Personalized Learning:

Communication Focus Groups

Through the Rhode Island Education Innovation Research Network (RI-EIRN), researchers and practitioners partner to ask and answer core questions that support innovation and improvement in our state’s education system. Periodically, the RI-EIRN team solicits requests for proposals from researcher teams that would directly answer questions surfaced by K-12 practitioners in the field.

Currently, we are soliciting proposals from scholars with expertise in qualitative and/or social science research to engage with our statewide personalized learning initiative, launched in January 2016. The personalized learning initiative is meant to proactively support educators in shifting to and working within an educational model that is tailored to the needs of each student, allows for student agency, ensures relevancy of content, and prepares students with both the knowledge and the skills and dispositions to be successful in the twenty-first century. This work is big, important, and sometimes confusing to parents and other family members. For the personalized learning initiative to be successful, educators engaged in this work must be able to communicate it well to families. But we presently don't know how families feel about personalized learning, or even what they know about it.

The RI-EIRN team seeks researchers interested in engaging in focus groups to help Rhode Island educators who are either engaged in personalized learning or beginning to think about personalized learning best communicate with families and others. Through these focus groups, we seek to learn:

1) What families know about personalized learning and how they feel about this new educational model.
2) How we can best inform families about current innovations in teaching and learning.
3) What role families play in co-creating the social understanding of these new models of learning—and what role could they play.

We seek researcher partners who approach their work through a lens of innovation—both in how they structure their own projects and in the deliverables they seek to create and way they seek to impact change through their research and learning. To that end, research teams should work in a manner that ensures findings can support an understanding of the expectations that families and community members have for education and the role they see themselves playing in supporting that system.

The final research team will be supported with up to $20,000 to complete the following deliverables over a six-month research project.
Deliverables
The successful research partner would be asked to:

- Develop a focus-group protocol
- Conduct all necessary focus groups to answer core research questions
- Distill findings that answer the core questions above, including poignant elements, themes and patterned data
- Work with the RI-EIRN team to write a research brief that synthesizes key findings and includes visuals to illustrate relevant data, with goal of better supporting community-building, engagement, and partnerships through usable insights

Eligible research teams will be:

- Experts in social science and qualitative methodology with core experience in focus group facilitation, not necessarily all in the education sector
- Affiliated with at least one Rhode Island institute of higher education as a graduate student (under the guidance of a faculty member), faculty member, or other connected researcher

To apply, please send a letter of intent to info@collaborativeri.org that details:

- The research team’s plan for engagement with families and community members
- The team’s proposed method of collecting data, including a draft focus group protocol with at least five sample questions included
- The team’s forecasted project plan and plan for showcasing collected data
- Detailed biographies and scope of work for each researcher working on this project

Please send questions to info@collaborativeri.org.