

# Nevada Future of Learning Network Case Study

## White Pine County School District

The [Nevada Future of Learning Network](#) is a coalition of districts, leaders, educators, students, and community partners building a learner-centered, future-ready education system. It launched in 2023 as part of the Nevada Department of Education's (NDE) effort to create the statewide [Portrait of a Nevada Learner](#) and advance [personalized, competency-based learning](#).

### What is learner-centered, future-ready education?

Being learner-centered means **prioritizing the needs, interests, and experiences of learners**. Instead of focusing on delivering content from the teacher to the students, learners are empowered to take an active role in their own education. Being future-ready means attending to and **anticipating the needs of society and the future labor market** when considering the goals of schooling. This approach includes considering global economic trends and environmental changes along with local history.

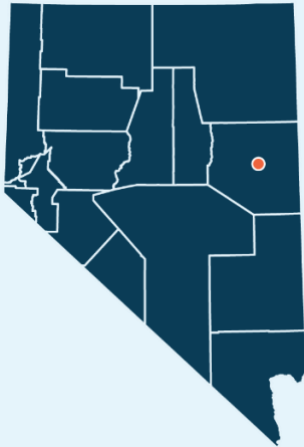
### How does the Nevada Future of Learning Network advance learner-centered, future-ready education?

- Connects and supports coherence among school, district and statewide efforts to advance learner-centered, future-ready education
- Provides coaching, professional learning, and resources for educators, leaders and innovators
- Spotlights promising practices in Nevada and nationally

### Resources:

- [Nevada Future of Learning Network](#)
- [Nevada Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education](#)
- [Nevada Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education Final Report](#)
- [Nevada Innovation Guide](#)

## DISTRICT SPOTLIGHT



**Buildings:** 3 elementary schools (K-5), 1 middle school (6-8), and 2 high schools (9-12)

**Enrollment:** 1,260 students

**Locale:** Town, Remote

**School Week Schedule:** 4-day school week for students

**Portrait:** Local District Portrait of a Leader

**Student Demographics:** <5% Asian, <5% Pacific Islander, <5% Black, <5% American Indian / Alaska Native, 6% two or more races, 22% Hispanic, 68% white

### Getting Started with Learner-Centered Education

Prior to the creation of the Portrait of a Nevada Learner, White Pine County School District (WPCSD) was engaged in creating a local version based on their work with the Leader in Me program. WPCSD calls theirs the Portrait of a Leader. After participating in the Nevada Future of Learning Network, the district deepened their work by incorporating more intentional competency-based, learner-centered education practices. They gathered input on their portrait through community engagement workshops and listening sessions.

After gathering feedback, the collective vision for the Portrait of a Leader resulted in four domains with eight competencies, which the district called durable skills. The community partners had a big-picture vision for socializing these durable skills. The portrait was accompanied by learning progressions for elementary, middle, and high schools, which supported students' development of portfolio presentations in fifth, eighth, and twelfth grades to show evidence of progress in the durable skills. According to a 2025 student survey about learner-centered practices, approximately 82% of high school students agreed or strongly agreed that their school has communicated what they should know and be able to do after graduating.

One teacher emphasized, "One of the things that we are really proud of is this is not White Pine County School District's portrait. It's White Pine County's Portrait of a Leader, which involves all of our constituents: families, community members, school district leaders, officials, and organizations around town. We are all involved in this project." This distinction, according to this teacher, is important because it ensures that "we are out in front of creating opportunities for holistic learning for our students so that students' entire academic identities are not reduced to a moment in time for a test score on one test." A number of the WPCSD staff also engaged with the work at the state level on the Portrait of a Nevada Learner and brought back new ideas and approaches from that work to the district.



### Building and Maintaining Momentum

During the summer of 2025, the district’s Board of Trustees adopted two policies to continue operationalizing the Portrait of a Leader. The policies focus on endorsements and credentials that students are expected to work toward during their time in WPCSD. The first policy was to create endorsements for students to earn in grades 8 and 12 aligned to academic performance in courses linked to science, technology, arts, and mathematics (STEAM), STEM, and literacy. The second policy was to create credentials aligned to the durable skills in the Portrait of a Leader that employers expect of graduates. These endorsements and credentials are outlined as [Middle School](#) and [High School](#) Learning Requirements and Aspirations.

Additionally, according to the district leader, they have been working toward incorporating more project-based learning and have done this more at the elementary and middle school levels and continue to work on this at the high school level. The district is also developing and formalizing their learning model. This model includes their instructional playbook, which is a list of conditions in the classroom and across the district to operationalize the portrait. The district leader shared, “There’s a lot that’s still in the works of making that happen.” As one teacher emphasized, “Our ultimate goal with this Portrait of a Leader is to ensure our students are good human beings. This work has given us guidelines to help students better themselves and bolster teachers with the tools that we need in our toolbox to help them do that.”

The district leader is intentional about being inclusive with this work. There are many opportunities to serve in leadership roles to represent grade-level and school site teams. Based on a 2025 survey about learner-centered practices, approximately 61% of educators at the high school strongly agreed or agreed that they have opportunities to lead, influence, or guide efforts in their school. The portrait presents another opportunity for educators to be leaders. Meetings focused on the Portrait of a Leader work are open to anybody, including community members, who want to shape the way the work moves forward. One teacher added, “This is a holistic opportunity for all stakeholders so that everybody’s involved and invested.” They want to make sure everyone “knows what’s happening and can help us make sure it’s happening in a good way.”

## **DISTRICT-WIDE LEARNER-CENTERED EFFORTS**

### **Amplifying Student Voice Through Community-based Advocacy**

To continue to build their students’ leadership skills, another opportunity in which students were engaged was an interdisciplinary legislative research project. Students in fourth through eighth grades worked together and created pitches for their school community. Because the area doesn’t have a local tax base to fund itself, the students shared interest in researching how to replace old buildings that had fallen into disrepair.

Supported by their teachers who served as guides, the students researched how the assembly in Nevada works, how the senate works, and what the governor does to enact a law once it has been passed out of the chambers. The students also conducted research on the health effects of asbestos as well as social policy around the American Disability Act (ADA), especially for students who are immobile when there is not an elevator.

Based on their research, they created a multimedia presentation and wrote an essay. They also created a social media post about how they needed the support of Nevada legislators to replace the schools and why. The Board of Trustees selected a champion from each grade level, and the district leader took the students to Carson City to introduce the bill that a legislator wrote for the district. The students testified, the bill passed with only one dissenting vote out of 63 legislators, and the governor signed it. Because of the students’ efforts, the district will have a new school building in a couple of years.

### **Measuring What Matters Through Annual School Showcases**

White Pine County School District is highlighted in the [Nevada Innovation Guide](#) for measuring what matters. The district leader shared, “There’s a misalignment between the measures that are currently used to define school quality and student progress versus the shifts that need to be made to more accurately reflect the good work that’s going on in all school districts.” He explained how some of the district’s schools are not highly rated according to the Nevada School Performance Framework (NSPF). One of the schools, an alternative school, is considered a one-star school according to the NSPF. The district leader explained that “adult diplomas and HiSET (a national high school equivalency credential) completers do not count as graduates in Nevada’s formula for graduation rate.” Many of the students who attend the alternative school are adult diploma graduates and HiSET completers; thus, the school’s low rating. He said, “**The alternative school**

**serves our most at-risk kids. Every graduate that comes out of that school is a success story, every single one.**” He explained, “When we’re talking about choice and agency and being student-centered, it is hypocritical to require the system to create all of these opportunities for choice and agency in every possible way while at the same time only measuring learning in the same old way. Kids don’t have any choice or agency about that.” State leaders recognize that this is an issue, and efforts are being made for better alignment.

To illustrate this misalignment and show the Board of Trustees that learning is taking place across the district, every year, the district leader invites board members on a journey to each school for a showcase where students demonstrate their learning. Hundreds of students, teachers, and parents gather, and “it’s really beautiful and powerful to see them push back on the constraints of how we define schools in the public narrative,” the district leader shared.

## **Investing in and Building Teacher Leaders**

The district leader shared that their Portrait of a Leader does not just apply to students; it also applies to the district’s teachers. The district has formal paid leadership roles for their experienced teachers, including collaborative team leaders, professional learning community leaders, and mentor teachers. Experienced teachers apply for these teacher leader roles each year. The district leader explained that these teacher leader roles are “a great opportunity for exceptional teachers who want to stay in their classroom but also want a formal leadership role. It allows us to pay them for their time and recognize those efforts.” The teacher leaders support the new hires, who participate in a year-long mentoring training program that occurs outside of contract time.

Five Fridays a year are designated “Friday learning days.” All teachers come to campus for Friday learning days to engage in professional learning. A next step for the WPCSD’s professional learning team is to differentiate learning on the Friday learning days for teachers. This shift would allow the teachers who are early adopters of learner-centered practices to move to their next step or serve as support for later adopters while allowing later adopters to learn together using introductory materials. According to a 2025 educator survey on learner-centered practices, 72% of high school educators reported that their professional learning is helping them implement personalized learning.

One teacher shared, “I am fortunate to work in a district that is very serious about making sure our students are best supported by supporting teachers with opportunities to learn what they need to learn.” One teacher explained how the district celebrates internal talent by inviting teachers to share what they know with their peers:

The district and school leaders provide the opportunity for professional learning to come from within our district. If you have something that you would like to share to support other teachers, they invite you to do that. Sometimes they come into your classroom and see what you’re doing and say, “Would you be willing to share what you’re doing? Can we help you prepare something to make sure that this is in our next professional learning opportunity?”

The district also pays educators to share their knowledge and expertise as well as to attend professional learning opportunities. One teacher expressed, “Teachers in our district are treated like professionals, valued for their work, asked to share that work, compensated on those days when we attend professional learning opportunities, and given the supplies we need after the professional learning so that we can engage intentionally in the work in our classroom.”

## **SCHOOL AND CLASSROOM SPOTLIGHTS**

### **Exploring Learner-Centered Approaches Through Club Offerings**

At the district’s STEAM Academy, learners self-select into two types of learning experiences. On Monday after the school day, students join one of 17 clubs, such as piano, culinary, and Shoshone language. The clubs are not overly structured and allow students the freedom to explore what they are interested in and how they want to learn it.

Another opportunity for a more structured, learner-centered approach is through their inductive STEAM model that occurs one Friday per month. The district operates a four-day school week, so this is an opportunity to provide additional hands-on learning. The district leader shared, “The students build stuff, blow stuff up, make things. It’s not required. The students who want to join come in. Out of the 400 students in the school, about 160 take part in this learning experience. Our plan is to scale this up so that it’s much more than 160 students.”

### **Growing Student Agency with a Garden in Elementary School**

Born out of a student’s idea, the kindergarten class grows a garden that supports the whole school and community. The teacher shared the story of how the garden started:

I had a student in my first year of teaching who had gardened with their grandma when they went and visited her. In school, we were going into our plant unit using the little cups in the window. We were going to do that, and my student said, “Oh, but what about if we planted them outside in the ground like a garden?” At the time, we didn’t have a space that was developed for that yet. Then the student said, “We could build a box. My mom has a box outside.” Then all the other kids said, “Yeah, that would be fun.”

The students wrote a letter to the principal asking if they could have a school garden. The teacher shared excitedly, “Our principals said, ‘Yes, you can do it.’” They found a spot on the school grounds that wasn’t being used that was fenced in and protected. The class found community members who volunteered their time and resources to level the area and build the boxes. They also provided soil and other tools that the students would need to tend the garden. The teacher explained, “While we would have hit our science standards and grown a flower in the window, these students created an entire garden!”



The students use the garden throughout their time in the elementary school, and then the fifth graders help the kindergarteners the following year to prepare the garden for seed. The other grades in the school also support by incorporating composting and exploring how to defend plants against different pests and diseases.

The teacher shared, “I think sometimes people think for our littlest learners that they don't necessarily have the words or understand the world or their learning enough to have the opportunity for things like voice and choice. But they are so vocal, and they are so excited about so many things, and willing to work and try.” She expressed, “They know themselves. They know their interests. They know their peers’ interests because they’re very interested in each other already.”

*“I think sometimes people think for our littlest learners that they don't necessarily have the words or understand the world or their learning enough to have the opportunity for things like voice and choice. But they are so vocal, and they are so excited about so many things, and willing to work and try.”*

– Teacher, elementary school

Their garden, which is called “Kinder Garden,” gives students the opportunity to plan and prepare for plantings, though the season is short because of the local climate. They decide what goes in the garden and learn about plants’ life cycles. Students also learn about the economics of running a garden. The teacher explained, “They know that things are going to cost money and that they can also turn a profit. They learn about opportunities like farmers’ markets.” They grow pumpkins every year and can see them sprouting all the way through decomposition and back again to seed.

Students also take what they grow and create meals for different school events throughout the year. For instance, the kindergarteners baked a pumpkin cake for a school board meeting. They made tomato soup for the whole school. The school also hosts a Thanksgiving feast each year, and this year, the first graders and fifth graders used zucchini from the garden to make a zucchini bread for dessert. The teacher explained, “They’re getting opportunities that address their standards and also grow socially and emotionally. They also get invested in something that helps them learn about the world outside of our four classroom walls.” She continued to share how this work is authentic not only for her students but also for the community as a whole:

This work is authentic for all stakeholders. The authenticity not only supports student engagement and learning; it’s also motivating and supportive for teachers, parents, and community members to be involved in the portrait and the partnerships it inspires.

## **Supporting Freshman in their Transition to High School and Beyond**

The transition from middle to high school can be challenging for many students, so White Pine County School District intentionally created a support structure to bridge the gap. Called “Freshmen Achievement,” the class is a holistic learning experience that supports students not only on the social emotional side but also immerses freshmen in the Portrait of a Leader. It provides students with an introduction to expectations for their time in high school, including portfolios, and getting ready for “enrollment in college, enlistment in military, or employment in jobs,” said the teacher who facilitates the course. There are also peer leaders in the class, who are juniors and seniors, who work with the freshmen every day.

The teacher integrates the Portrait of a Leader throughout the course. For example, students use the portrait’s four domains to create projects that represent themselves. To do this, students use a storyboarding document to illustrate how they live the domains, and from that, they create their final project and present it to the class. Students also work in pairs if they want to. Students create podcasts, digital posters, brochures, and presentations. The teacher expressed, “This project is a good reminder that when you give students agency and the tools and information they need, they generally do really well with that.”

The teacher shared another goal of the work he is doing with his students:

A lot of students see school as a function of their social identity instead of their academic identity, naturally. But I think a lot of students also see those as mutually exclusive categories. I feel like with our portrait and with our portfolios, we're trying to help students understand how those two worlds collide in a very productive way, and that *that* can be as valuable for their overall learning as just focusing on academics over here and social networking over there. I've talked to my ninth graders a lot about it, and they see it. They see the importance of it.

## **Using Student Autonomy and Relationships to see Relevance in Literature**

A high school teacher uses learner-centered practices to support students in thinking critically about the world around them. He said, "It's less about the answers and more about how we get to the answer." He shares the path with students first: "We have this required reading – Hamlet. Here are our standards. Here's where we need to get to. The play is the vehicle in which we are going to do this. How do you guys want to achieve the standard?"

This year, after giving his students the freedom to choose how they wanted to meet the standard, they chose to act it out using modern-day scenarios and reflected on what they are learning. "For example," he started, "I said, 'How would you feel if you didn't have anybody to talk to, and the one person who you did talk to all of a sudden started ghosting you.'" They took the play, made it their own, and put it into something they understood. He shared,

What's really fascinating is that, after their first assessment, the class performed higher than my traditionally-taught classes. They're starting to build a relationship with these characters. Those relationships lead to empathy and this whole myriad of social emotional learning that isn't always expressed. It is a safe space because there is not going to be that emotional up and down of a real-life relationship as we are working on empathy.

The teacher emphasized the importance of building meaningful relationships with his students. This helps him to be in tune with where they are and what they need. He joked that if he did not have those relationships, it might be harder to get into the content they are working through:

The world's coming down as it does for my teenagers, right, and I'm like, "Hey, now we're going to talk about this book that's 450 years old." They're, for good reason, going to be like, "What the heck?" And so there are days that I come into my classroom and based on how I greet students and what's going on, that I adjust my lesson plan based on the needs of the class. I might say, "Hey, yeah, you know what? Today, we might just have to do reflective writing for the first part to get us into a space where we can learn."

According to a 2025 student survey about learner-centered practices, approximately 82% of high school students who responded to the survey strongly agreed or agreed that teachers and other adults in their school care about them, and 100% of the high school educators who responded to the survey reported that they work to create meaningful relationships with students.

On the first day of the school year, he tells his students that they have 140 days in the classroom, and he said, “If you leave here the same as you entered after the 140 days, then I failed you as your teacher.” He continued, “My satisfaction at the end of the day is knowing that I’ve helped kids improve themselves. That I’ve created a space where kids can develop themselves into better humans.”

## REFLECTING ON PROGRESS AND WHAT THE FUTURE HOLDS

The district leader conveyed that they continue to incorporate student-centered learning throughout their district. He shared, “There's always more questions than there are answers. Thinking about things from an ideological standpoint, I think most people understand the shifts that need to be made. I think the hard thing is the practicality in operationalizing some of these ideas.” The district leader sees his role as someone who can “continue loosening and removing the roadblocks that people perceive get in the way of doing some of these things.” One teacher added that having a district leader who “thinks outside the box” is so transformative and inspiring:

I'm very pleased to have the opportunity to work in a school district with a superintendent who is always thinking outside the box in terms of what's best for students and not necessarily what's dictated that we have to do. And yes, there are things we have to do. We all know this, and some of those things are not going away. But he has consistently looked for innovative ways to bring our portrait into the district because authentically, we build value. That's what's best for our students and what's best for their learning, and we really want to see that grow.

### Methodology

This case study highlights the experiences of one district that participated in the Nevada Future of Learning Network. The information shared in this case study is based on four interviews (one district leader and three teachers) and student and staff responses to the Nevada Personalized Learning Implementation Surveys from two schools in the district. In 2025, there were 247 survey responses from students in grades 9 through 12. There were 18 survey responses from educators at the high school in 2025. The term “educators” as used in this survey includes classroom educators, special education educators, subject matter educators, specialist educators, and paraprofessionals.

**To learn more about Nevada’s efforts in learner-centered education, visit:**

<https://www.nvfutureoflearning.org/>

This case study was made possible with the generous support of KnowledgeWorks and the Nevada Department of Education. For more information about KnowledgeWorks, please visit <https://knowledgeworks.org>. For more information about Nevada's efforts in learner-centered, future-ready education, please visit <https://www.nvfutureoflearning.org/>.

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