The National Center
On Scaling Up Effective
Schools spent the 2010-2011
school year observing classrooms and interviewing students, teachers, support
staff, and school leadership teams across four high schools in South Florida to
study the policies, programs, practices, and processes that made these schools
effective in reaching all learners. From our multi-level comparative case study
research in these schools, along with existing research on effective schools
nationwide, we find that the effective schools in Broward developed a systemic
approach to personalization for academic and social learning. This brief explains the
elements of Personalization for Academic and Social Learning (PASL), and gives
examples of potential interventions schools can develop and use to improve PASL.

Definition
Personalization for academic and social learning (PASL) represents a systemic,
school-wide approach to meeting the academic and socio-emotional needs
of high school students. PASL refers to the ways in which schools actively
encourage students to develop a sense of belonging to the school as a whole, as
well as meaningful, positive connections with adults and other students.

What does it look like?
When administrators and teachers concentrate on personalization for academic
learning, they hold high expectations for student’s academic success, get to
know students as individuals, customize instruction to meet the needs, experiences,
and interests of their students, and develop students’ sense of belonging and
engagement in their learning.

When schools promote personalization for socio-emotional
learning, they explicitly build students’ capacity to recognize and
manage emotions, solve problems, and build relationships with others;
these schools also encourage informal personalization through
positive school climate achieved
through administrators’ and
teachers’ expressed ethic of caring,
concern, and support for students’
well-being, intellectual growth,
and educational success.

Critical to PASL is a behavior
management system consistently enforced by administrators and teachers that
addresses student behavior in an individual and fair manner and in which students
feel safe.

In schools that promote a culture of personalization, students not only feel safe,
but also exhibit a sense of belonging toward the school that, in turn, leads to
higher motivation, engagement, and sense of self-efficacy.

Key Findings:
• Systemic structures to promote strong relationships between adults and students
• Programming to meet both academic and socio-emotional outcomes.
• Strong and reliable disciplinary and support systems for students that create feelings of caring and trust
• Instructional activities that drew on students’ experiences and interests
• Stronger linkages with parents

Potential Practices, Policies, Programs, Processes
We identified a number of school-wide structures that increased personalization in schools. These organizational
structures supported the practice of meaningful conversation among
students and the adults at these schools, including administrators,
guidance counselors and support personnel.

• Targeted looping of educator teams, in which assistant principals, guidance counselors,
and teachers shared the same students over years in order to develop meaningful relationships
• Proactive use of data by administrators, teachers, and support staff to monitor student progress, provide feedback to
students, and create targeted, personalized interventions
• Opportunities for participation through extensive athletic and extra-curricular options
• Small learning communities created through student teaming
• Consistent behavior management systems
• College readiness programs (AVID, etc)
• Comprehensive middle school articulation plan that helped students understand the transition and feel connected to
their high school