



# Personalized Professional Development to Support Student-Centered Learning

A Partnership between BetterLesson and Watervliet City School District

## The Vision

Watervliet City School District serves about 1300 students in a small urban community just north of Albany, New York. In the 2019–2020 school year, the district identified special education as an area of focus. Special education teachers had shared that general education professional development wasn't meeting their specific needs and did not feel actionable. So the district prioritized providing tailored professional development to this important cohort of teachers.

**To support their special education teachers, leaders made a plan to:**

- 1 Develop and implement personalized professional development for all special education teachers, meeting each one where they are in their own learning journeys and addressing their specific challenges.
- 2 Support special education educators who co-teach as well as those who provide pull-out or 1:1 support
- 3 Support special education educator retention
- 4 Build a culture of continuous growth in special education to support leadership development within the Watervliet City School District.

# The Partnership

BetterLesson provides real-time guidance to support educators in building confidence and competence in student-centered, equitable, flexible learning. We do this across [4 Essential Elements of Student-Centered Learning](#):



**Inclusive and Responsive Practices**



**Flexible Instructional Models**



**Curriculum and Academic Content**



**Instructional Leadership**

Within each Element, we divide our work into targeted Focus Areas. ([Learn more about the framework here.](#)) Watervliet City School District decided to focus on three in particular: [Social and Emotional Learning](#), [Formative Assessment and Differentiation](#), and [Student Centered Literacy](#).

Teachers engaged in a full year of biweekly, one-to-one, job-embedded, virtual coaching with BetterLesson's expert educators. Coaches personalize their support to address each teacher's most pressing challenges and help them make observable, measurable advances in their practice.

## Coaching sessions focused on:



Implementing high-leverage, research-based instructional strategies



Engaging in reflective cycles to ensure strategies optimize engagement and achievement



Leveraging qualitative and quantitative teacher and student growth metrics to measure success

“Some new strategies I’ve tried because of my BetterLesson coach: I’ve implemented station groupings within 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade WIN blocks. The mini-stations are allowing me to work more directly with each student to address individual needs. At parent-teacher conferences, I shared the article and memory strategies that my coach provided with my student’s parents.”

TEACHER, Watervliet City School District

## Sample strategies that Watervliet City Schools teachers implemented in their classrooms:

### SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING

- [Self-Regulation Strategies](#)
- [Class Meeting or Morning Meeting](#)
- [Circle Up: Community Conversations](#)
- [Collaborative Conversations for Behaviorally Challenging Students](#)
- [Implementing a Positive Reinforcement Economy](#)

### FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT & DIFFERENTIATION

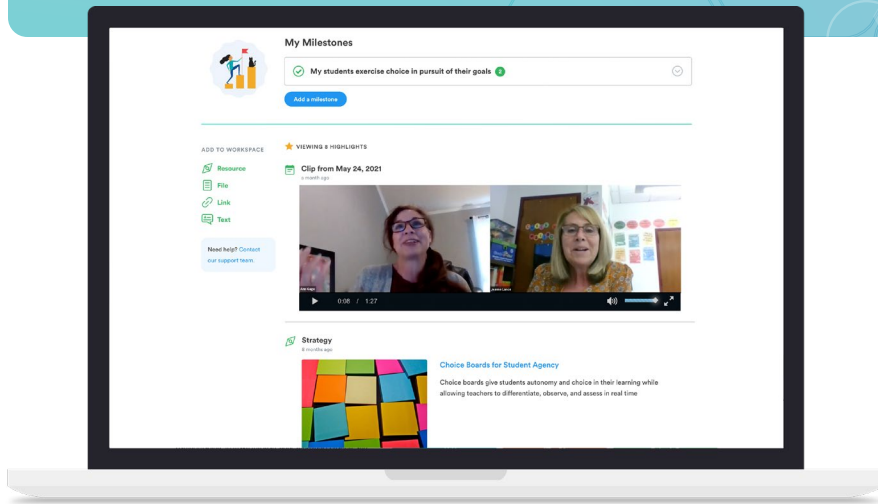
- [Goal Setting and Reflection](#)
- [Designing Group Stations for Station Rotation Model](#)
- [Analyzing Student Data to Inform Instruction](#)
- [Student Conferences with Teacher](#)
- [Choice Boards for Student Agency](#)

### STUDENT-CENTERED LITERACY

- [Practicing and Self-Evaluating Reading Fluency](#)
- [Interactive, Visual, or Language Chunk Word Wall](#)
- [Final Word or Save the Last Word](#)
- [Literature Circles and Book Clubs](#)
- [Examining Exemplars and Using Mentor Texts](#)

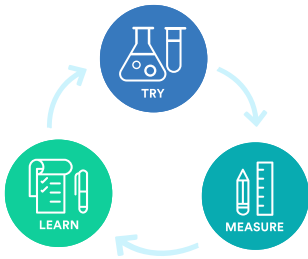
“My coach addressed my changing needs and supported me fully. She shared many learning strategies that I actually used. This opportunity provided the most valuable professional development I have received during my time in this district. It was personalized and relevant to issues I experience within my own classroom and I saw a direct benefit to my students.”

TEACHER, Watervliet City School District



## BetterLesson Lab

Coaches and educators work together in the Lab, an online platform where they can document their vision and milestones, share artifacts, and access thousands of instructional strategies and lesson plans created by experienced educators.



## Try-Measure-Learn

BetterLesson coaches help educators identify their challenges, make a plan to try new strategies, and then reflect on results. This collaborative, learn-by-doing method models what learner-centered instruction looks like.

## The Impact

15 educators completed 159 coaching sessions and tried 32 new strategies in their classrooms. Watervliet special education educators acquired or enhanced core competencies that they will rely on and continue to refine for years to come. Their growth mindset is supported, and they expanded their capacity to be student-centered teachers and leaders within Watervliet School District.

**100%**  
OF EDUCATORS  
say they made progress in their  
chosen growth area.

**75%**  
OF EDUCATORS  
say they grew considerably in  
student centered literacy.

“We are really happy with the partnership with BetterLesson. The 1:1 coaching has been a benefit, because it gives us an opportunity to provide targeted PD to teachers that might not otherwise fit the PD mold we have for everyone else in the district. After seeing BetterLesson’s unique approach of aligning strategies for teachers on an individual basis, we already have ideas of other teacher groups who could use this support.”

DON STEVENS, Watervliet Assistant Superintendent



BetterLesson provides 1:1 virtual coaching and small group professional learning focused on supporting educators to create classrooms where students drive their own learning, exercise choice and ownership, and develop the personal agency they need to succeed. We provide job-embedded support across a wide range of topics, including instructional leadership, student engagement, responsive and inclusive practices, innovative models and remote learning, and curriculum and academic content. We have partnered with more than 30,000 educators across 47 states, plus D.C., Puerto Rico, and five countries internationally. BetterLesson's free Lab site hosts a continuously growing library of evidence-based strategies and is visited by more than 500,000 educators each month. BetterLesson values the pursuit of educational equity and is dedicated to ensuring that every student—regardless of race, income, national origin, gender identity, ability, or location—has access to an excellent education.

[EXPLORE OUR SERVICES AND TOPICS ►](#)

[Schedule a Consultation to Learn More.](#)

