

Designing the Future: Case Studies Highlighting AI in Service of Learner- Centered Classrooms



July 2025



Learner-Centered
COLLABORATIVE

INTRODUCTION

Introduction	3
Case Study: Escondido	6
Case Study: Lamont	10
Conclusion	14

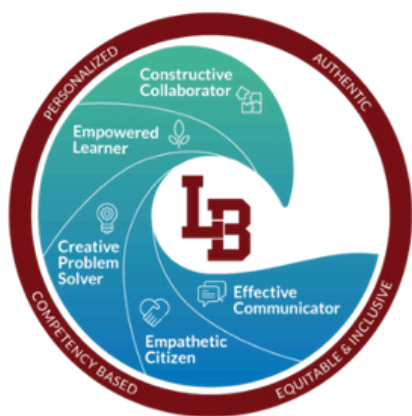
Artificial Intelligence (AI) can serve as a tool for educators to bring the Portrait of a Learner and Learning Model to life. This publication explores specific, successful, learner-centered uses of AI in K-12 education that can be utilized as a model for schools as we enter a new era of technology.

INTRODUCTION

November 30th, 2022, is a date worth remembering. It was the day ChatGPT became publicly available and artificial intelligence (AI) secured a permanent place in daily discourse. Since then, AI use in education has increased at an unfathomable pace. In spring 2024, AI use by educators and students had already exceeded 60 percent, and the “AI in Education” market was just shy of \$6 billion.

The question isn’t if AI will play a meaningful role in education and learning, but how. **Will it be used to further entrench outdated models of efficiency and compliance? Or can we harness its potential to accelerate a shift toward something more human, more personalized, and more learner-centered?**

At Learner-Centered Collaborative (LCC), we believe AI holds promise as a tool that can support the creation of education ecosystems where learners know who they are, thrive in community, and actively engage in the world as their best selves. To help realize this future, we partner with educators to define whole-learner outcomes, design meaningful learning experiences, and create the enabling conditions for learner-centered transformation.



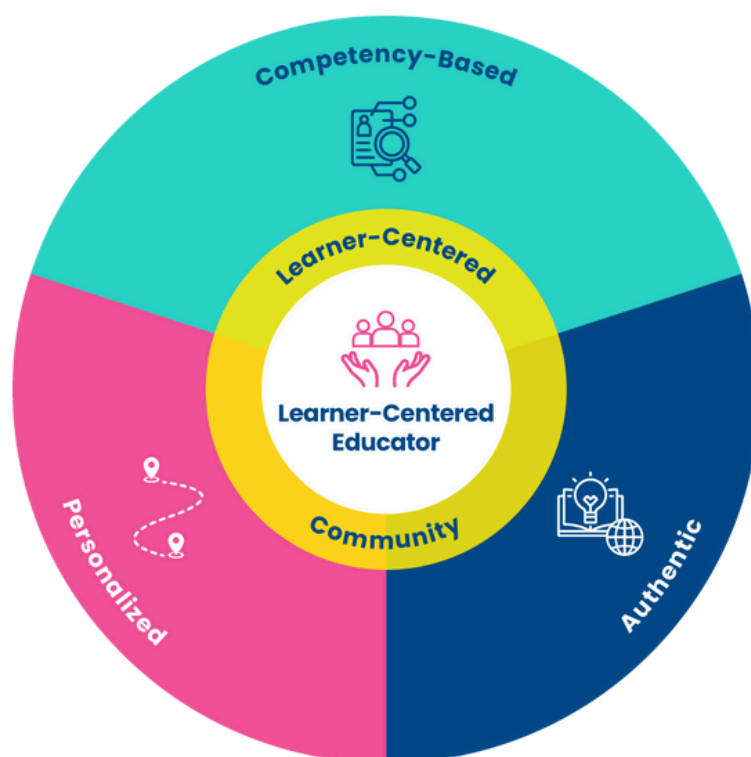
Portrait of a Learner examples from Laguna Beach USD, Escondido USD, and South Allegheny

When a school or district is ready to evolve its practices to center learners and learning by design, we start by co-designing a [Framework for the Future](#) with the entire learning community, including students, families, educators, board members, and other community stakeholders.

This foundational step produces vision, mission, and values statements along with two other core assets. The first is a Portrait of a Learner: a comprehensive representation of a learning ecosystem's desired whole-learner outcomes. The second is a new Learning Model that brings the Portrait of a Learner to life within the daily student and educator experiences. A key element of the Learning Model is leveraging technology as a tool to create authentic, competency-based, personalized learning experiences.

Having a Framework for the Future is a powerful first step to realizing learner-centered change in a school or district. The challenge is understanding what this all looks like in practice.

That's why we offer and support [Learner-Centered Innovation Cohorts](#): groups of educators across schools (within or across districts) who engage in cycles of learning, reflection, and design throughout an academic year.



Learner-Centered Collaborative's Learning Model features three key elements: Embracing a learner-centered mindset, designing learner-centered communities, and creating learner-centered experiences.

This publication explores how two districts—Lamont Elementary School District and Escondido Union School District—are bringing their Frameworks for the Future to life through Innovation Cohorts supported by AI-enabled tools like [Inkwire](#) and [Playlab](#).

A Quick Note on AI Tools



To support educators in implementing learner-centered practices, Learner-Centered Collaborative has co-developed two AI-enabled tools in collaboration with Inkwire and Playlab.

INKWIRE

Inkwire is an AI-enabled Project-Based Learning (PBL) designer. LCC partnered with Inkwire to embed LCC's PBL design elements to help educators craft projects that consider a learner-centered community and are authentic, competency-based, and personalized. Inkwire supports the development of authentic projects that align with a school or district's academic standards and Portrait of a Learner competencies.

PLAYLAB

Playlab empowers users to create custom AI-enabled applications and chatbots. Learner-Centered Collaborative used Playlab to create the Learning Experience Accelerator, an application that serves as a thought partner for educators integrate learner-centered strategies into their daily instruction and weave Portrait of a Learner competencies with academic standards.

These are just two tools in a sea of education-related AI applications. For a deeper dive on how to know which tools might work best for your context, how to keep the human element of learning at the forefront, and how to integrate AI use throughout your school or district, check out these articles and resources:

Optimizing the Balance of AI and Human Interaction

Blog by Brittany Griffin

4 Checkpoints For Integrating AI In K-12 Education

Blog by Devin Vodicka

Introduction to Learner-Centered AI: Why, What, and How

Online Course

Lamont Elementary School District
Lamont, California

Escondido Union School District
Escondido, California

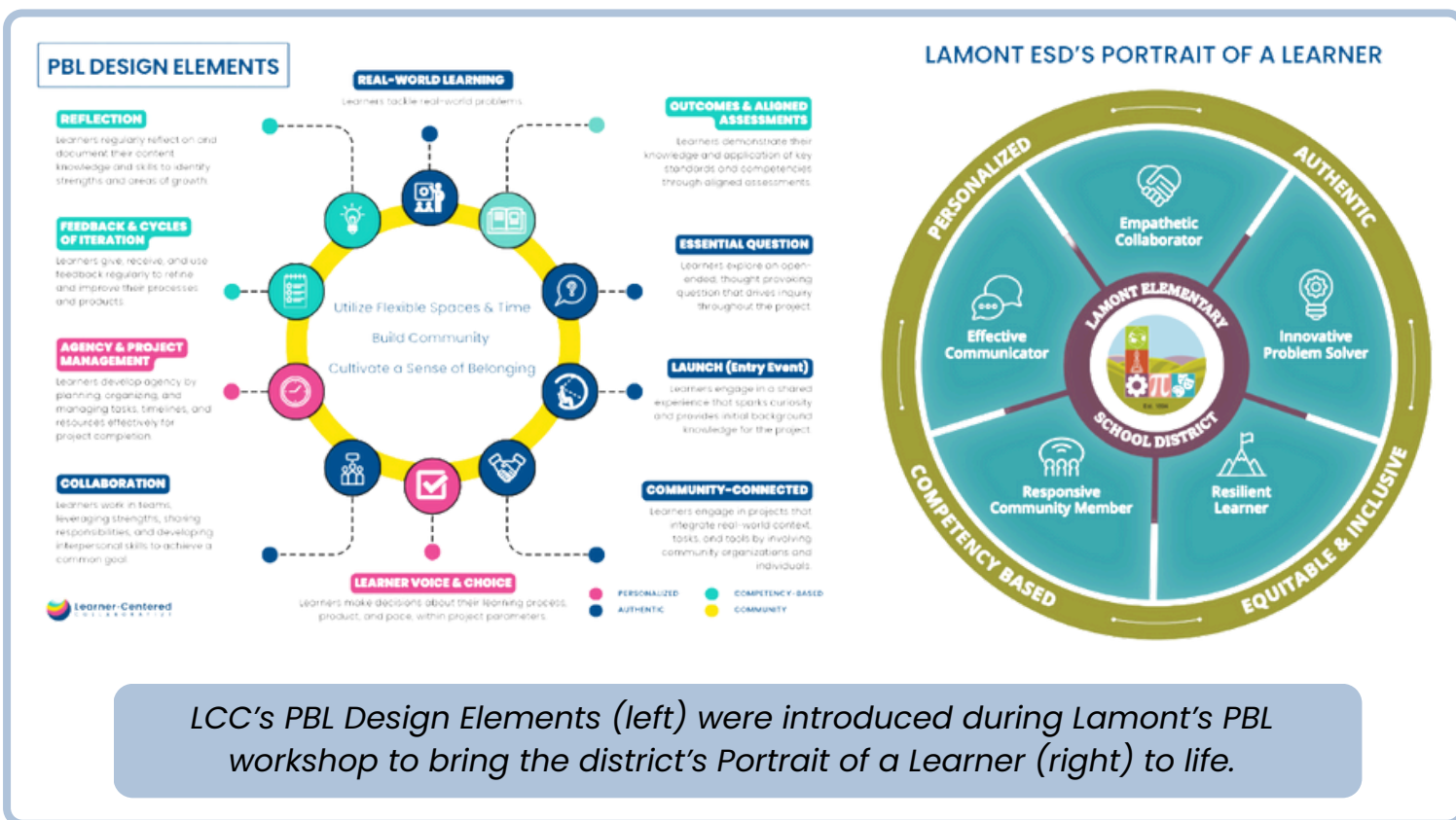
As you read these stories, consider what becomes possible when we combine learner-centered mindsets with transformational technology within strong support systems.

CASE STUDY:

Lamont's Implementation of Project-Based Learning

During the summer of 2024, Learner-Centered Collaborative facilitated a three-day Project-Based Learning (PBL) workshop for educators in Lamont who were interested in bringing their unique [Learning Model and Portrait of a Learner](#) to life in their classrooms.

Following an introduction to our PBL design elements, this group launched into a yearlong PBL [Innovation Cohort](#) where they could brainstorm project ideas, test them out in the classroom, share their results, iterate their designs, and test again. Their design toolbox included Inkwire, a PBL designer that could reference Learner-Centered Collaborative's PBL design elements, Lamont's Portrait of a Learner, and Lamont's Learning Model. This supports educators in their design of projects to ensure they are aligned with district frameworks, strategies, and desired outcomes.



Kelly Williams, Director of Strategic Partnerships and leader of Lamont’s Learner-Centered Innovation Cohort, noted, “Some educators were already using ChatGPT for their project designs, but Inkwire gave them a shortcut. It already had all the district’s foundational documents embedded within the tool and didn’t require special knowledge like “prompt engineering” to receive high-quality output.”

With Inkwire, educators can generate project ideas aligned to district-specific standards and learner-centered outcomes, then receive multi-week project plans broken out into daily schedules. That structure doesn’t just save time—it deepens teachers’ understanding of the district’s learner-centered philosophy and how to apply it in practice.

Midway through the cohort experience, 88 percent of participants said they were excited and curious about the role of AI in education, and over 70 percent were using AI tools, including Inkwire, weekly. This frequency of use has helped participants develop an understanding of how to work with AI to get the best results possible.

Project Settings LCC PBL Design Framework ? Use example

Design Ideas
Tip: Copy & paste in any existing project materials to use as a starting point for your design.

Enter initial design ideas or topics to cover...

Add Standards Add Competencies

Grade Levels

Duration

Weeks Days per week Minutes per day

[Back](#) [Create](#)

Inkwire’s Project Settings options

The screenshot displays the LCC PBL Design Framework interface. On the left, a circular diagram represents the framework's elements. The main section shows a project titled "Skateboard Science: Tricks & Turns!" by Kelly Williams, a 7th-grade project lasting 4 weeks. It lists standards: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.10, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.1, and CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.1, along with the skill "Actively listens to understand" and "+ 1 more". Below this, a "Project Purpose" section is visible. A "Learning Goals" section contains a dashed box with the text: "Complete at least one LCC PBL Design Framework element to generate 1-Pager and Plan". A "Project Launch" section is also present. A question prompt is shown in a box: "What is a real world problem that your students will tackle and what final product will they create to address the identified problem for an authentic audience?". Below the prompt is an "Ask AI" button. The AI-generated response reads: "1. Students will investigate the environmental impact of skateboarding materials and design a sustainable skateboard prototype. They will present their findings and prototype to a local skate shop, advocating for eco-friendly practices."

Example question prompt in Inkwire's project designer

For instance, Inkwire's output wasn't to be taken as 100% complete. "I can look at it and say, okay, day one, yes, I want to do that activity. I'll skip day two, and I can probably combine days three and four," said a fifth-grade educator at Alicante Elementary School in Lamont.

She emphasized that her PBL expertise was still needed to assess the quality of Inkwire's output, but it saved her hours of time upfront creating the initial project plan so she could focus on the finer details of her daily lesson plans.

An important distinction between an application like Inkwire and a Large Language Model (LLM) like ChatGPT is that Inkwire is a one-way experience. With Inkwire, users can choose AI-generated ideas from a dropdown list or provide custom responses based on a preset list of question prompts. Once all answers are added, Inkwire creates a project plan. Compare that to an LLM where users engage in an open conversation, going back and forth, searching for the right things to say that will improve the output.

Antonio Aguilera, a seventh-grade world history educator at Mountain View Middle School, likes to use [Inkwire as a brainstorming tool](#) when he's stumped on what type of project he wants to design that specifically targets one of the competencies that aligns with the district's Portrait of a Learner.

“With Inkwire, it’s easy to just click the dropdown. It’s more user-friendly if you’re not that tech-savvy. It’s also nice because in ChatGPT, if you forget to directly reference the Lamont Portrait of a Learner in your chat, then your results might be too generic, whereas with Inkwire, that’s a non-issue because it’s already integrated.” This points to the value of a tool that is pre-trained with district frameworks and materials as references.

Both Lamont educators mentioned taking advantage of what each tool does best. During the 2024-25 academic year, Inkwire’s strength was designing competency-aligned project plans, whereas an LLM like ChatGPT was a better thought partner for lesson plan design.

After receiving [her project plan from Inkwire](#), a fifth-grade educator inserted it into ChatGPT and asked questions like: “Can you suggest what you would put on each slide for this topic? Can you give me a list of women who are in STEM? Can you make sure this is for fifth-grade students?”

Shortly after the year wrapped up, Inkwire released a new feature that provides educators with individual lesson plans and suggests detailed activities. This is a great addition, but it doesn’t make the educators’ use of ChatGPT irrelevant. There continues to be great value in stacking different AI tools together and taking advantage of what each does best.

During the final Celebration of Learning in May 2025, Lamont’s Innovation Cohort participants talked about how they saw themselves as learners throughout the experience. Many agreed with the sentiment shared by one participant about readiness: “I wasn’t fully ready to try PBL or work with an AI tool. I didn’t have it all mapped out. I just gave myself permission to try and learn along the way.” That willingness to try without knowing how everything would play out translated to a new relationship with students where educators can say, “I’m learning alongside you. We’re in this together.”

“Inkwire is like your coach. It’s prompting you with these questions that train you to internalize this learner-centered mindset. The more I’m internalizing those questions for myself, the more I start to see teaching and learning through those questions more broadly,”
-Kelly Williams

This cohort experience gave educators a new way to see themselves as teachers and learners. Going into the summer and the 2025-26 academic year, educators are excited to continue the journey and are already planning what projects they might try next.

CASE STUDY:

Escondido's Strategy for Scaling AI Use with Purpose

Escondido Union School District (EUSD) had already done the hard and foundational work of building a [Framework for the Future](#): A Portrait of a Learner was in place, a Learning Model was in use, and educators were beginning to test learner-centered strategies in classrooms.

With so much change already happening, introducing a new technology like AI felt like a stretch. However, for North Broadway Elementary Principal Cherry Moore, she could already see this technology wasn't going to wait for anyone. Students and classroom educators were already tinkering with it on their own, so it was imperative to create space for open dialogue and experimentation.

[Escondido] Learner-Centered Learning Experience Designer

Share

Welcome to the Escondido Learner-Centered Learning Experience Designer! Start by telling us your name and what grade level you teach.

I'm Sarah and I teach 3rd grade.

Great to meet you, Sarah! Could you share some information about the unit or project you're planning? What topics will it cover, and what will learners do as part of the unit or project? Is there an essential question, a standard, or a skill you want students to focus on?

we are going to do a math unit on graphs and charts

That's exciting, Sarah! A math unit on graphs and charts can be highly engaging. Are you planning any specific final product or assessments for learners during this unit or project? What activities will they be involved in to demonstrate their understanding?

Enter Message

AI can make mistakes, including bias. Check important information.

The diagram is a circular framework for the Escondido Union School District. At the center is a blue circle with the Escondido Union School District logo. Surrounding this are eight colored circles, each containing an icon and a label: 'Empowered Learner' (blue), 'Empathetic Collaborator' (orange), 'Ethical Scholar' (green), 'Effective Communicator' (red), 'Critical Thinker' (teal), 'Creative Problem Solver' (yellow), 'Personalized' (light blue), and 'Authentic' (light orange). These are arranged in a ring around the center. The outer ring of the diagram is divided into four quadrants by a blue line: 'PERSONALIZED' (top-left), 'AUTHENTIC' (top-right), 'EQUITABLE & INCLUSIVE' (bottom-right), and 'COMPETENCY BASED' (bottom-left).

The LEA App starts by gathering information from the user about the learning experience they have already planned

Rather than launching AI broadly, the school partnered with Learner-Centered Collaborative in spring 2025 and formed a Design Team of innovative educators who were excited to put AI to the test.

Their primary tool for experimentation was the Learning Experience Accelerator (LEA) App, developed using Playlab. This application is a learning experience thought partner trained using Learner-Centered Collaborative's research-based [Learning Model](#) and classroom strategies as well as Escondido's Learner Profile competencies. It helps educators integrate those competencies and strategies into their daily instruction aligned to desired outcomes.

When educators began playing with the tool, "They all were like, 'wow, I can see this unlocking our teachers,'" recalled César Morales, Partner Lead for Escondido Union School District.

The Learning Experience Accelerator seamlessly integrates the district's unique Portrait of a Learner competencies and Learning Model, state standards, and LCC's learner-centered strategies so that the output is consistently aligned with the district's implementation goals.

When using the tool, educators answer questions about their grade level and describe a unit, project, or lesson they are planning to teach. The app then connects their idea to specific Portrait of a Learner competencies and shares success criteria based on their grade band. It also provides concrete strategies for explicitly teaching the relevant skills, providing feedback to learners, and designing opportunities for learners to demonstrate and reflect on the skills throughout the unit or project.

Notably, while the EUSD Design Team of early adopters was experimenting with the app, every educator in the school was building a knowledge base around the district's Framework for the Future.

"We had done some work with the district's new Learning Model (developed in collaboration with Learner-Centered Collaborative), so we had this foundation," reflected Cherry. "Then we started asking teachers to create a learning experience based on what they understood about the Learning Model to see if what they designed could produce the Whole-Learner Outcomes expressed in our district's Portrait of a Learner." **Cherry felt it was imperative to develop this foundational knowledge prior to introducing the LEA app so educators could confidently assess and iterate on the outputs.**

Certainly, Sarah! Here are some detailed examples of how to teach, practice, and assess each selected standard and competency:

- **Standard:** 3.MD.B.3 - Draw a scaled picture graph and a scaled bar graph to represent a data set with several categories.
 1. **How to teach & practice this:** Begin with a discussion on various types of graphs and their real-world applications. Facilitate a data collection activity where students gather information on a topic of interest, then guide them in creating scaled bar graphs. Encourage creativity in graph design to enhance engagement.
 2. **How to assess this:** Evaluate students' graphs based on accuracy, clarity, and the effective use of scales. Provide opportunities for students to present their graphs to peers, offering explanations of their data and choice of representation.
 3. **Opportunities for feedback:** Use peer review sessions where students exchange graphs and provide constructive feedback. Offer teacher-led feedback to refine graphing techniques and data interpretation skills.
- **Competency:** Consistently applies learned skills and knowledge to real-world problems (Outcome: Empowered Learner)
 1. **How to teach & practice this:** Relate graphing activities to real-world scenarios, such as comparing weather patterns or sports statistics. Discuss how understanding data can impact decision-making in everyday life.
 2. **How to assess this:** Have students explain how their graphs can be used to address a real-world problem or question. Assess their ability to articulate connections between their learning and practical applications.
 3. **Opportunities for feedback:** Provide reflective prompts for students to explore how they applied their skills to a real-world context. Offer feedback on their ability to make connections and propose solutions.
- **Competency:** I continuously improve my work by creating multiple drafts and iterations (Outcome: Empowered Learner)
 1. **How to teach & practice this:** Introduce the concept of iteration through examples of drafts in various fields (e.g., writing, art, engineering). Encourage students to create

 Enter Message



AI can make mistakes, including bias. Check important information.

Armed with Escondido's Portrait of a Learner competencies, Learning Model, and strategies, the app recommends state standards and Portrait of a Learner competencies to integrate into the learning experience with specific ideas for teaching, practicing, assessing, and providing feedback on the skills.

Once the foundation was in place throughout the school and the Design Team felt confident about how to get the most out of Playlab, the bot was introduced at an all-staff meeting where 5th-grade educator Katie Taylor demonstrated how to use the tool to rework an existing lesson.

Her colleagues watched as she selected relevant learner outcomes from their Portrait, received suggestions aligned to their Learning Model, and adapted the ideas to meet her classroom needs. The live demo was catalytic. “The tool builds confidence and has educators saying ‘oh my gosh, I know more than I thought I knew about our Portrait and Learning Model,’” César shared. “This tool just elevates those connections for teachers.”

“I think by August, we will be in a place where teachers will take a fresh look at the plans they made, go in and identify what Whole-Learner Outcomes their plans will hit, and then explore how students might self-assess based on the Whole-Learner Outcomes they’re developing. I feel like that’s when our teachers are going to be more energized and ready to have more tools to help them do that work.”

–Cherry Moore

As they head into the summer and plan for the 2025–26 academic year, the emphasis will be on seeing the Learning Experience Accelerator App as a way to enhance unit planning and build capacity for designing Learner Profile aligned learning experiences.

North Broadway’s story shows that scaling AI use isn’t about urgency—it’s about strategy. **With a clear vision, phased rollout, peer modeling, and purposeful tools, the school created conditions where innovation could grow without top-down mandates, but rather with authentic buy-in from educators.**

CONCLUSION

The stories from Lamont and Escondido remind us that AI is not a shortcut or a substitute for educator expertise—it's a tool. When integrated within a clear and shared vision like a Framework for the Future, AI helps educators navigate the complexity of [learner-centered models](#) and translate big ideas into meaningful day-to-day practice. Tools like Inkwire and Playlab don't replace professional judgment; they elevate it.

Change in education is not just about adopting new models; it's about building the capacity of educators to implement them effectively. AI-enabled tools provide educators with specific ideas for bringing the Portrait of a Learner competencies into their daily lessons, units, and projects while implementing learner-centered strategies. These tools not only enhance learning design but also foster continuous professional learning and collaboration.

As learner-centered education continues to evolve, AI has the potential to serve as a powerful companion on the journey, enabling educators to design learning experiences that are more authentic, personalized, and competency-based. We hope these stories inspire you to explore how AI can support your team and the learners you serve!

If your school or district is interested in exploring AI-enabled tools in your context through workshops or Innovation Cohorts, connect with the Learner-Centered Collaborative team at [**collaborate@learnercentered.org**](mailto:collaborate@learnercentered.org).