How does differentiation for students support our mission?

The four key elements of One to the World learning experiences provide an instructional framework to support our mission of empowering all students to make meaningful contributions to the world. Differentiating for students performing below grade level and above grade level contributes to greater growth in the development of students as knowledgeable critical thinkers, communicators, collaborators, creators and contributors. With differentiation leading to greater growth in terms of significant content and important competencies, students are better positioned to solve authentic, challenging problems, create public products, and connect with the world to make meaningful contributions. The graphic below reminds us of the importance of differentiation for students.

What is blended learning and how does it provide differentiation?

Blended learning is an instructional strategy that enables individual student needs to be met through the blending of face-to-face instruction and the use of adaptive digital content. Effectively using adaptive digital content fills gaps in student learning and adjusts learning experiences to meet the needs of students performing below, on, or above grade level. Blended learning involves leveraging technology to power instruction to provide students with a personalized learning experience, including increased student control over the time, place, path, and/or pace of learning. Blended learning utilizes data to ensure students have opportunities for individualized learning and that teachers have the information they need to provide instruction that can fill gaps or provide appropriate instruction for students working above grade level.

Clayton Christensen Institute
Blended learning models enable students to:

Learn significant content via small group instruction with the teacher and adaptive digital content that personalizes the instruction to meet individual students’ needs.

Engage in work designed to emphasize content and competencies presented as authentic, challenging problems, and to make connections to the world while creating public products for the world.

Using technology in the classroom does not automatically constitute blended learning. What happens in a blended learning classroom looks very much like guided instruction in small groups, where some students are receiving differentiated small group instruction from the teacher, some students are working on project-based learning, and some students are completing independent practice.

Loudoun County Public Schools will be partnering with Education Elements, an organization that is known for its track record with Next Generation Gates Foundation Grant recipients, to begin the implementation of personalized learning. Professional learning opportunities, leadership development, and infrastructure readiness are key strategies in this work. No additional funding is necessary as this project can be supported out of existing Department of Instruction funds.

Mathematics Improvement

Personalizing learning in mathematics will mean that blended learning and adaptive digital content are used to promote academic growth for all students. Students working above grade level and below grade level will be able to have instruction to meet their individual needs. This is just one strategy the Department of Instruction is putting in place to improve mathematics performance in the school system.

Plans for Initiating the Work

Three cohorts of five schools at the elementary and middle school levels will be selected via an application process. The schools will select a personalized learning leadership team comprised of teachers, the TRT, and administrators to guide the implementation process at each building. Measures of success will be built into the project design. A district leadership team will work collaboratively with the school teams to prepare for a fall 2016-2017 launch.