

**WHITE
PAPER**

Personalized Learning for Post-Pandemic Success



Tailoring instruction to the needs of each student can help reverse pandemic-related learning loss—and a new resource can help.

Personalizing instruction to address each child's unique learning needs is a proven strategy for improving academic achievement. Yet, in many schools, personalized learning has taken a back seat to more pressing concerns during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Now that most school systems have reopened their doors and are making concerted efforts to improve both in-person and virtual instruction, personalized learning is experiencing a resurgence. This strategy is especially critical in light of the excessive learning loss and social-emotional impact experienced by students across the country during the pandemic, and it will play a key role in helping to make up for lost instructional time. What's more, the significant investment that school systems have made in technology tools to support remote teaching and learning have educators well positioned to tailor their instruction to the needs of each student.

This white paper explores how personalized learning can help close achievement gaps that have widened during the pandemic—and it explains how a new resource called the [Stride Learning Hub](#) can help.

Why Personalize Learning

Traditional approaches to instruction are designed with a single learner profile in mind, delivering a curriculum that is scoped and sequenced for the average learner to meet a set of standards for each grade level. But not all students learn at the same pace or in the same ways. Students might need more time to master some concepts and less time to learn others. They might respond better to some instructional approaches over others.

For these reasons, teachers have discovered a great deal of value in differentiating their

instruction. They might organize students into subsets for small-group instruction that targets each group's needs, for instance—or they might have students work individually at their own pace. In both cases, teachers are assigning supplemental curriculum resources to individual students or groups of students that address these students' learning needs more effectively.

“Our No. 1 takeaway was that personalized learning, when implemented thoroughly, was effective for increasing academic achievement measured by standardized tests.”

— Dabae Lee, Assistant professor,
Kennesaw State University, Georgia

There is mounting evidence to suggest that personalized learning can improve student outcomes. For instance, a study published in February 2021 found that teachers in high-performing schools tend to implement personalized learning strategies more effectively than those who work in lower-performing schools.¹

“Our No. 1 takeaway was that personalized learning, when implemented thoroughly, was effective for increasing academic achievement measured by standardized tests,” Dabae Lee, an assistant professor at Kennesaw State University in Georgia and lead author of the study, told *Education Week*. “One of the greatest fears of teachers and administrators is seeing a drop in their test scores. This makes them reluctant to transform their traditional practice to personalized learning. We hope this finding will assure them that personalized learning is effective if implemented well.”²

Key Challenges

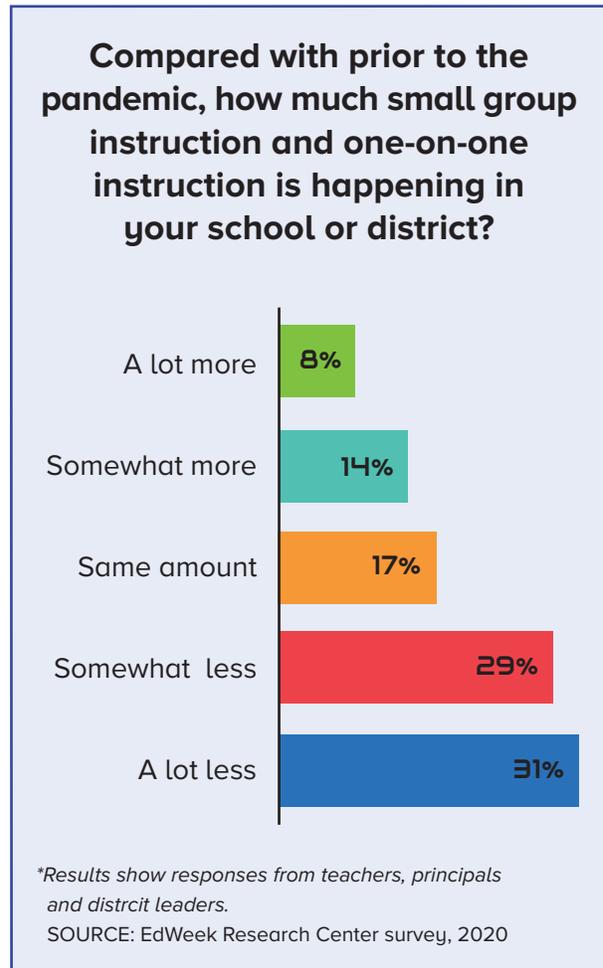
Personalizing instruction for each student isn't easy. It takes a lot of planning, an understanding of each child's academic and social needs, and intelligent use of instructional tools and approaches.

At the height of the pandemic, these challenges proved to be overwhelming for many educators. More than half of respondents in an *Education Week* survey said that teachers weren't doing as well with personalizing instruction as they were before the pandemic. Most also said that student small-group work and individual instructional time with teachers—both fundamental elements of personalized learning—were suffering.³

Tailoring lessons to individual students' needs appears to have been pushed to the back burner during the pandemic to make room for other priorities. "Some of the time spent on personalized learning has been set aside as teachers have focused on taking care of other student needs," says Amanda Ferguson, Senior Director of Product Management for Stride Learning Solutions.

Simply making sure that all students were logging on daily and had what they needed to learn without interruption has been a monumental task for many educators. In addition, teachers have spent a great deal of time learning new skills and transforming their practice to support remote and hybrid instruction, as well as tending to students' social-emotional needs during the pandemic—which has left them with little time to personalize education.

Staffing shortages have also added to the challenge. Health and safety concerns and disagreements over mask and vaccine mandates have prompted some school district employees to



leave or retire and have discouraged candidates from applying for job openings. As a result, many school systems have scrambled to hire paraprofessionals and other employees needed to support personalized learning. Data from the federal Bureau of Labor Statistics revealed there were roughly 450,000 public education job openings in June and July 2021, more than twice as many openings at the same point in 2020.⁴

"When schools have fewer staff members and other resources, it becomes even harder to pull out students for individual or small-group instruction," says Christine Foss, Director of Product Management for Stride Learning Solutions.

A Critical Need

While personalized learning has become less of a priority, the need to target lessons to each child’s unique learning needs is only growing more urgent. Numerous sources indicate that student learning has declined during the pandemic, especially for the most vulnerable students—and personalized learning can help make up for this lost instruction.

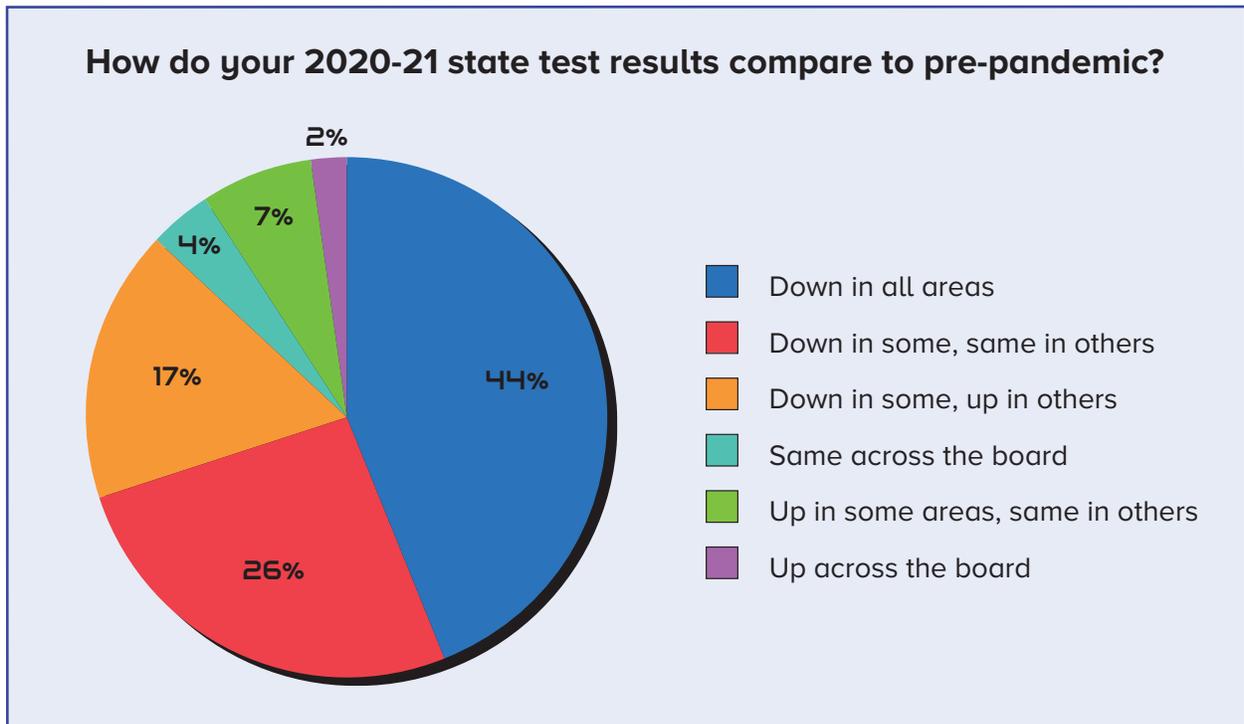
An analysis of student data from NWEA, a nonprofit research organization that offers assessments to measure student growth and proficiency, reveals that students nationwide learned less than usual during the atypical 2020-21 school year, with Black and Latino students losing more ground than their White and Asian peers.

Overall, students in grades 3-8 reportedly ended the 2020-21 school year roughly 3 to 6 percentile

points behind their 2018-19 counterparts in reading and 8 to 12 percentile points behind in math. Black and Latino third graders fell 10 points behind their 2019 counterparts in reading and 15 to 17 points behind in math, while White and Asian students were only 4 to 5 points behind in reading and 9 points behind in math.⁵

These findings correspond with the outcomes from high-stakes state exams. In a national survey of teachers, principals, and district administrators by *Education Week*, 87 percent of respondents said that scores were down in at least some areas—and 44 percent said scores were down in all areas—from where they were prior to COVID.⁶

These results aren’t surprising, given the significant disruptions to learning that have occurred over the past two years. But they confirm that students will need additional support to offset the effects of the pandemic on their learning.

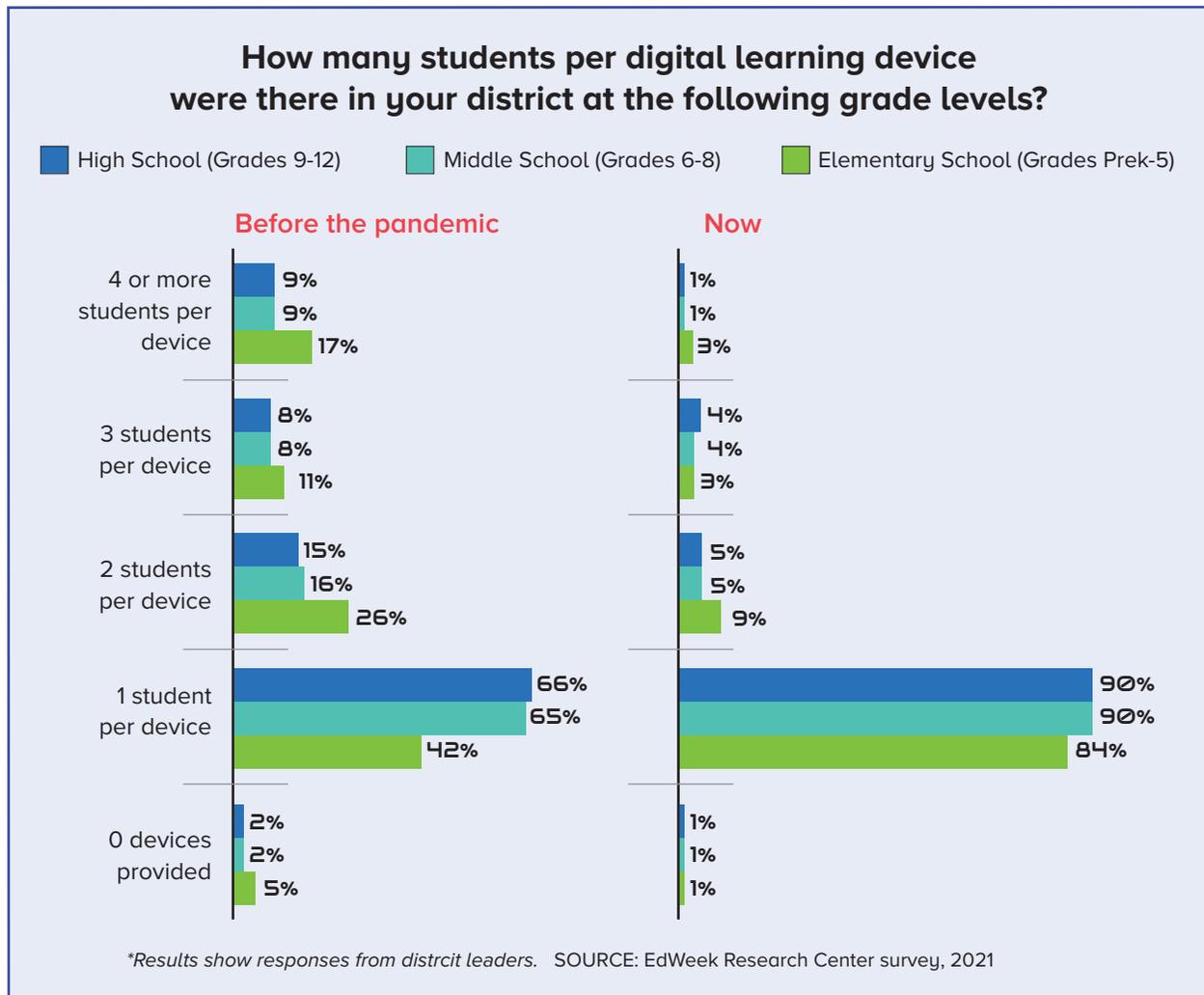


Personalized Learning Requirements

Personalized learning is one such support, and as school systems have returned to in-person education, many teachers are trying to differentiate their instruction once again.

To tailor instruction to each student’s needs, teachers must have content that is appropriate for a wide variety of skill levels, interests, and learning styles. While this can be done using print-based resources, it’s more easily accomplished digitally, when educators can tap into the wealth of supplemental teaching materials that exist online.

One positive development to emerge from the pandemic is that schools are now better positioned for digital instruction. To support remote teaching and learning, many school systems have made substantial investments in Chromebooks and other digital devices for all students. According to an Education Week survey, 84 percent of educators said their schools have at least one device for every elementary school student as of March 2021, and 90 percent said the same for middle and high school students. Those figures are up from 42 percent and 66 percent prior to the pandemic, respectively.⁷



What's more, teachers have become more adept at using technology for instruction. Before the pandemic, only 22 percent of teachers were regularly creating online lessons. Now, that figure stands at 51 percent.⁸

Although educators are well positioned to personalize instruction, the strain from the last few years has taken a huge toll, and nine out of 10 teachers are experiencing job-related stress.⁹ “Teachers often spend a lot of time roaming the internet, looking for resources to personalize instruction,” says Ferguson of Stride Learning Solutions. “They need a ready resource of digital assets they can trust to make personalized learning easier.”

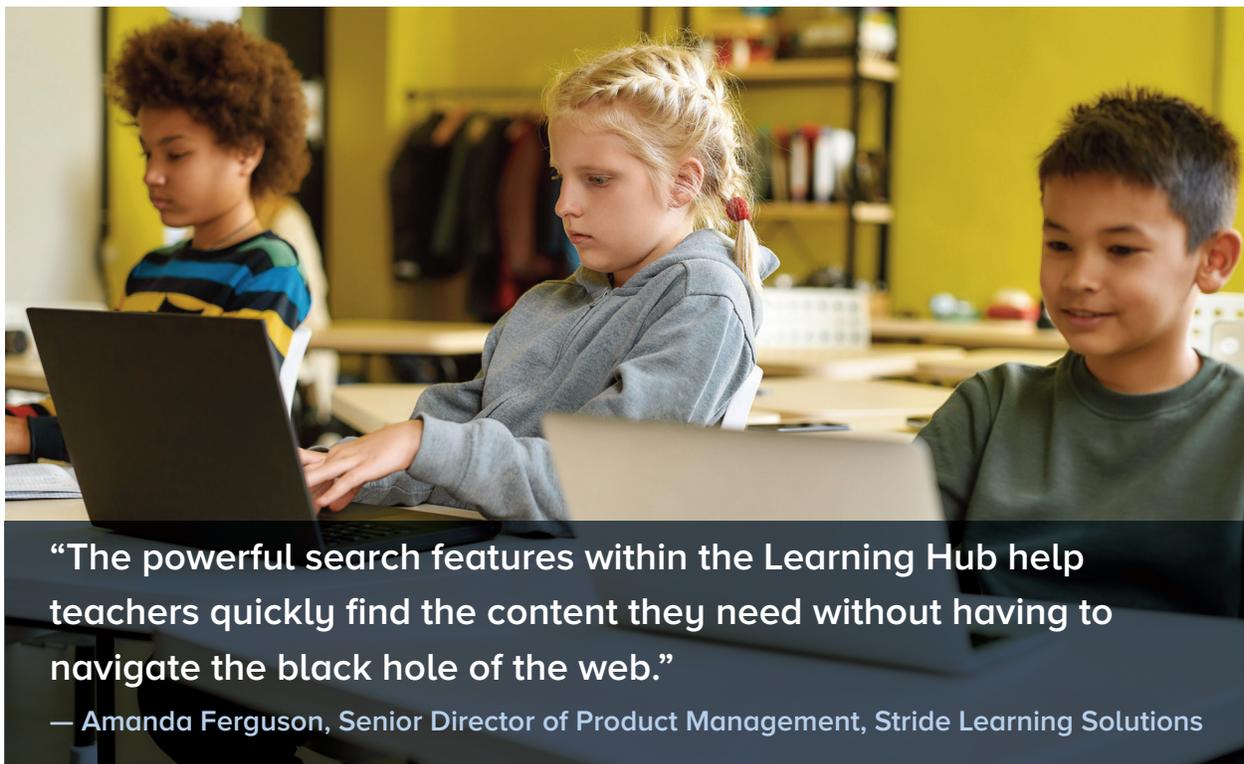
How the Stride Learning Hub Can Help

A new resource called the **Stride Learning Hub** can help. It's a one-stop shop for finding engaging, peer-reviewed content and resources, enabling

teachers to customize lessons and instruction to meet students' individual needs more easily.

With the Stride Learning Hub, teachers can save time when personalizing instruction by accessing a robust library of more than 200,000 research-based, standards-aligned resources spanning all grade levels and curriculum areas. “Because Stride has deep expertise in developing online content, this isn't just a collection of PowerPoint slides and PDF documents, but best-in-class activities that encourage students to think and engage with the content more deeply,” Ferguson says.

For example, there are science simulations, customizable assessments, and innovative tools such as ebooks and interactive games. Translation of most assets is available in more than 100 languages. There are also theme-based collections of content for each grade level.



“The powerful search features within the Learning Hub help teachers quickly find the content they need without having to navigate the black hole of the web.”

— Amanda Ferguson, Senior Director of Product Management, Stride Learning Solutions

Teachers can search the Learning Hub by grade level, subject area, asset type, and – by Spring 2022 – even the curriculum standards they want students to master. A number of exciting enhancements are planned for the Learning Hub, including the ability for teachers to sort content by user ratings, save favorites, and export content into a learning management system. Other future enhancements include a lesson building feature for creating entire lessons and sharing them with other teachers.

“A big impetus for developing the Learning Hub was collecting these resources in one simple place for teachers,” Ferguson observes. “The powerful search features within the Learning Hub help teachers quickly find the content they need without having to navigate the black hole of the web.”

Setting Up Teachers for Success

Teachers have limited time and resources to deliver personalized learning tailored to students’ unique needs and interests. But, because the use of technology has skyrocketed during the pandemic, teachers are more ready and willing to embrace a digital solution for personalizing instruction.

That’s especially true if teachers have a resource that saves them time in instructional planning. The Stride Learning Hub, which gathers high-quality digital content in one simple-to-use, searchable connection, is just such a solution.

To learn more about Stride Learning Hub and how your teachers can gain access, visit stridelearninghub.com.

¹ Lee et al. “Differences in personalized learning practice and technology use in high- and low-performing learner-centered schools in the United States.” *Educational Technology Research and Development*, Feb. 2021. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11423-021-09937-y>

² Klein, Alyson. “Why Personalized Learning Works in Some Schools, But Not in Others. What Test Scores Say.” *Education Week*, Oct. 29, 2021. <https://www.edweek.org/technology/why-personalized-learning-works-in-some-schools-but-not-in-others-what-test-scores-say/2021/10>

³ Bushweller, Kevin. “How the Pandemic Is Testing Personalized Learning.” *Education Week*, Nov. 4, 2021. <https://www.edweek.org/technology/how-the-pandemic-is-testing-personalized-learning/2020/11>

⁴ Lieberman, Mark. “No Bus Drivers, Custodians, or Subs. What’s Really Behind Schools’ Staffing Shortages?” *Education Week*, Sept. 20, 2021. <https://www.edweek.org/leadership/no-bus-drivers-custodians-or-subs-whats-really-behind-schools-staffing-shortages/2021/09>

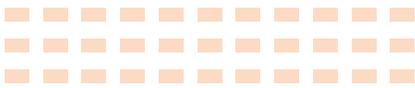
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⁸ Prothero, Arianna. “Pandemic Fuels Tech Advances in Schools. Here’s What That Looks Like.” *Education Week*, Sept. 14, 2021. <https://www.edweek.org/technology/pandemic-fuels-tech-advances-in-schools-heres-what-that-looks-like/2021/09>

⁹ “91% of Educators Have Experienced Job-Related Stress, According to a Survey.” *Education Week*, Sept. 14, 2021. <https://www.edweek.org/leadership/educator-stress-anti-racism-and-pandemic-response-how-youre-feeling/2021/09>



About Stride Learning Solutions

Since 2000, Stride Learning Solutions has been a leader in strategic solutions to solve district challenges. Stride Learning Solutions' flexible online and blended learning options boost modern instruction and promote lifelong student success. With an innovative platform, comprehensive digital courseware, adaptable technology, and extensive support, Stride Learning Solutions is equipped to help your school or district empower a brighter future for learners.

To learn more, visit stridelearning.com/learning-solutions.

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