

Considerations for Launching a Blended Learning Program

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Overview

Blended learning should be considered a means to an end – heightened student growth and success. Establishing what your blended learning model is intended to accomplish and evaluating considerations that will impact your ability to implement it will help you choose the most appropriate model for your district or school. It will also allow you to identify talent that will help ensure its success.

Why Blended Learning?

There are many ways to justify pursuing a blended learning model, but those that support student academic growth and preparation for college and post-graduate success should be prioritized.

Student-Centered Objectives



Personalization

Students have unique needs and learn at different paces and in different ways. The traditional classroom is not designed to tailor instruction to individual students based on these differences. Whether by adapting the level of rigor to a student's current mastery in real time or allowing student discretion over the pace and method of content acquisition, blended learning leverages technology to facilitate more personalized learning trajectories that help students achieve their full academic potential.¹



Broadened Content Access

The use of technology-based instruction provides students access to a wider array of specialized content than is typically available in the traditional classroom model. For students with specialized learning needs, at schools located in remote or rural areas or at small schools with limited staff, content access through technology-facilitated channels enables them to engage with material that may be beyond the expertise of in-school faculty. This access also allows teachers to align instruction with each student's readiness level.



21st Century Skills

Many students lack personal access to and fluency in the technology tools critical to success in the modern workforce. Blended learning integrates technology into the classroom experience, enabling students to build comfort with technology in a way that prepares them for success in the world beyond K-12 education.



Engagement

In a rapidly evolving and technology-dependent society, leveraging technology to facilitate learning may provide educational paths that are more intuitive and enticing to students than traditional approaches. Online dashboards and report cards that provide real-time updates on students' content and skill acquisition can also drive more direct student ownership of learning and provide parents with better access to information about their children, thereby enhancing their engagement in students' education process.

¹ For a more complete look at what different levels of personalization might look like, please see the [Blended Learning Student Personalization Continuum](#).

Classroom-Level Benefits

Some classroom-level advantages blended learning provides may also help students achieve heightened personalization and increased academic growth.



Time Flexibility

Students are often limited to school operating hours to access new content and instructional support. By hosting a portion of instruction online, blended learning models enable students to engage in learning from multiple locations and outside standard school operating hours, allowing teachers greater flexibility to structure in-school time.



Teacher Capacity

Teachers may not always be able to create a robust learning experience if they need to prioritize basic skills development. Blended learning may be used to divide the responsibility for students' lower-order and higher-order skill development, using online platforms to introduce students to new concepts and facilitate student acquisition of basic skills. Teacher capacity may then be directed to developing higher-order skills including critical thinking, written and oral communication and collaboration.



Real-Time Data

The use of technology to capture and track real-time data on student progress enables teachers to gather more information on students more quickly, facilitating more timely adaptation of instruction to evolving student needs. This information on student progress may be used to inform both virtual and in-person instruction, ultimately improving the student experience by providing more, better and faster information about what students need and how teachers can help them.

Considerations for Implementing Blended Learning Models

There are several key considerations to pursuing a blended learning approach. While their importance may vary depending on the context and specific model, they should all be evaluated to best understand and prepare for challenges that will arise in moving to a blended approach to serving students.



Talent

Adopting a blended learning model requires the school team to embrace change and uncertainty and ultimately redefine and adapt roles to meet the needs of students in a new system. Carefully assessing existing and potential talent to guide thinking about your model and transition approach is necessary to facilitate a successful launch. This is especially true for districts and schools with restrictions on moving or reallocating staff, or which struggle to attract and retain talent due to location, performance record or other factors.



Curriculum

As an emerging instructional tool, most blended learning curricular options remain in the pilot or emerging phase. It remains challenging to find and aggregate programs, resources, and curricula that together provide a rigorous, skills-aligned experience for students in a given blended learning model. As a result, it is necessary to dedicate time and resources to vet materials for quality and cohesion and to integrate them with in-person learning.



Technology

Acquiring the technology infrastructure and systems necessary to a blended learning model, and developing or hiring the talent necessary to support it, can be costly and time consuming, especially given that early adoption of blended learning will require testing and iterating different technology-based approaches to support student learning.



Physical Space

The more clearly a blended learning model diverges from traditional, one-size-fits-all instruction, the more likely physical classroom space will need to be adapted to support it. Reconfiguring physical space in existing buildings or arranging for the use of new buildings can be a complex, expensive and time-intensive undertaking.



Information Management + Systems Integration

Blended learning systems typically generate large amounts of data on student learning and performance that can inform teacher instruction and improve the student experience. However, this information may be difficult to use due to poor integration and alignment between online and offline assessments, data tracking systems and instructional approaches. The ability to integrate virtual and in-person approaches, and skillfully use the data both systems create, is a key consideration to effectively implementing a blended learning model. As blended learning matures, the availability of both data integration platforms that facilitate online/offline alignment and robust blended curricula should improve, but will likely persist as challenges to effective implementation in the near-term.



The Financial Impact of Blended Learning

Though blended learning models may require substantial up-front investment in technology, the capacity gained by leveraging technology-supported instruction may allow for staff and resource reallocation that lowers long-term operating costs, potentially freeing up funds to support teachers and enhance student achievement and growth. Depending on the context and the model, financial considerations could serve as either a constraint or motivation for the adoption of blended learning.

Conclusion

Though there is no formula for designing a best-fit blended learning model, clearly defining desired outcomes and evaluating considerations will provide much of the requisite information needed to begin making informed design decisions about the specific model structure and human capital needed to best serve your district or school.