



Big Picture Learning

Student-Centered Learning Design: O-A-R-I-A

Big Picture Learning's **mission** is to activate the potential of Schools, Systems, and Education.

As Big Picture Learning moves forward, we recognize the need to be agile. The need to face the challenges of everyday life, whether they be in education or the world at large. We lead with a definition of personalization that starts with 'person'. We adhere to a philosophy in which meeting the educational needs of a nation can be accomplished one student at a time. But BPL's new approaches, new drives and – yes – new successes suggest that we can also approach these challenges *one school at a time; one community at a time; one paradigm shift at a time.*

We move forward from this day prepared to activate the potential of **Schools, Systems, and Education** through student-driven, real-world learning. **We are activists.** Join us.

One Student at a Time System: *We believe in cultivating the brilliance of every young person.*

Big Picture Learning (BPL) is grounded in the philosophy of educating One Student at a Time. This principle means deeply personalizing learning based on each student's interests, needs, and goals. It begins with the advisor forming a deep, trusting relationship with each student, understanding their story, strengths, challenges, and aspirations. In BPL schools, students are not seen as part of a generalized group, but as individuals with unique learning journeys.

Learning Plans are central tools for enacting this approach. These co-created documents outline each student's personal, academic, and real-world learning goals. They evolve, reflecting changes in student interests, growth, and circumstances. Regular Learning Plan meetings with the student, advisor, and family ensure shared ownership and accountability. This continual revision and reflection process supports meaningful goal-setting and a deeper understanding of learning as a personal endeavor.



Rather than being measured against standardized benchmarks or compared with peers, students' progress is assessed based on their individual growth. This approach fosters intrinsic motivation and resilience, as students learn to set and meet their own goals. It builds a sense of ownership and agency that is often missing in traditional education systems. Advisors act as coaches who support students to pursue excellence while remaining grounded in their authentic selves.

This model also enhances students' social-emotional well-being. When students feel known, seen, and valued, they are more likely to engage, persist, and take risks in their learning. The One Student at a Time approach creates a culture of care and respect that nurtures confidence, curiosity, and courage. Students are empowered to bring their full selves into the learning space.

Ultimately, One Student at a Time ensures that learning is tailored, relevant, and empowering. It reflects BPL's core commitment to personalizing education, building strong relationships, and preparing students not just for tests, but for life. In doing so, it honors the dignity, potential, and humanity of every learner.

- Seminal Resource (s):
 - Document: [Individual Learning Plans](#)
 - Video: [Personalization \(One Student at a Time\) & Interest-Driven PBL](#)

Advisory System: *We believe in small learning communities based on relationships, relevance, and rigor.*

Advisory is the beating heart of a BPL school. It is a relational and academic structure in which students belong to a consistent learning community led by an advisor. This multi-year relationship creates the foundation for trust, growth, and meaningful learning. Unlike traditional homerooms or periodic check-ins, advisory in BPL is a central space where students reflect, connect, and thrive.

The advisor serves multiple roles: coach, mentor, connector, advocate, and educator. Advisors work closely with students to develop Learning Plans, find and support internships, guide interest-based projects, and prepare for exhibitions. They meet with families regularly, helping to build a network of support around each learner. This consistency allows advisors to deeply understand their students and support them through academic, personal, and social transitions.

Within advisory, students engage in community-building, reflection, and skill development. They have space to process challenges, celebrate successes, and deepen their understanding of themselves and others. Group activities, discussions,



and projects foster collaboration and empathy. Over time, advisories become safe, supportive environments where students can take risks and grow.

A key strength of the advisory model is its continuity. Advisors often stay with their students for multiple years, which enables sustained mentorship and guidance. This long-term relationship is particularly powerful during the critical developmental stages of adolescence. It allows advisors to respond flexibly and personally to students' evolving needs.

In essence, advisory is where BPL's commitment to relationships, personalization, and rigor comes to life daily. It is where students are most deeply known and where their holistic development is consistently nurtured. Advisory is not just a structure; it is a culture that reinforces the core values of Big Picture Learning.

- Seminal Resource (s):
 - Document: [Indicators of High-Quality Advisory System](#)
 - Video: [Advisory System](#)

Real World Learning System: *We believe that young people should be actively pursuing their passions in the real world, engaging in authentic work while being mentored by professional adults.*

Real World Learning is a cornerstone of the BPL design, bridging the gap between school and the wider world. It acknowledges that meaningful learning happens through doing, exploring, and engaging with the community. By participating in Learning Through Internship (LTI) experiences, students step beyond the classroom to connect their interests with authentic work.

Each student secures an internship aligned with their passions and career curiosities. They spend part of each week learning from mentors in professional or community settings. These internships are not peripheral but are integral to the curriculum. Students apply academic skills in real-world contexts, gaining practical knowledge and confidence. The LTI experience deepens their understanding of how the world works and how they might contribute to it.

Advisors play a crucial role in facilitating and supporting these experiences. They help students find internships, maintain contact with mentors, and connect learning back to the BPL Learning Goals. Reflection and documentation are essential elements of Real World Learning, encouraging students to process what they are learning and how it matters.

Real World Learning fosters independence, initiative, and a sense of purpose. Students learn how to navigate workplaces, build professional relationships, and understand



systems beyond school. These experiences often lead to unexpected discoveries, new interests, and clarified goals. For many students, LTIs transform their sense of what is possible for their futures.

This model redefines the boundaries of school, affirming that learning happens everywhere. It cultivates a generation of learners who are not only academically capable but also socially and professionally competent. Real World Learning is how BPL makes education relevant, powerful, and connected to life beyond the school walls.

- Seminal Resource (s):
 - Document: [Indicators of High-Quality Internship Systems](#)
 - Video: [Real-World Learning/RWL Example 2/RWL Example 3](#)

Interest-Driven Project-Based Learning: *We believe that young people should be designing/co-designing their learning opportunities.*

At the core of Big Picture Learning is Interest-Driven Project-Based Learning, which honors student curiosity and voice. In this approach, students engage deeply with topics that matter to them, designing projects that integrate personal interest with academic rigor. This makes learning more engaging, meaningful, and lasting.

Projects begin with a question or idea sparked by the student's passion. With guidance from their advisor and support from mentors, students develop project plans that align with the BPL Learning Goals. They conduct research, engage with experts, produce high-quality work, and share their learning through public exhibitions. Projects are not assigned; they are designed in partnership.

This process develops essential skills: planning, problem-solving, critical thinking, creativity, and communication. Students learn to manage timelines, seek feedback, revise work, and persevere through challenges. Because the work is personal and purposeful, students are motivated to go deeper, take ownership, and aim for excellence.

Interest-Driven Project-Based Learning also supports culturally responsive pedagogy. Students draw from their identities, cultures, and lived experiences to create work that is authentic and relevant. Projects can take many forms: scientific investigations, social action campaigns, art installations, business ventures, and more. This flexibility allows students to express who they are, what they value, and how they contribute to solving real-world problems.

Ultimately, this model shifts the question from "What do I have to learn?" to "What do I want to learn and why does it matter?" It transforms students into active creators of



knowledge and empowers them to see themselves as capable, connected, and creative learners. This is how BPL fosters both academic excellence and deep personal growth.

- Seminal Resource (s):
 - Document: [Passion Project Template/Independent Project Planning Guide/Sample Project Explosion Template](#)
 - Video: [Personalization \(One Student at a Time\) & Interest-Driven PBL](#)

Authentic Assessments: *We believe that young people should leverage a full range of competencies to track their learning over time and demonstrate/teach what they know.*

Authentic Assessment in Big Picture Learning is about honoring the full scope of a student's growth, not just their test scores. It is rooted in real work, real feedback, and real evidence. This approach ensures that assessment is meaningful to students and reflective of the skills, knowledge, and qualities that matter in the world beyond school.

The International Big Picture Learning Credential (IBPLC) exemplifies this approach. Rather than issuing traditional grades, advisors assess students based on a developmental framework tied to six Learning Goals: Quantitative Reasoning, Empirical Reasoning, Social Reasoning, Communication, Personal Qualities, and Knowing How to Learn. Assessment involves exhibitions, portfolios, mentor feedback, narratives, and the student's own reflections.

This process is deeply collaborative. Students are involved in selecting and presenting evidence of their learning. Advisors draw on their long-term relationships and knowledge of the student to make holistic, informed judgments. External mentors and panels provide additional perspective. This triangulation ensures fairness, depth, and authenticity.

Authentic Assessment values both the product and the process. It emphasizes growth over time and encourages metacognition. Students learn to self-assess, set goals, and reflect critically on their work. The assessment process supports continuous improvement and fosters a growth mindset.

In a world that increasingly values adaptability, collaboration, and complex problem-solving, BPL's approach to assessment prepares students to thrive. It communicates their readiness to universities, employers, and communities more richly and honestly. Authentic Assessment is not just an evaluation tool; it is a core part of how students learn who they are and what they can achieve.

- Seminal Resource (s):
 - Document:



- Competency-Based Education
 - [Gibson Ek Competency-Based Framework](#)
 - [International Big Picture Learning Credential](#)
- Exhibitions
 - Website: [Authentic Assessments \(Exhibitions\)](#)

Evidence-Based Research from the Learning Policy Institute

The [Learning Policy Institute \(LPI\)](#), founded by renowned education scholar Linda Darling-Hammond, is a nationally recognized research organization that conducts and communicates high-quality, evidence-based studies to inform education policy and practice. Their work focuses on advancing equitable and effective learning opportunities for all students. The report [“Redesigning High Schools: 10 Features of Effective High Schools”](#) synthesizes decades of research on the structures and practices that most powerfully support student success, particularly for historically marginalized learners. Because it is grounded in rigorous, evidence-based research, this report provides both validity and credibility to Big Picture Learning’s student-centered design. Each of BPL’s five core elements—One Student at a Time, Advisory, Real World Learning, Interest-Driven Project-Based Learning, and Authentic Assessment—is strongly affirmed by LPI’s findings, demonstrating that BPL is not only innovative in practice but also deeply aligned with what the research confirms young people need to thrive.

BPL Design	Learning Policy Institute Research Findings	Citations (Report)
One Student at a Time (personalized, interest-driven learning plans for each student)	LPI highlights <i>personalization and student-centered learning</i> as a core redesign feature. Schools that excel intentionally tailor instruction and support to individual student needs and strengths. Use of Individualized Learning Plans (ILPs) is cited as a	<i>p. 17–18: “Effective schools...personalize learning through Individual Learning Plans that connect student goals, strengths, and interests with school learning opportunities.”</i>



	key mechanism.	
Advisory (a small group with a trusted adult for mentorship, guidance, and relationship-building)	LPI emphasizes <i>sustained, caring relationships with adults</i> . Advisories, looping, and mentor programs are listed as structures that promote belonging, guidance, and academic persistence.	p. 23: "Structures such as advisory groups ensure that each student is well known by at least one adult who monitors progress and provides guidance."
Real World Learning (internships, service learning, and community-based experiences)	LPI identifies <i>work-based learning, internships, and community partnerships</i> as essential. They argue that authentic applied learning prepares students for college, career, and civic life.	p. 30–31: "High schools integrate work-based learning opportunities—including internships, service learning, and community-based projects—linking classroom learning with real-world applications."
Interest-Driven Project-Based Learning (PBL) (interdisciplinary interest-driven projects centered on developing academic, career, and durable skills)	LPI stresses <i>deeper learning and inquiry-based approaches</i> . Project-based and interdisciplinary learning increases motivation, critical thinking, and collaboration when tied to student interests and authentic problems.	p. 26–28: "Project-based learning engages students in extended inquiry connected to their interests... promoting problem-solving, communication, and application of knowledge across disciplines."
Authentic Assessments (exhibitions, portfolios, and demonstrations of learning)	LPI recommends shifting from narrow standardized testing toward <i>performance-based assessments</i> . Portfolios, capstones, and exhibitions are validated as equitable measures of readiness.	p. 33–34: "Performance assessments—including portfolios, capstone projects, and exhibitions—provide richer evidence of student learning than standardized tests."

