Make Virtual Personal
A Call to Create a New Learning Experience for Students
“The key to this transformation is not to standardize education, but to personalize it, to build achievement on discovering the individual talents of each child, to put students in an environment where they want to learn and where they can naturally discover their true passions.”
Sir Ken Robinson
Welcome!

It is my pleasure to submit this document that declares an invitation to create a new learning experience for the students of the Racine Unified School District.

Specifically, this document is a manifesto for a future learning experience for students that is focused on three design drivers. Presented is a bold view of how students will learn as reflected in our district’s core values.

The manifesto is accompanied by a set of design strategies that support the drivers and are based in the wants and needs of our students to create a space that will serve our virtual learning community. These strategies are focused on two areas:

1) the realization of a new space and
2) the program that can potentially take place in that space.

Please take some time to review this document. I would welcome your comments and insights into the manifesto and drivers, and how they support the design of a plausible future student learning experience.

Sincerely,
James O’Hagan
Director of Digital & Virtual Learning
The Racine Unified School District
Department of Digital & Virtual Learning

Mission
We make virtual personal.

Vision
We provide opportunities for student success outside the traditional classroom in rigorous and leading edge ways through personal coursework and mentorship
The Racine Unified School District has identified core values for an educational experience: Student Centered Decisions, High Expectations, Equity, Diversity, Strong relationships, Unity and Respect.

Using a reimagined Kurten Building, let us create a program that serves to manifest those expectations of experience and where this space serves as the bravest location for learning in not just Racine, but in the United States.

Schools hold a time-honored position as a location for supporting the acquisition of the skills and dispositions of learning. In the past, that meant coming to a place between certain hours and have instruction directed for the learner. But the tools that enable those processes have changed and the scope of what it means to learn has shifted as the world now connects through a personal, always-on, always available, digital environment.

It is this environment that has reshaped what it means to read, write and communicate and drastically altered the vision of what “learning” means and how it contributes to the development of our citizenry. That, coupled with a focus on rethinking the modern student learning experience and what it means, challenges us to rethink the spatial identity of where learning occurs. The value of repurposing spaces to serve a new condition for personal learning is now upon us.

To that end, this project seeks to reinvent the experience for students involved in virtual courses by reinventing their learning space, and to create an invitation that declares an irresistible experience awaits the Racine community through the connections this space creates - an experience based in the three signature design drivers.

The following pages identify the design drivers that should define the new design of this space.
The Racine Unified School District has an opportunity to fully embrace student-centered personal learning plans.

As schools strive to find innovative ways to truly personalize each student’s learning, the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction provides a provision can of significant flexibility.

The Racine Unified School District will work directly with students and parents to design a personal learning plan that will meet the unique needs, interests and goals of a student. The parents (or student with parent notification) then make a formal request to have the district approve and adopt the learning plan.

By collaborating with the student and parents, and by leveraging the breadth of our resources, our district ensures the personal learning plan includes adequate assurances of rigor and accountability, including methods to be used for determining levels of competencies, gained through the plan.
While many districts have sought to build virtual schools, the Racine Unified School District has developed a program that utilizes virtual learning considered a model for the state of Wisconsin.

Many districts in the state have begun to explore how to abandon their full time virtual schools and replace them with programs utilizing virtual and blended learning approaches. The Racine Unified School District has a breadth of resources that will allow for a unique program focused on personal learning that includes full time virtual learning options.

Program

- No additional staff at this time
- Almost cost neutral
- Provide a personal learning experience, not just virtual
- Leverage breadth of district resources and academies
- Provide services no other virtual school can provide
- Flexible and student-centered

School

- Need for additional full time staff
- Subsidize Internet access
- Only one learning environment
- Asset management
- Increase in special education services
- Only meets functional needs
- Inflexible and structure-centered
Manifesto

Space as an Organism
Space as a Catalyst
Space as a Studio
Space as a Catalyst


This space supports the collision of space and learning and serves to create the conditions for the redefinition of “classroom” in the Racine Unified School District. This space supports the investigation of new ways to learn, connect, and grow as students and as people. This space is unbounded and serves as a location of possibility. This space is an accelerator and incubator of ideas, and itself exists in a prototype mode of “perpetual beta.” This space is a place for exploration that unfolds into a pathway that leads to an unknown destination. This space seeks to create linkages and collisions between students of unlike demographics.
Space as an Organism


This space serves as a centering location for learning.
This space supports connective interactions throughout virtual spaces.
This space is agile and transforms itself on-demand to support a range of learning interactions.
This space has the capacity to grow as expectations for learning change and grow.
This space connects with other locations for learning and informs those spaces, and in turn, they inform the behavior of this space.
This space is responsive and at the same time distributive.
This space has the capacity to look different in the afternoon from what it does in the morning.
This space addresses social and individual needs, both in formal and informal ways.
Space as an Opportunity


This space is a stepping off point.
This space fosters the conditions for student driven success.
This space invites the community into our district.
This space is a location that supports student agency.
This space challenges students and parents to further their participation in learning.
This space is a system created to empower others.
This space manifests a new narrative about learning and developing powerful student-driven ideas.
Strategies

Strategies for moving this space towards a concept design plus a set of provocations to challenge your thinking about the meaning of “school” and “classroom.”
Strategies

1. Create a welcoming location for students, parents and the community apart from traditional school buildings signaling our bold approach to learning in personal ways.

2. As part of a new invitation into learning in the space, name the location not with the words “school” or “classroom.”

3. As part of an invitation into learning in the space, consider the entrances into the space. In this space, display “pictures of learning.”

4. As part of an invitation into creating partnerships with other community organizations, develop shared spaces with unique funding sources.

5. Create spatial neighborhoods that are adjoined but provide the necessary separation that may be desired by students and educators.
Strategies

6. Provide age appropriate furniture for a range of interactions from individual to collaborative, from formal to informal, and from to academic to social.

7. Focus on this equation in the design of the space and what elements are used in the design: Flexibility + Agility = Adaptability.

8. Using that equation, select furniture that creates the condition of adaptability.

9. Create the capacity for the space to support an entire class experience at an individual level that employs the unique capacities.

10. Develop spaces for reading and for quiet reflection.
Strategies

11. Develop performance spaces and the ability to stage speakers, concerts, presentations, and other types of similar engagements.

12. Make this space accessible for students outside a traditional school day. This will contribute to the value of the space.

13. Focus on providing students with the ability to move, either while sitting, or by standing. Consider using height adjustable furniture to add to the flexibility and agility of the site.

14. Provide access to writable surface, either on writable walls or tables, or with rolling capacity.

15. Strategically employ additional lighting in the space if possible as part of a finishes program.
FAQ

Would we earn a full FTE from students if we had a virtual program instead of a virtual school?

Yes, we would earn a full FTE by bringing back students who have left us because of open enrollment to other districts and have a structure in place to retain our students looking for full time options. The counseling structure is already in place at the high schools, though we may need to designate one specifically for students looking to return to RUSD.

Those students who look to return to our district will find we can provide more services, should they want them, than the traditional virtual schools. The students who return to us increase the overall FTE of the district. Where they end up assigned (Case, Park, RAE) is inconsequential when it comes to the overall state aid we would recoup. Students who return to us and do not want to associate with the traditional high schools would likely be assigned under the RAE designation. They would either be able to earn a generic RUSD diploma, or one with a virtual designation.

So kids could be "full time" but assigned to their home school and go all virtual?

Yes, they could. By being all virtual but still assigned to their home school would allow their home schools the flexibility to work with their students in developing a personal learning plan. For some of our students, full time virtual seems like a good choice, but we need to consider the social and emotional needs of these students as well.

By developing a personal learning plan for the student, per Wisconsin State Statutes 118.15(1)(c) and 118.15(1)(d) and outlined in the Department of Public Instruction document Fostering Innovation in Wisconsin Schools, we can empower our high schools to retain their students in new ways.

Students who choose a full time virtual option would be ours full time versus full time in another virtual school?

Yes, they would be ours which would increase our overall FTE for the district. Where they are located within the district does not matter if we are looking at the overall state aid for the students. We would also be able to more effectively meet the needs of our students by designing a learning pathway for each student as an individual.
Why does a virtual student need a physical space?
Students who are in virtual schools or programs many times have their functional needs met. However, many students still have social or emotional needs their virtual schools or programs are not meeting. Having a physical space provides a connection to a community. In striving to meet our vision to "Make Virtual Personal" we are providing a social and emotional support lacking in other virtual schools and programs. This space does not just serve as a quiet work space for our students. This space is a catalyst that supports the collision of space and learning and serves to create the conditions for the redefinition of “classroom.” This space is an organism that serves as a centering location for learning supporting connective interactions throughout virtual spaces. And this space is an opportunity to serve as a stepping off point to student-driven success and an invitation to our community from the Racine Unified School District.

Is this program considered Blended Learning or Personalized Learning?
Actually, this program is both.
The definition of blended learning is a formal education program in which a student learns:
- at least in part through online learning, with some element of student control over time, place, path, and/or pace;
- at least in part in a supervised brick-and-mortar location away from home;
- and the modalities along each student’s learning path within a course or subject are connected to provide an integrated learning experience.

Our model of Blended Learning is an "A La Carte" approach.
The definition of personalized learning is tailoring learning for each student’s strengths, needs and interests—including enabling student voice and choice in what, how, when and where they learn—to provide flexibility and supports to ensure mastery of the highest standards possible.
**FAQ**

**What is an "A La Carte" approach to Blended Learning?**
A student may take a course entirely online to accompany other experiences that the student is having at a brick-and-mortar school or learning center. The teacher of record for the A La Carte course is the online teacher. Students may take the A La Carte course either on the brick-and-mortar campus or off-site. This differs from full-time online learning because it is not a whole-school experience. Students may take some courses A La Carte and others face-to-face at a brick-and-mortar campus.

**How are virtual classes conducted?**
Virtual courses are asynchronous, meaning students have control over the pace and place of their coursework. Interaction with their teacher varies depending on when the student contacts their teacher, and their teacher's availability. Because our teachers are teaching face-to-face courses as well, this can limit availability during the day.

**Will students at the other high schools still be able to take online courses?**
Yes. Students will still be able to attend their high schools and take online courses in accordance with the compelling needs guidelines.

**How does this program fit into the district calendar?**
The nature of this program allows for students to engage in learning all year round. Online courses may be taken at any time. Face to face courses would fit into the traditional school calendar. The space is available to students anytime during normal hours of operation.

**Will students who participate in this program be allowed to participate in sports, music and other extracurricular activities?**
Yes. Different than a fully virtual school, this program allows students to still participate in their traditional brick and mortar school activities.
**FAQ**

As part of the enrollment, students are interviewed. Why are the students interviewed to enter a virtual program?

The student interview is a key piece of the pathway to entry into the program. In some cases, students may think taking virtual courses are their only option as an alternative to their brick and mortar schools. Through the interview is an opportunity to have a discussion with the students about their learning plan and to ensure they understand what it is will be expected from them. In some cases, it may be discovered there is a better option for students to meet their learning expectations not requiring they take virtual courses.

Would this space serve students who have been expelled?

Maybe. Students who have been offered virtual learning as an option as a condition of their expulsion would have to be evaluated by the director on a case by case basis.