INTRODUCTION

The call to personalize education is increasingly ubiquitous. It can be found in such disparate forms as the Federal Race to the Top absolute priorities and Edupreneurs’ Twitter feeds. A deepened understanding of how students learn best, the explosion of education technology, and a changing policy landscape are making it increasingly possible and desirable to create more personalized learning environments.

Students at the Center defines personalized learning as learning experiences that customize education to an individual’s personal needs and interests as well as connect the individual to adults and peers in a larger community of learners. Students benefit from individually paced learning tasks, tailored to start from where the student is, and address individual needs and interests. At the same time, their learning is deepened and reinforced through participation in collaborative group work and building relationships with others that are focused on engaging and increasingly complex and authentic problems and projects.

In Personalization in Schools (2012) Susan Yonezawa, Larry McClure, and Makeba Jones hone in on the aspect of personalization efforts that emphasizes positive teacher-student relationships built upon teachers knowing their students well.

This annotated bibliography focuses on youth-adult relationships as a critical part of an approach that prioritizes personalization. This bibliography weaves together core findings from Personalization in Schools with commentary on a set of current, text-based, and publicly downloadable materials that can help educators and community members as they attempt to foster those relationships critical for moving toward a truly personalized education for the youth they serve. Some of these materials are referenced and discussed explicitly in the report. Some are newly introduced here. While not a comprehensive list of resources, all have been selected with educators in particular in mind.

ORGANIZATION OF THE ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

This annotated bibliography is organized by the four core principles of the Personalization in Schools report. Each principle is followed by a brief description of related online or text-based resources. The discussion includes each reference’s potential utility and drawbacks for educators seeking to implement both broad and specific aspects of personalization.

The four principle findings from Personalization in Schools are:

> **Teacher-student relationships are central to personalization.** They lie at the heart of a variety of widespread reforms designed to support young people as students and as emerging adults.

> **Positive relationships between youth and adults improve student outcomes** on a range of measures, including academic, behavioral, physical, and emotional well-being. The gains are particularly evident for low-income and minority youth.

> **More research is needed on implementing personalization-oriented reforms.** The most effective practices appear in small schools, advisory programs, and efforts that focus on improving youth-adult relationships versus large-scale, districtwide reform.

> **There are promising new ways to increase personalization,** including career-based curricula, multiple pathways, technology, and community schools.
Core Principle #1: Teacher-student relationships are central to personalization. They lie at the heart of a variety of widespread reforms designed to support young people as students and as emerging adults.

Most administrators and teachers recognize that teacher-student relationships matter—that’s why they became teachers in the first place—and that building relationships with young people makes a difference in their lives. But how to get entire schools to become supportive environments for youth is another story entirely. The charge to transform districts and schools primarily falls on the shoulders of administrators. Thus, we start with a few select foundational websites that may be familiar to many informed district administrators and principals, but not necessarily explored for resources related to improving personalization and individualized instruction in schools.

RESOURCE #1: COALITION OF ESSENTIAL SCHOOLS

www.essentialschools.org

Resource type: website, tools, research, core principles lists

Improving teacher-student relationships has been at the center of Ted Sizer and his organization, the Coalition of Essential Schools (CES) for over two decades. As part of Dr. Sizer’s legacy, the CES website, Essentialschools.org, maintains numerous tools that the Coalition offers to help educators realize improved teacher-students relationships in their schools. The website includes a list of the CES 10 Common Principles and links to online resources connected to each of the 10 principles, including observation protocols and assessment tools that administrators or teachers might use on “learning walks” as a staff. Part of what CES advocates for is improved school structures to reduce teacher-student ratios (e.g., 1:80 at the high school level). On the website, CES provides links to CES-conducted and national research on professional learning communities, technology to promote personalization and advisories, among other topics. The link to research on advisories is particularly helpful in issue 69 of CES’s Horace publication http://www.essentialschools.org/horace_issues/69. One caveat is that many of the online resources via Horace, including some of the supposedly downloadable teacher resources, are somewhat dated. The most recent online editions of Horace are from 2009, and the online links to the downloadable teacher resources date as far back as 2005, and some do not open any longer. The best resources for educators are really the citations to which the website leads.

RESOURCE #2: NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SECONDARY SCHOOLS PRINCIPALS (NASSP)

www.nassp.org

https://www.nassp.org/KnowledgeCenter/TopicsofInterest/PersonalizingtheSchoolEnvironment.aspxds

Resource type: website, tools, case studies, articles

National Association of Secondary Schools Principals (NASSP) also offers a website of resources for educators and administrators. In their Knowledge Center, administrators in particular can drill down on the topic of personalizing their school environments. Unfortunately, while some resources here are easily downloadable, others require a subscription to NASSP’s Principal Leadership magazine or are available via individual article purchase. Two of the documents are lengthy doctoral or master’s dissertations and are too long and cumbersome for practical use. In sum, there are 12 different text-based resources on personalization on this website that provide concrete school descriptions of efforts by individual educators to personalize their schools and classrooms using techniques such as advisories, personalized graduation plans, and personal goal-setting. NASSP work on personalization tends to lean a little bit more toward middle school level educators, but with some digging there is plenty here as well for high school administrators and teachers to find of interest. The best resources would likely be those published in Principal Leadership as fellow educators often wrote them with administrators’ needs in mind.
RESOURCE #3: AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION (APA) – RESEARCH REPORT

http://www.apa.org/education/k12/

Resource type: website, modules, video

Between 2004 and 2006, the APA conducted a teacher needs survey of 2,400 teachers to ascertain what practical service the APA could provide practicing K-12 teachers. From that survey, APA designed ten modules that addressed the needs that the teachers expressed. One module is entitled Improving Students’ Relationships with Teachers to Provide Essential Supports for Learning. This module is housed on the APA official website and listed as curricular materials. The module includes a helpful list of research-based, cited, and practical “dos and don’ts” as well as some teacher-student videos (that are less helpful) to illustrate their research-based points. For example, the site lists one “Do” as “Make an effort to get to know each student in your classroom. Always call them by their names and strive to understand what they need to succeed in schools (Croninger & Lee, 2001).” And a “Don’t” as “Don’t give up too quickly on your efforts to develop positive relationships with difficult students. These students will benefit from a good teacher-student relationship as much or more than their easier-to-get-along-with peers (Baker, 2006; Birch & Ladd, 1998).” The “dos and don’ts” can be helpful to administrators who might want to use them within teacher evaluations, observations, or in professional development with faculty. The practicality of the “dos and don’ts” is probably the most hands-on useful element of the module. The rest of the module is less actual curriculum and more advice.

Core Principle #2: Positive relationships between youth and adults improve student outcomes on a range of measures, including academic, behavioral, physical, and emotional well-being. The gains are particularly evident for low-income and minority youth.

Past research indicates that positive relationships between youth and adults in schools matter a great deal and can be correlated highly with students avoiding risky behaviors and engaging in positive behaviors that promote academic success. But how “positive” are your schools’ adult-youth relationships? Measured by what? Measured against what standards? And in what subcategories? Resources in this section are useful for administrators and teachers who want either: 1) Some way to gauge their school environment before and/or after (think pre-post) they attempt a new reform strategy, or 2) To take the pulse of their efforts while they are in the middle of it.

RESOURCE #4: SENSE OF SCHOOL MEMBERSHIP SCALE


Resource type: website, tool to measure students’ perceptions of school climate

Several student survey scales have been created over the past two decades to measure students’ sense of personal and psychological safety, membership, and overall sense of belongingness at a school. Some of these scales are publically available and can be used by educators to evaluate their student body before and during efforts to increase personalization at their school sites and in their districts. One such scale that is commonly used is the “Sense of School Membership Scale” that can be found on page 153 of the Measuring Violence-Related Attitudes, Behaviors and Influences Among Youths: A Compendium of Assessment Tools” which is free and downloadable from http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/YV_Compendium.pdf. Used primarily at the middle school level (grades 6-8), this tool could be adapted for older grades and can be administered via paper and pencil or adapted for online use via Survey Monkey or Google forms. Responses are measured on a 5-point Likert scale from strongly disagree 1 to strongly agree 5. Sample questions include:

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

1. I feel proud of belonging to my [middle or high] school.
   - Strongly Disagree 2 - Disagree 3 - Neither 4 - Agree 5 - Strongly Agree

2. I am treated with as much respect as other students.
   - Strongly Disagree 2 - Disagree 3 - Neither 4 - Agree 5 - Strongly Agree

3. I feel very different from most other students here.
   - Strongly Disagree 2 - Disagree 3 - Neither 4 - Agree 5 - Strongly Agree

4. The teachers here respect me.
   - Strongly Disagree 2 - Disagree 3 - Neither 4 - Agree 5 - Strongly Agree
There's at least one teacher or other adult in this school I can talk to if I have a problem.


RESOURCE #5: UC SAN DIEGO CENTER FOR RESEARCH IN EDUCATIONAL EQUITY, ASSESSMENT AND TEACHING EXCELLENCE (UCSD-CREATE)

http://create.ucsd.edu

Resource type: additional websites, research & evaluations, teacher, consultant, & PD contacts, access to other educators

A university research center at University of California, San Diego, CREATE houses a variety of design-research partnerships and projects to improve the college-going pipeline for low-income youth in part by improving teacher-student personalization techniques for schools as a way to promote student achievement. The CREATE website maintains a list and some active links to recent research and evaluations of personalization efforts and reforms as well as connections to high-quality teacher professional development networks in reading (California Reading and Literature Project), writing (National Writing Project), mathematics (Math for America, San Diego), and science (San Diego Science Project). CREATE also recently began housing (as of last year) federal- and state-funded university outreach programs (Early Academic Outreach Project and the federal TRiO - Upward Bound - programs) that serve low-income elementary, middle and high school students. Partnered with the acclaimed Preuss School at UCSD (http://preuss.ucsd.edu/about-preuss/index.html), and Gompers Preparatory Academy—(http://www.gomperscharter.org/), CREATE has access to remarkable school site educators who have embraced and implemented personalization techniques such as blended-learning, student-led research, advisory programs, and mentoring and internship programs for youth. Educators from across the country can explore CREATE’s site to connect with these cutting-edge schools, national and statewide PD and outreach networks promoting college-going among low-income youth. Educators can also receive low-cost consultation, professional development, and research and evaluation services via CREATE researchers.

Personalization in Schools report authors Yonezawa, McClure, and Jones are on staff at CREATE.

Core Principle #3: More research is needed on implementing personalization-oriented reforms. The most effective practices appear in small schools, advisory programs, and efforts that focus on improving youth-adult relationships versus large-scale, district-wide reform.

Schools across the country have attempted various small and large reforms and strategies to increase teacher-student personalization and connection in their schools and districts. The research-base behind some of these common strategies, such as advisory or small school reform, is discussed in the Personalization in Schools paper. But how can practicing educators maximize their potential success at implementing such strategies when they try them the first time around or to improve what is already in place? How can educators salvage a struggling reform effort or make a strong attempt even more successful? This section offers some descriptions and links to resources that may help educators engaged in such improvements.

RESOURCE #6: EDUCATORS FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY (ESR)

http://esrnational.org/

Resource type: website, video, PD resources & tools

Educators for Social Responsibility is a 30-year-old nonprofit organization that offers face-to-face, online, and video-based professional development services and resources (mainly for purchase) for pre-K to secondary-level educators. ESR’s website contains a catalog of free downloadable curricular materials that are searchable by topic and by general grade level (elementary, middle, high school). The website functions well and the free materials that are downloadable are teacher-friendly and useable directly in the classroom. In regards to personalization specifically, ESR provides specialized services in professional development around advisory practices at the secondary level, conflict resolution pre-K through high school, and improving disciplinary practices and teacher-student relationships as part of classroom instruction. They specialize in schools and districts serving low-income, minority youth as well as rural environments.
Core Principle #4: There are promising new ways to increase personalization, including career-based curricula, multiple pathways, technology, and community schools.

The number of online resources promoting new ways for schools to incorporate technology has exploded and seems to increase daily. Below are a few resources that might prove helpful to schools trying to get a broad view of why we should be re-thinking educational practices when it comes to 21st-century learning practices and what kinds of models are out there that show promise. In particular, the resources below embrace the notion of free resources and technologies that resource-strapped schools might be able to capitalize on (e.g., texting, Facebook, Edmodo, TED talks, etc.) when thinking about ways to personalize their schools and classrooms.

RESOURCE #9: ONEVILLE—A DESIGN-BASED RESEARCH PROJECT

http://wiki.oneville.org

Resource type: professional learning community, video, tools

From 2009-2012, the community and educators of Somerville, Massachusetts, in collaboration with Harvard University faculty and students, worked together to see if they could transform their schools and neighborhoods into a more collaborative and cohesive network for the youth in their schools. By employing and systematically testing a host of new and commonplace technologies—such as texting, dashboards, and social media—the Oneville Project was born. Funded originally by the Ford Foundation, the Oneville Project’s purpose was to provide new knowledge for educators interested in the usefulness of such technologies for supporting young people. The text on the website is written in everyday language and includes embedded videos of teachers from Somerville talking about their testing of

Articles contain suggestions on how to improve advisory programs and the article links will also connect educators to other associations, such as the Association for Middle Level Education, and additional online resources.

RESOURCE #8: MDRC

http://www.mdrc.org/

Resource type: research & evaluation reports

MDRC maintains links on its website to research and insights on a variety of personalization-related reform strategies for high schools, including district-wide small school reforms (in New York City’s Small Public High Schools of Choice, for example), the impact of career academies, and curriculum and pedagogical reforms. While mainly a resource for research on such topics, this website is helpful in that it provides downloadable links to the full MDRC research studies on these topics—e.g., http://www.mdrc.org/sustained-positive-effects-graduation-rates-produced-new-york-city%E2%80%99s-small-public-high-schools. (The links to the career academies study can also be helpful for Core Principle #4).
texting and other applications. There is also contact for the faculty member and students who ran the project and an invitation for educators interested in the findings to contact them. Finally, the Oneville Project write-up also appears in a published article in Teachers College Record.  

**RESOURCE #10: HARLEM CHILDREN’S ZONE (HCZ)**

http://www.hcz.org/programs/high-school

**Resource type:** tools, case study

Harlem Children’s Zone is the celebrated model of school and community turnaround in Harlem championed by Geoffrey Canada and detailed in his book “Whatever It Takes” (2008) and numerous magazine, newspaper, and journal articles on him and HCZ’s efforts. For the purpose here, we focus on HCZ’s efforts at the high school level to personalize instruction and wraparound services for high-risk youth and their communities. More specifically, HCZ now has an array of programs to serve their 900 high school-aged students including programs that capitalize on the personalization concept of “anywhere, anytime learning,” combining career and college readiness and awareness, and academic case management. For example, at HCZ, academic case management involves a “holistic” approach which starts in middle school where student advocates are assigned to work with each student and create individualized action plans with the student on their behalf. Other adults—such as parents, teachers, and community members—are in charge of enacting these plans with students as they move from grade to grade, with particular attention to key transitions to high school and post-secondary education. Educators can go online to the HCZ website, buy Canada’s book, or read the many articles about HCZ available online (see references). From these sources, they can get a fairly broad idea of the way HCZ educators have embraced the idea and employed some practices of personalized education to support their students at the high school level. The site lacks detailed lessons and videos that could help educators transfer the HCZ model to their own sites.

**RESOURCE #11: RAMONA PIERSON—TED TALK EDUCATION GOES DIGITAL.**

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g5aHL2qd_08

**Resource type:** video

Ramona Pierson gives an inspirational 11-minute video talk on TEDX (this is her second TED talk). In this talk, she addresses the value of personalized instruction to serve individual student needs. Currently, the Chief Science Officer at Promethean, Pierson became interested in education late in life following several diverse careers in aviation, neuropsychology, and software development. In this second TEDX talk, Dr. Pierson pushes forward the notion of personalized instruction via technology and the need for a paradigm shift in schools. This resource may be particularly useful for introducing the notion of personalized instruction via collective input (think adult teams of support around youth) in schools to school faculty and communities.

**RESOURCE #12: COUNCIL OF CHIEF STATE SCHOOL OFFICERS (CCSSO)—NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON STUDENT ASSESSMENT 2012, MINNEAPOLIS, MN RAMONA PIERSON OPENING LUNCHEON TALK: LEARNING TO LEARN—“THE IMPACT OF RADICAL COLLABORATION AND PERSONALIZED LEARNING 2.”**

http://www.ccsso.org/NCSA/News/NCSA_-_Streaming_Live_Learning_to_Learn_%E2%80%93_the_Impact_of_Radical_Collaboration_and_Personalized_Learning_at_1200_pm_Central_Time.html

**Resource type:** video

This resource is an online video of an hour-long interview and conversation at the National Conference on Student Assessment with Ramona Pierson (also see Resource #11) and her ideas on how radical collaboration among adults can benefit learners by intensifying personalized learning in productive ways. Provides a radical, “big picture” look at why we should think about focusing on personalized learning in education.

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RESOURCE #13: TED TALK: KEN ROBINSON SAYS SCHOOLS KILL CREATIVITY

http://www.ted.com/talks/ken_robinson_says_schools_kill_creativity.html

Resource type: video

One of the six original TED Talks, Sir Ken Robinson discusses for 20 minutes how school systems must change in order to truly treat students as individuals and to stop stifling their development into the creative and entrepreneurial adults we need in our society. Viewed over 15,300,000 times, this TED talk is about changing the big picture of education regarding personalization and individualized education in U.S. schools. The talk is highly engaging and filled with bits of dry humor. This could be useful as well for introducing faculty to the concept of personalized and individualized education, thinking out of the box, etc.

RESOURCE #14: TED TALK: SALMAN KHAN: LET’S USE VIDEO TO REINVENT EDUCATION

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nTFEUsudhfs

Resource type: video, instructional video repository

In his 2011 TED talk, Salman Khan, founder of Kahn Academy, discusses both the origins of his now popular website focused on helping students access free lessons on mathematics (and beyond) and how his insights have led him to believe that such online, mini-lecture format instruction can revolutionize classroom instruction by allowing for more personalized, hands-on and teacher-student and student-student connection in the classroom. Building on some of the research on how people retain information, Khan shares his thinking that a “flipped classroom” where teachers direct students to view a lecture at home and then come into the classroom equipped to discuss, debate, think, and apply their learning can maximize engagement, extend learning, and promote retention of information for students. Not discussed are equity issues of access to such technology for all students.

RESOURCE #15: LISA NIELSEN—THE INNOVATIVE EDUCATOR

http://theinnovativeeducator.blogspot.com/

Resource type: blog, resources

Lisa Nielsen is the co-author of the book Teaching Generation Text, published by Jossey Bass (2011), and the publisher of the five-year old blog—The Innovative Educator. Her blog contains helpful postings comparing the utility of various commonplace technologies and free and for-purchase online tools—including social media sites such as Facebook, Edmodo, and Schoology. Her educator-oriented perspective comes from her years as a K-12 educator. She is currently the Director of Digital Literacy and Citizenship in the New York City Department of Education, a newly created post. Neilsen’s blog is particularly helpful because it includes a lot of free advice and reviewing that K-12 educators would otherwise have to do on their own in order to make sense of the pros and cons of various online tools and resources. For example, on the issue of which social media platform might be most useful to a school, she includes a handy matrix comparing the three platforms—Facebook, Edmodo and Schoology—along dimensions such as age restrictions, advertising, accessibility from home, or “strengthening your digital footprint.” (See her blog for more about that.) Her common sense approach and language is easy to understand and pulls few punches, such as her blog post title “Why Smartboards are a Dumb Initiative.” Her blog is active and easily searchable and covers a multitude of topics connecting kids, families, and educators with personalized learning and various forms of technology such as Twitter, iPads, iPods, PowerPoint, social media, texting, cell phones, Smartboards, needs of special ed students (ADD/ADHD), etc.

RESOURCE #16: NEXT GENERATION LEARNING CHALLENGES (NGLC)—WAVES I–IV

http://nextgenlearning.org

Resource type: initiative, models

Next Generation Learning Challenges is funded by the Hewlett and Gates Foundations and supported by multiple national education organizations in education technology and educational governance. Now in Wave IV of $12 million in innovation funding, NGLC has historically supported a variety of model schools and networks including Summit Schools and KIPP. Through these waves of funding, NGLC supports the development and spread of innovations in education that they hope will lead to more personalized learning and better post-secondary outcomes for low-income youth. The model schools and partners they have funded are identified and described on their website and have links to the websites of the specific models as well. The core beliefs across these model schools are equity for all learners and learner-centered engagement and experiences.
SUMMARY

The 16 resources annotated here were selected in part for their connection to the core tenets of the Personalization in Schools report and their ease of accessibility to a practitioner audience. Online tools and websites rather than single references, reports, or other PDFs were prioritized for this same reason. In particular, resources that could offer multiple types of support or could offer multiple looks at personalization efforts in schools and examples of schools enacting such efforts—as diverse as they are—were also highlighted. Because so much of the work of improving teacher-student relationships and creating more individualized and personalized efforts for youth relies on educator collaborations and structures that also support teachers, the resources above also include some motivational talks that can help educational leaders and teachers get inspired and motivate others to attempt more personalized reforms. Personalization has great measurable impact on youth. Doing the work—actually making connections with students—requires both inspiration and know-how. The resources included attempt to provide a bit of both.

Students at the Center synthesizes and adapts for practice current research on key components of student-centered approaches to learning and deeper learning outcomes. Our goal is to strengthen the ability of practitioners and policymakers to engage each student in acquiring the skills, knowledge, and expertise needed for success in college, career, and civic life. The edited volume of Students at the Center research papers Anytime, Anywhere: Student-Centered Learning for Schools and Teachers (2013) is available from Harvard Education Press. Production of this annotated bibliography was supported generously by funds from the Nellie Mae Education Foundation.