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Patrick Henry Elementary School

DEVELOPING STUDENT AGENCY



CORE COMPONENT

Learner Led: Enable learners to take ownership of their learning so that it can dynamically adjust to their skills, curiosity and goals

Learner Led at Patrick Henry School

Patrick Henry Elementary focuses on Learner Led instruction to personalize learning for students. Learner Led instruction empowers learners with meaningful ways to make choices about their learning experiences, transforming the traditional learning environment to one driven by the student.

Our Sources



Ms. Diane Meloscia - 4th Grade Teacher

"The personalized learning block lets them move at their own pace and reach their goals when they should... As they move through the autonomy levels we start bringing in new activities... It's a constant conversation with the kids, them telling us what their needs are, us telling them what we'd like to see and what the expectations are... I think the answer is yes to a lot of the things they ask."

Developing Student Agency Through Levels of Autonomy

Ms. Meloscia is part of Patrick Henry's fourth grade team, which is comprised of three teachers, each with a specialization - literacy, math, or science/social studies. The team began the journey toward a Learner Led environment by redesigning their school day to better meet student needs, creating a block of personalized learning time where students can drive their own experiences. In the morning, students now rotate for content-area instruction through mini-lessons and differentiated small-group support. This model enabled the teachers to create a two-hour afternoon block, in which students set their own goals, follow their own schedules, and advocate for their own needs.

To support students during their personalized learning time, the team scaffolds the experience, allowing students to gain increasing independence as they demonstrate ownership of their learning. Teachers conference with students regularly to help them build academic and advocacy skills. One critical element of this scaffolding is the Levels of Autonomy, through which students progress as they learn to manage their own schedule, goals and learning activities.

ABOUT

Patrick Henry Elementary School

Chicago Public Schools
Neighborhood School
Attendance based on student
living in boundary

650

Total PreK-6 Students

4%

African American

2%

Asian

83%

Hispanic

7%

White

4%

Other

88%

Low Income

13%

Diverse Learners

46%

English Learners

17%

Mobility

(Reflects any enrollment change between the first school day in October and the last day of the school year.)

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HOW IT WORKS in Ms. Meloscia's class...



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STEP ONE: Create time and space to support students in developing ownership

- **Create learning experiences that are designed for the strengths, interests and needs of students:** Ms. Meloscia redesigned her literacy time to better meet the individual needs of her students. She moved her mini-lessons to a shorter 60-minute block in the morning, which enabled her to design 90 minutes of personalized learning time in the afternoon.



Re-evaluate how you use classroom time to support learning. Consider allocating more time for independent and collaborative student work. Use learning goals, plans or menus to support students managing their own learning activities so that teacher time can be dedicated to students who need extra support.



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STEP TWO: Develop a structure to scaffold increasing advocacy and ownership

- **Cultivate an environment for learners to move purposefully and freely within the classroom to enhance collaboration and peer support:** Ms. Meloscia started the transition to personalized learning time by introducing students to Levels of Autonomy, and the expectations and responsibilities of each level. Students begin at Level 1 and move to higher levels as they demonstrate readiness for more independence and ownership. Progress is fluid, and students can move between levels based on readiness and need. See the sidebar for details about each Level of Autonomy.



Gradually release control from teacher to student as students develop the skills to own and drive their learning. Structures that support and develop independence motivate students to hold themselves accountable for learning. Work with students to set goals, monitor progress, create their own schedules, make choices from learning menus, and lead weekly conferences with teacher or peers.



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STEP THREE: Provide students with tools to manage their time and learning

- **Partner with learners to establish a timeline and a plan for monitoring progress in meeting goals:** Ms. Meloscia provides each student with a template to create their schedule, set goals, track progress, and reflect on learning. The template is differentiated to student needs. Students in Level 1 receive a template with a pre-determined schedule and a list of "must dos" and "may dos." Students in Level 4 create their own schedule and choose the activities on which they work. Students in all levels set a goal and reflect on learning.



Reflection is a critical element to support metacognitive skills at each level. At all stages of independence and ownership, use reflection to help students recognize how their actions impact their learning. Students in more teacher-directed stages can reflect on where they chose to work or if they met a work completion goal.



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STEP FOUR: Establish structures for students to self-assess and advocate for their needs

- **Coach learners to identify needs and advocate for those needs to be met:** Ms. Meloscia conferences regularly with each of her students. The frequency and content of conferences varies based on student need and their level of autonomy. During all conferences, Ms. Meloscia coaches students on their reflections and self-assessments to help them recognize, articulate and meet their needs.



Developing self-advocacy and ownership with students requires time, patience, intention, and empathy. For many teachers (and students), these skills need to be developed. Consider how to set students up for success: establish structures and coaching routines, use modeling and role-play, and build trust and open communication.

Ms. Meloscia's Levels of Autonomy

Level 1: Teacher-Directed

Level 1 is very teacher-directed and students interact with the teacher regularly. All students receive a schedule that includes assignments, needed materials, activities to complete, and where to work.

Level 2: Some Student Choice

In Level 2, students have some degree of choice, but they still meet regularly with the teacher to receive assignments and directions on how to complete their work. They have more flexibility than Level 1, including choice of where to work and the order in which to complete some activities each day.

Level 3: Significant Student Choice

In Level 3, ownership has shifted to the students, who make many of their own learning choices while teachers monitor and facilitate. Students create their own schedule, check in periodically with the teacher, and choose where to work, including the hallway learning nooks.

Level 4: Student-Directed

In Level 4, students advocate for their own learning. Students co-create their learning goals and the path to achieving those goals with their teachers. They create their own schedule and determine what to do when. They work independently and collaboratively with peers in locations throughout the school building. The students are responsible and accountable for their learning and request teacher support when needed.

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