schools. By seeding a new school in his franchise with about 50 percent of the staff from another of his schools, he established consistent practices and culture. At the same time, he allowed the vice principals and staff members to make adjustments according to their students' needs.

With its regular observations and weekly coaching, Navigator also sought to reinforce consistent rigor while still giving teachers a say in how best to meet students' needs. "One of our keys to success ... is consistency and our ability to have our say," said Amy Guerra, a teacher at Hollister Prep. "So, if we say, 'Hey, we have a need with writing, and we need it to be continuous from kinder through fifth so that we have solid writers,' we get to be a part of that collaboration to develop that and tweak it."

To check that standards-focused practices actually led to measurable student achievement gains, all schools placed a strong emphasis on using student data to continuously evaluate their practices.

Ranson's principal set high standards, refined every year, for schoolwide consistency in responding quickly to the student data that teachers continuously gather. Initially, Principal Erica Jordan-Thomas said, teachers needed the first step of "give an assessment that's aligned and talk about the data. Then we moved to, all right, now there needs to be some type of formalized way in which people are recording their findings from the data and what they're going to do about it,



so we moved to an instructional action plan template where teachers were actually creating a plan for how they were going to respond. And then we moved to creating uninterrupted time during the day for teachers to be able to do this, because we would task teachers with doing it, and they wouldn't turn it in for another week or two after the test, and by that time, the data is dead. So now, we are at the phase where our response time is quicker. [On Monday] we gave our ELA test, their data day will be on Wednesday, and the expectation is that their instructional action plan is done by the end of their data meeting.”

Schedules that allow for collaboration

Careful scheduling was a must for these new approaches to staffing. Innovative staffing arrangements often involved far more collaborative team planning, coaching, teacher feedback, and student handoffs from one educator to another. The more interdependence there was between team members, the more teams needed time outside of teaching duties to plan and coordinate.

This meant school leaders had to make it a priority to give their teaching staff school-day prep time for coaching and collaboration. For example, schedules for Ranson's MCLs included daily or weekly individual planning time, time to analyze data and practice lessons with their whole teams, and time to coach each teacher. The school's schedule also made time each week for MCLs to plan and learn as part of the school's instructional leadership team with the principal and assistant principals, as well as receive their own coaching.

To create additional time for planning, collaboration, and professional development, several of the schools also ended the school day early on Wednesdays so that teams had time to meet in the afternoon. “We early-release every Wednesday at 1 o'clock so our teaching teams can have an additional 90 minutes of collaborative time,” said Colleen Collins, CICS West Belden's principal. “We want to make sure that teachers are able to plan with everybody that teaches in their room, so we want all the other support teachers and staff there at the table, helping to make those decisions and really understand what the learning goals are for each class.”

Compensation that fits within existing budgets

One particularly tricky budgeting question for many of the schools was how to provide fair and competitive compensation for a variety of staffing roles while keeping total compensation costs within their available budgets. All of the schools wrestled with the same basic budgeting problem: How do you create new staffing arrangements and obtain technology, given fixed levels of per-pupil funding set by traditional staffing assumptions?

Some schools addressed this challenge by tinkering with the total number of students a teacher supports over the course of a day. For example, the two high school classrooms in Cabarrus County used larger class sizes—within legal limits—to provide extra compensation to high-quality teachers, and then used technology to reduce their student-to-teacher ratios during teacher-led instruction. The teachers in these classrooms reach twice as many students as usual within one class block by having half the students work online—at home or school—one day while the other half is in class with the teacher, then swapping the next day. They earn a per-class supplement for teaching this way.

At Ranson, the school paid its MCLs more by reducing the number of teachers hired for a grade by one and spreading the students from the collapsed class among the remaining team teachers. In turn, class sizes were slightly larger than before the school implemented the MCL approach—about two to three more students per class. MCLs who led four teachers

The more interdependence there was between team members, the more teams needed time outside of teaching duties to plan & coordinate.

received an annual supplement of \$16,000; MCLs leading five to eight teachers received a \$23,000 supplement. Pay levels were set by the leadership of Ranson’s learning community and the district.

The Franchise schools used a similar arrangement: They collapsed three grade-level classes into two, rotated the combined students among two content-specialized teachers and an online learning lab, and used the savings to fund stipends for high-performing teachers, support staff for the lab, and growth analysts who analyzed data and coached teachers. Growth analysts received supplements of \$2,400, while other teachers could receive additional pay of up to \$15,000 depending on their students’ performance and additional responsibilities they took on, such as tutoring before or after school. Other than for a few growth analyst positions that were funded with one-time grants, the Franchise schools covered all salaries and supplements with recurring state funding.

Schools also kept their staffing costs within budget by using less-expensive positions to cover some of the instructional responsibilities within their personalized learning approaches. All of the schools that used support staff or teacher-in-training roles did so in part to increase their level of staff support at a lower cost than hiring additional certified and experienced teachers.

For example, fellows at Brooklyn LAB, the first step on the school’s career ladder, received a \$15,500 stipend and were eligible for a loan-forgiveness program for undergraduate debt. Residents, the second step on the ladder, made \$50,000 in their first year and \$52,500 in their second year, compared with \$60,000 to \$80,000 for experienced teachers. At Navigator, starting pay for small-group instructors ranged from \$15 to \$18 per hour, and those working 30 or more hours per week could receive full benefits. The starting salary for teachers-in-training was about \$37,000 plus benefits, while a new teacher’s salary began at about \$51,000 plus benefits.

Many schools also formed partnerships to cover some costs. For example, Brooklyn LAB’s fellows came through a program of the Corporation for National and Community Service. LAB also received grants to help pay for residents to earn a master’s degree through the Relay Graduate School of Education in addition to their teacher certification work, and partnerships helped provide professional development opportunities to its staff at a discounted rate. By recruiting math coaches through the Jesuit Volunteer Corps, Cristo Rey had to provide them with only housing and a small living stipend. Its tutors were college students from nearby Santa Clara University who earned “service learning” college credits rather than pay. And Cristo Rey used a work-study program that required students to work in internships one day a week at other organizations and businesses to subsidize their tuition.



Facilities were among the least crucial factors in their success, and inexpensive fixes to create common, small-group, and independent learning spaces were often sufficient for their needs.

Facilities that support team teaching

Some school leaders put a high priority on aligning their facilities with their instructional models; others chose to make do with available spaces that could keep their facilities costs low.¹⁷

Intrinsic asked architects to design the building to support the personalized learning model, with sets of two large, open, T-shaped or L-shaped classrooms for each grade separated by smaller interior classrooms and adjoining passageways. A variety of seating, tables, and desks organized the large rooms into spaces for small-group and large-group lessons, peer collaboration, individualized online instruction, and other personalized learning activities.¹⁸ That allowed three team teachers to work with 60 students at a time, leading separate lessons in the same space while still within close proximity to one another so that they could informally observe and coordinate their teaching. Intrinsic paid for most of the costs of its \$19 million facility through an independent loan.¹⁹

Navigator, Brooklyn LAB, and CICS West Belden chose to operate in lower-cost facilities modified to fit their needs. Navigator's school buildings consisted of rows of modular classrooms located on fields or parking lots adjacent to traditional schools operated by their authorizing school districts. Brooklyn LAB and CICS West Belden both operated in older buildings that once housed Catholic schools.

Brooklyn LAB used whiteboards as dividers to split its gym into small spaces where fellows could work with small groups of students. Navigator's classrooms all had two wall-mounted TV screens facing two U-shaped desk arrangements, so that teachers and small-group instructors could work side by side to each lead small-group lessons with minimal interference. CICS West Belden removed a door that separated a large and a small classroom to create an open learning space for a combined third- and fourth-grade class. While the open doorway turned the rooms into a single common space, the wall separating the rooms partitioned the space for different activities.

At one Franchise school, leaders knocked out a wall separating two sides of a modular unit to create a single learning space, which they further divided with furniture for different learning activities. And Cristo Rey opened a flexible partitioning wall between its two math classrooms to create a single, open classroom where two math teachers, a math coach, and tutors could work with students.

The differences among the schools' facilities appear to be differences between optimal and suboptimal, not make-or-break differences for instructional success. Large classrooms and flexible furniture provided space for team teachers to simultaneously oversee multiple student groups and learning activities. But school leaders generally emphasized that facilities were among the least crucial factors in their success, and inexpensive fixes to create common, small-group, and independent learning spaces were sufficient for their needs.

LOOKING AHEAD: SCALING UP, RESEARCH, AND ACTION

Schools like these are demonstrating what's possible with new staffing models and blended learning to support high-quality personalization. As we look beyond these schools, what conditions need to be in place for other schools to reach many more students with similar practices?

Achieving scale

First, for schools like these to scale up, they must be able to sustain their **ongoing operations within regular budgets—not temporary grants**. Fortunately, the studied school models suggest money should not be a barrier to expansion. Most schools took advantage of government or philanthropic grants to cover their initial start-up costs. But with careful budgeting, schools were able to cover the ongoing operating costs of their schools with recurring revenue (except for a few grant-funded growth analyst positions at the Franchise schools). They did this by reallocating existing funds to both pay strong teachers more and provide all teachers with more support and development. Most worked within the confines of existing, and sometimes decidedly un-fancy, facilities. Most invested in technology, but such costs are already part of most school or district budgets today. When these schools did face bigger costs upfront in making the transition, they saw costs drop in subsequent years and fit within regular budgets.²⁰

Second, innovative schools that aim to close achievement gaps and help all students leap ahead still need **excellent teachers** who can consistently grow their students' achievement. Research shows that teachers' skills fall along a distribution similar to what we see in other professions: Only about 25 percent of teachers have what it takes to produce strong learning gains with their students.²¹ Unfortunately, this distribution in teacher effectiveness sometimes masks a major barrier to scaling up promising approaches to personalized learning: Schools that produce strong outcomes too often do so by cherry-picking the best teachers in a region. The approach may work for one school or a small network, but cannot be scaled up to reach all of a region's students.

The schools profiled here, however, offer a potential solution to these limitations. **Innovative staffing and blended learning can allow a school to extend the impact of a limited supply of excellent teachers**. Schools can create teacher-leader roles for teachers who have proven student results, through which they can develop other teachers to be able to produce comparable results.²² They can provide new or aspiring teachers with intensive support and professional development through such roles as small-group instructors, residents, or team teachers, all working with strong



Schools are starting to unleash the impact of their most valuable asset.

veteran teachers. And schools can create a cascade of high-frequency coaching that presumes that all educators need intensive, ongoing professional development, and build that coaching and development into daily schedules and educator roles

Third, in both traditional district and charter schools, finding enough **great leaders** to lead and sustain change can be a barrier to scaling up models focused on excellence. These schools need leadership *will* and *skill*—both visionary leadership and strong instructional leadership. One solution may be for more schools to focus, as some of the profiled schools do, on creating **internal pipelines of strong teacher-leaders**, some of whom may want to advance to leading one or more schools focused on instructional excellence. Multi-school leadership, as set up in CCSD's Franchise program, is another complementary solution for extending and widening the leadership pipeline.

What's needed next

These profiled schools provide a taste of the potential power of blended learning and innovative staffing to personalize learning for all students. The field needs **additional research** to test and validate the factors that seem to have made these schools successful. The more we understand about which circumstances and features of a school cause positive student outcomes, the more other innovators in the field will be able to replicate and advance innovative strategies with more predictable success. Furthermore, other up-and-coming schools that were still too early in their work to be profiled for this project are also worth researching. A number of these schools are trying approaches that are distinct from any of the schools we studied and may unearth other valuable approaches for helping students succeed.

Meanwhile, **what actions right now** would make a difference for more schools and students? We see several possibilities: **Expose school designers and system leaders to examples** of innovative staffing so they can see what's possible. Prompt them to reflect on this question: "As our school seeks to fully personalize instruction for students and achieve high-growth for all, how could new staffing models help?" And, as we learn more from research about what staffing approaches work best for students and teachers, **create and share a growing set of tools and examples** to support them.

CONCLUSION

Classrooms of the future will likely not follow the one-teacher-one-classroom model. Many school leaders may choose to have educators take on new roles and responsibilities, teach in teams, and work with students in small groups or one on one.

With blended learning, having educators with varying levels of expertise engage students individually or in small groups while others work independently becomes more feasible. And new technologies increasingly help teaching teams share common data on student progress and communicate about their teaching efforts, making collaboration seamless and powerful.

With the combination of blended learning and new staffing models, schools are starting to unleash the impact of their most valuable asset for driving student outcomes: excellent teachers. The organizational inertia of traditional staffing arrangements may take some time to change. But the more schools like those we studied are able to produce strong results and then refine and codify their practices, the more other schools across the country will be inspired and able to follow in their footsteps.



NOTES

1. The term “personalized learning” is increasingly used to describe various instructional practices aimed at addressing students’ individual learning needs and interests, but it has varied meanings across the K–12 education sector. For a comparison of various definitions, see Rhode Island Office of Education, “Definitions of Personalized Learning,” http://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/c9d9ee_68c3f0898e894d83a6e26c9ec0fd148e.pdf.
2. “Hattie Ranking: 252 Influences and Effect Sizes Related to Student Achievement,” Visible Learning blog, accessed April 7, 2018, <https://visible-learning.org/hattie-ranking-influences-effect-sizes-learning-achievement/#comment-10298>.
3. Gary Miron, Christopher Shank, and Caryn Davidson, “Full-Time Virtual and Blended Schools: Enrollment, Student Characteristics, and Performance,” National Education Policy Center, May 2018, <http://nepc.colorado.edu/files/publications/RB%20Miron%20Virtual%20Schools%202018.pdf>.
4. Visible Learning blog.
5. Michael Hansen and Ben Backes, “New teaching model yields learning improvement for students in math,” The Brookings Institute, January 25, 2018, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/brown-center-chalkboard/2018/01/25/new-teaching-model-yields-learning-improvement-for-students-in-math/>.
6. See school profiles for student results at <http://publicimpact.com/innovative-staffing-to-personalize-learning>.
7. We conducted our interviews with Brooklyn LAB by phone.
8. Note that several common elements of personalized learning were fully evident in some but not all of the profiled schools. For example, only a few of the schools in the sample are fully competency-based, and many do not afford students total choice across various, leveled assignments.
9. Opportunity Culture is an initiative by Public Impact that aims to extend the reach of excellent teachers and their teams to more students, for more pay, within budget. To learn more, see <http://opportunityculture.org/>.
10. Ranson IB Middle School is part of Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools’ Project Leadership & Investment For Transformation (L.I.F.T.) zone.
11. Hansen and Backes.
12. See Stanford Center for Education Policy Analysis, “Racial and Ethnic Achievement Gaps,” accessed April 26, 2018, <http://cepa.stanford.edu/educational-opportunity-monitoring-project/achievement-gaps/race/>.
13. Clayton M. Christensen, Michael B. Horn, and Heather Staker, “Is K–12 blended learning disruptive? An introduction to the theory of hybrids,” Clayton Christensen Institute, May 2013, <https://www.christenseninstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/Is-K-12-blended-learning-disruptive.pdf>.
14. Jeffrey Mirel and Simona Goldin, “Alone in the Classroom: Why Teachers Are Too Isolated,” *The Atlantic*, April 17, 2012, <https://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2012/04/alone-in-the-classroom-why-teachers-are-too-isolated/255976/>.
15. National Council on Teacher Quality, “Frequency of evaluation and observation: 2017 teacher and principal evaluation policy,” accessed April 27, 2018, <https://www.nctq.org/yearbook/national/Frequency-of-Evaluation-and-Observation-77>.
16. For example, one school that we considered for this study, Roots Elementary in Denver, pared back its staffing model when it realized that its kindergartners—many of whom suffered from childhood trauma—had a hard time forming strong, caring relationships with any particular adult because they bounced among many adults each day. To learn more about this example, see Jon Hanover, “Reshaping Space, Roles and Routines to

Support Children with Trauma,” *Edsurge*, September 27, 2017, <https://www.edsurge.com/news/2017-09-27-reshaping-space-roles-and-routines-to-support-children-with-trauma>.

17. To see examples of some of these facilities, watch the videos available at <http://publicimpact.com/innovative-staffing-to-personalize-learning/>.

18. For additional details on the design of Intrinsic’s campus, see Larry Kearns, “New blueprints for K–12 schools,” *Education Next*, Summer 2017, <http://educationnext.org/new-blueprints-k12-schools-innovative-design-supports-blended-learning/>.

19. Bryan Toporek, “Chicago School Designed with Blended Learning in Mind,” *Education Week*, April 13, 2015, <https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2015/04/13/chicago-school-designed-with-blended-learning-in.html>.

20. Kate Stringer, “Analysis of Personalized Learning Programs in Chicago Shows that Strong Teacher Leaders, not Technology, Key for Financial Sustainability,” *The 74*, February 13, 2018, <https://www.the74million.org/analysis-of-personalized-learning-programs-in-chicago-shows-that-strong-teacher-leaders-not-technology-the-key-factor-in-success/>.

21. For examples of this research, see the following sources: Steven G. Rivkin, Eric A. Hanushek, and John F. Kain, “Teachers, Schools, and Academic Achievement,” *Econometrica*, vol. 72(2), March 2005, pp. 417–458; Jonah Rockoff, “The Impact of Individual Teachers on Students’ Achievement: Evidence from Panel Data,” *American Economic Review*, vol. 94(2), May 2004, pp. 247–252; William L. Sanders and June C. Rivers, “Cumulative and Residual Effects of Teachers on Future Student Academic Achievement,” University of Tennessee Value-Added Research and Assessment Center, November 1996, <https://www.beteronderwijsnederland.nl/files/cumulative%20and%20residual%20effects%20of%20teachers.pdf>.

22. Hansen and Backes.

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Please cite this report as:

Public Impact & Clayton Christensen Institute. (2018). *Innovative staffing to personalize learning: How new teaching roles and digital tools help students succeed*. Chapel Hill, NC: Public Impact; and Lexington, MA: Christensen Institute. Retrieved from <http://publicimpact.com/innovative-staffing-to-personalize-learning>



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