

You may have heard the phrase personalized learning and wondered what exactly does it mean. Personalized learning tailors the educational experience to meet an individual student's needs. Every child, no matter what age, learns differently and, as educators, it is our responsibility to change our teaching methods to meet our students' needs. For example, some learn best through hands-on activities, while others may prefer having a technology component. Through building the teacher-student relationship, our teachers are able to learn their students' likes, dislikes, interests and aspirations. They are then able to present the material in a manner that helps to keep the students engaged in learning.

Our Career Readiness Academy (CRA) is a prime example of personalized learning. Upon entering the program, students and their parents have an enrollment meeting with the principal, Nicole Isaacs, to discuss their interests and long-term goals. An individualized plan is developed for every student to assist them on their journey towards graduation. Credit hours, post-graduation goals and personal circumstances are discussed. Teachers and guidance counselors monitor the students' progress throughout the program. Every student at CRA wants to graduate on time, but the path they take to receive their diploma is different for each individual.

Students from both Lakota East and West who enroll in this alternative high school program complete their online courses during either the morning, afternoon or evening session. They are also required to spend another 15 hours completing assignments while logged in from home.

The personalized learning aspect of the Academy meets the needs of some students who may struggle with a traditional high school setting for varying reasons. For some, the flexible schedule offered at CRA supports a student's need to fulfill personal obligations that may make completing a traditional school day difficult. For others, the smaller class sizes can help ease anxiety that may be a result of attending a large high school. The access to one-one-one support from teachers and working at their own pace helps students get back on track earning credit hours and they may even graduate early.

During last year's pilot program, the Academy enrolled 57 students at the start of the year, including 19 seniors, 17 of whom were able to graduate. This year, enrollment has more than doubled, with 135 students and a waiting list. We have already had 10 graduates this year!

In addition to the principal, six teachers and a community liaison, CRA also has a guidance counselor on staff. Students at the Academy are exposed to different career paths after graduation. Programs are also in place to help with the soft skills students will need in life. Guest panels and special programs are a regular occurrence. Students are able to practice their interviewing skills and gain confidence and tips during mock interviews. Special guests came to the academy earlier this year to assist in the Tie Project, teaching students how to tie a tie.

I am proud of the hard work both the students and staff are doing at Lakota's Career Readiness Academy. Time and time again, we have seen kids who assumed that they would just get an entry level job after high school stop and rethink their options. It is the personalized learning of the Academy that helps the students realize their potential and opens their minds to different possibilities.

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