Finding the Right Fit for Each Child: Michigan's Economic Future Depends on It

Have you ever worn shoes that didn't fit? Were they too wide or too narrow? Did the height of the heel make your back hurt? Did you have enough arch support? The wrong shoes can make a short walk excruciating and miserable; the right shoes can make a long trek invigorating and memorable. We understand why everyone needs to wear shoes that fit; and if you ever had to wear shoes that didn't fit, you know how that affected your attitude toward your walk, what you were able to accomplish on your walk, and how far you walked.

Teachers know one size does not fit all in the classroom either. Students don't all learn in the same way or in the same amount of time. One may need support with an assignment while another may be eager to take on the next learning task. If the class has to sit through more examples, some students will disengage. If the class moves on, others will not be able to catch up. Personalized learning means activities can be adapted to meet individual students' needs so they can take the long walk to graduation eagerly and efficiently.

Recently, *MVU* released a report – *Moving Michigan Farther, Faster: Personalized Learning and the Transformation of Learning in Michigan*. The report, prepared by Public Sector Consultants Inc. (PSC) and the Citizens Research Council (CRC), was commissioned by *MVU* in response to Governor Rick Snyder's call to examine technology innovation in Michigan schools. PSC and CRC interviewed state and national education leaders and did an extensive literature review. *Moving Michigan Farther, Faster* looks at both the future of education in Michigan and the role that technology could and should play in that future.

The report offers specific recommendations and analysis related to students, teachers, schools, technology, data, and quality and accountability. The recommendations converge on a simple, but powerful message: ***Personalized learning moves Michigan farther, faster.*** The report suggests that Michigan needs to design an education system that includes tools and support for teachers to lead the effort in providing customized education for all students.

Each student has different strengths and weaknesses, interests and difficulties, motivators and distractors. With so many students in public schools continuing to fall behind or drop out, we simply must examine what works and what doesn't. Personalized learning allows teachers, students and parents to select the methods, strategies and tools that meet the individual student where he or she is and promote progress according to his or her abilities. It's more effective. What could be better than options that fit your skills, your life and your goals?

I believe personalizing learning cannot happen on a statewide scale without a clear vision and a plan to harness fully the power of technology while supporting teachers through this transition. Today, teaching and learning can take place riding on a bus, sitting at the beach and waiting in line. Small, inexpensive and connected technology devices allow students to access information any time any place and extend the capacity for students to work on assignments and interact with teachers and classmates beyond the classroom walls, no matter the time of day or year. Teachers will need the right tools and training so they can take advantage of these exciting developments and move personalized learning forward.

Next time you think about the future of education, reflect on how many of our children don't have access to learning environments that fit their educational needs as well as your favorite pair of shoes fits you. We need every child to be fitted with an educational experience that matches their learning profile so they can reach their full potential. Personalized learning works and can be used to strengthen our global competitiveness if we embrace this opportunity.

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