



## WHAT *IS* PERSONALIZED LEARNING?

Educational leaders have been talking about personalized learning for nearly 100 years, but it is only now that personalized learning is being realized in schools around the world. What does personalized learning at SAS really mean, and what will it do for our students?

By  
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Singapore American School has more than 60 years of outstanding results, and has long been known for excellence in delivering a balanced and rigorous American curriculum. By traditional academic measures, our students are among the most competitive in the world. In addition, they exhibit strong character, leadership, and resilience, while showing compassion for others through service. SAS is an amazing place and our students are demonstrating their potential daily.

Increasingly our school needs to prepare students for a future that is moving rapidly and is difficult to understand. In most cases, we are preparing students for jobs that don't exist today, or at least not in their current form. A strong academic foundation alone is no longer adequate—and our parents, business leaders, colleges, and even our kids know it. We will always provide students a rock solid academic foundation, but beyond that foundation the best schools will need to innovate with the application of student learning in a broad range of contexts. It is the application of their knowledge, skills, and dispositions that will distinguish our students for college, and ultimately prepare them to be contributing members of society in a competitive and rapidly changing world of work.

Like many leading private schools today, SAS continues to identify and focus on the skills that students will need to master for the unknown future that they face. At our school, we call these skills our desired student learning outcomes. These outcomes include character, collaboration, communication, creativity, critical thinking, cultural competence, and content knowledge, and serve as the direction and substance for the school's academic programs.

When we consider how to best deliver on the promise of our vision and our relevant desired student learning outcomes, we know that it will best be delivered in a personalized learning environment, catering to where each student is in their learning journey. While personalized learning has been talked about in education circles for decades, never before have we had the tools and expertise to personalize learning like we can today. The more personalized the learning for each student, the more likely we are to tap into their full potential and capability. Personalizing learning is an ambitious goal, but increasingly we have the building blocks in place to make it possible.

But what will personalized learning really look like at SAS?

# What personalized learning is

- ▷ Personalized learning is student-centered, grounded in each learner's profile, and characterized by competency-based learning progressions, customized learning pathways, and flexible learning environments. Students take greater ownership of their learning, while also developing meaningful relationships with each other, teachers, and members of the local and global communities.
- ▷ Each student's progress toward clearly defined learning goals is regularly assessed against clearly defined levels of performance that connect to a curriculum focused on the SAS desired student learning outcomes.
- ▷ Students follow a customized path that responds and adapts based on their learner profile, which includes their individual learning progress, strengths, needs, interests, and goals.
- ▷ Student needs drive the design of the learning environment. All operational elements—including staffing, space utilization, and schedule—are dynamic and respond and adapt to support students in achieving their learning goals.

A personalized curriculum has in place the academic standards that a student must meet, but provides the opportunity to meet those standards in ways that are unique to the needs of our learners. It goes beyond knowledge to a focus on skills that align with our DSLOs. In some cases it may impact pacing, while in other cases it may impact how the curriculum is delivered. Personalized learning provides students the opportunity to pursue interests, passions, and ultimately purpose, which in turn inspires students to work harder, become more focused, and learn more. When learning tasks are constructed in this way, students are challenged to think, advocate for themselves, and align their learning with their strengths and interests.

Customized pathways allow students choice in what they study—think elementary iTime or genius hour, middle school TRi Time, and high school Catalyst projects and Advanced Topic courses—and how learning is demonstrated

While we are changing some of how and what students learn at SAS, there are other aspects of the SAS education that will not change, including the excellence for which we have so long been known, and the foundational learning—or core content knowledge—that is required to achieve that excellence. While students will learn in ways that interest them and at a pace best suited for each individual, the adults in our community will ensure they are challenging each student appropriately according to that student's profile.

As we develop the framework for personalized learning at SAS, we are specifically working on competency-based learning progressions, customized learning pathways, and flexible learning environments. Over the past several years our teachers and Office of Learning team have been further defining our DSLOs, have been developing our learning standards, and they are now working on the progressions through which students will advance.

Examples of competency-based progressions include our proficiency-based world language program and our K-8 reading and writing continuums

While learning progressions describe the scaffolding of skills in a content area or grade level, customized pathways give students the opportunity to link learning experiences together to further develop an area of interest or content area like math and science, the

humanities, performing arts, or athletics. This “voice and choice” for students gives them the knowledge and skills they need, and as important, gives them agency to take responsibility for their own learning. The flexible learning environments required to best implement personalized learning are materializing in several places throughout the school, and are a primary driver of our recently completed facilities master plan. These spaces are characterized by flexible spaces for various groupings of students, hands-on learning opportunities, connections to the outdoors, areas for group learning as well as individual learning, and the effective use of technology. The more spaces like these that we have, the more students we can provide a second-to-none world class education.

Flexible learning environments at SAS include the early learning center, new kindergarten hubs, the sixth grade A-side classrooms, and high school Catalyst and Quest program spaces

While personalized learning isn't a new concept, it is only now that we are truly able to realize its potential. Today more than ever we understand how the brain works, how social-emotional experiences can impact learning, and how technology can enable learning. We've been working for years on the pedagogy, teaching practices, and facilities impacts, and have been assembling the best educators in the world to teach, coach, and guide our students. We are ready for a new era of learning at SAS, and we are thrilled to partner with the wider SAS community during this exciting time in the life of the school.

The intended results of this work?

At SAS each teacher and leader believes that every student can learn at high levels, that every student is unique, and that we, as educators, can have a major impact on a student's life. While admirable, to fully realize our vision and act upon these beliefs, we have to personalize learning for each child. Doing this involves making the learning environment more flexible, making the learning journey transparent to students, and giving students the ability to deeply explore a broad range of interests.

We believe that SAS can be amongst the most effective schools in the world, even as the world changes around us. Our students will choose more, learn more, be better prepared for their futures, and feel more connected to our school than ever before.

# What it is not

- ▷ Personalized learning is **not** individualization. Individualization asks teachers to accommodate learning needs for individual learners by customizing instruction. Personalization connects learning with interests, talents, passions, and aspirations by asking students to actively participate in the learning process.
- ▷ Personalized learning is **not** technology centric; instead technology is used as a tool as appropriate to present content and gather evidence of student learning.
- ▷ Personalized learning is **not** independent study—in fact, the role of the teacher remains absolutely essential for student success.
- ▷ Personalized learning is **not** a “free for all” but is instead built on a foundation of a guaranteed and viable curriculum that ensures core knowledge and skills are addressed.
- ▷ Personalized learning does **not** ask students to work in isolation or at the expense of the whole child; instead it requires a strong focus on collaboration and social-emotional learning.