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Classrooms today feel and often times look very different than the ones adults remember from their childhood. And that is by design. Our schools, and our strategies for teaching and learning, are transforming to engage and empower students and to prepare them for jobs that don't yet exist in a world that is globally connected and constantly changing.

In Prior Lake-Savage Area Schools (PLSAS) we know that one size does not fit all. We are working to ensure our students are future ready by implementing personalized learning through an initiative called the Laker Learning Plan. The Laker Learning Plan focuses on the needs of the individual learner to empower them and help each student develop the following key traits associated with being future ready: curious, adaptive, aware, risk taker, innovator, teammate and determined.

Through this plan, when you enter a PLSAS school, you will often find students gathered in teams, working on projects or learning outside of the classroom. Here are just a few examples of student experiences that exemplify the goals of the Laker Learning plan:

- At PLHS, some teachers have implemented a “20% Project” in which students are given roughly 20% of the quarter to spend on a project of their choosing that speaks to their passions and interests. Teachers guide students to create their own timelines, research their own products and complete their projects. This way students have a voice in their own learning through a project that fosters creativity and innovation, all while meeting teaching and learning standards. Some students have chosen to work with food shelves or other social services organizations, while others have explored their passions through hands-on experience in the corporate world. Students have shared with me how much they have enjoyed investing their time in these very real-world learning opportunities.
- At the middle school level, teachers have set up opportunities for students to be young entrepreneurs and pitch their business ideas and products to a panel of adults in “Shark Tank” style, patterned after the popular TV show. Students learn how to set price points for their product, determine profit margins and build a marketing plan. These entrepreneurial students pitched products like the “iPad Cover with integrated Pencil Case” and “Adjustable Golf Club.” I was inspired by the confidence of the students as I watched them present their innovations.
- Recently eighth grade SWAT (Students Working to Advance Technology) students visited the Apple Store and Microsoft Store at the Mall of America where they wrote code to direct a spherical robot toy called a Sphero and built robotic fingers. We also plan to start a chapter of Girls who Code at the middle schools; a co-curricular club focused on closing the gender gap in computer science.
- Elementary students are working with a digital tool called Seesaw where they document what they are learning in the classroom and then share it with their teachers, parents

and classmates. Students are eager to capture their learning and share what excites them. It's one more example of how teachers are working to motivate students, capture their interests and engage them in their learning.

Next school year we will launch a plan to expand coding classes and bring more computer science into our classrooms. As we continue to help our students be productive users of technology rather than simply consumers of it, learning the language of coding and computer science is important for future-ready learners.

As we continue to expand the Laker Learning Plan, our students will be encouraged to be adaptable, develop new skills, test new technology and try new things without being afraid to make mistakes. Our goal is to empower students to shape and direct their own learning as they meet rigorous academic standards with quality and caring staff supporting them every step of the way.

Our classrooms and teaching styles will continue to transform in ways that engage students and make learning joyful, all while fulfilling our mission: to educate all learners to reach their full potential as contributing and productive members of our ever-changing global community.