



Connect with Students: Embrace Blended Learning

In many schools across the nation, a relatively new approach to instruction for K-12 is emerging. Blended learning is found in many educational settings and its implementation is varied. Horn and Staker (2012) define blended learning as “a formal education program in which a student learns at least in part through online delivery of content and instruction with some element of student control over time, place, path, and/or pace and at least in part at a supervised brick-and-mortar location away from home.”

According to Tucker (2012), “Blended learning is any combination of face-to-face instruction and online learning. It is the weaving together of instructional mediums – in person and online – to maximize learning outcomes for students.” Blending learning can offer student-centered learning experiences that address differences in student interests, abilities, and grade levels. A blended learning model has the capability to better serve all students by lending itself to differentiated instruction, providing innovative pedagogical techniques, and offering timely and current content, all of which personalize, enhance, or improve the instructional environment.

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Horn and Staker (2012) report the use of four common models, showing there is no single way to implement blended instruction. Many technology tools and online sources are available for educators who want to explore the concept of creating a blended learning model. When a campus initiates blended learning, the campus should inventory digital resources (i.e., laptops, Internet connections, other digital learning tools). Then, a comprehensive plan is prepared that aligns with the campus needs and identifies how to effectively use available resources in the core curriculum. All too often it seems that schools use digital resources to merely supplement instruction. However, blending digital resources with face-to-face (F2F) interaction can lead to daily learning experiences that challenge students, adapt to learning needs in real-time, and provide access to a 21st-century education.

Technology should not replace teachers, but rather make teaching easier and more effective. In blended learning, teachers are facilitators with the freedom to leverage technology to increase student involvement by combining face-to-face interaction with online learning. Thus, student success in an online environment is linked to relationships with teachers. Teacher interaction is important in a blended learning model, so a balance of face-to-face and online interactions should complement one another. Frequent, real-time collaboration and communication with teachers and classmates are necessary in order to best respond to student needs. Relationships and conversations between students and teachers and between students and students exist in blended models. According to teachers practicing blended learning, online formats offer opportunities for shy students to express themselves, since they may not speak in the typical classroom.

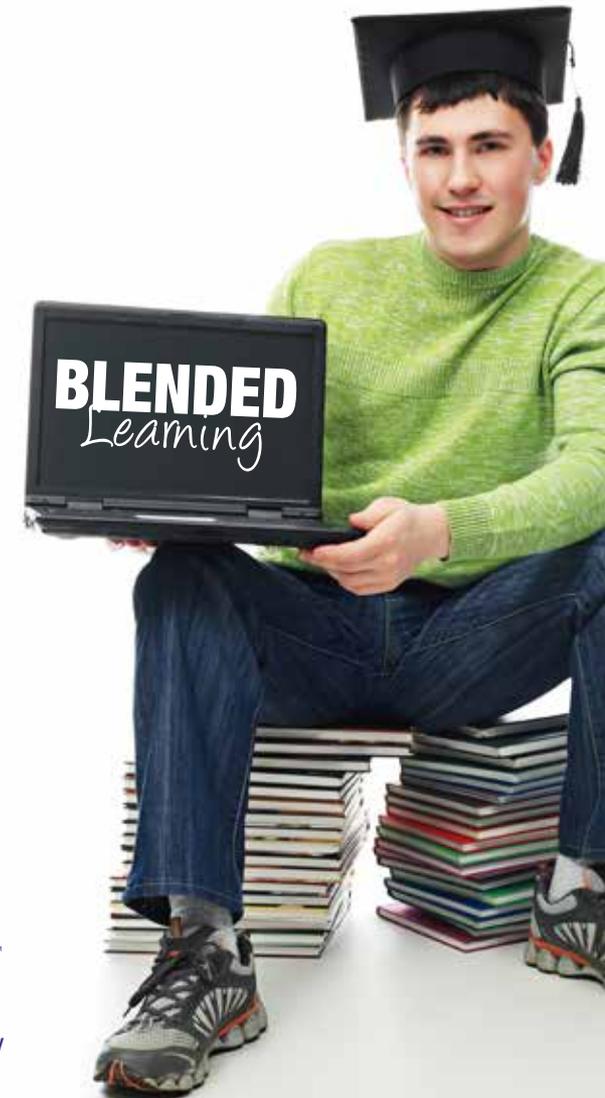
As students graduate and enter an increasingly digital world, it is imperative that educators embrace technology for academic purposes, developing skill sets necessary for student success.

If educators are serious about preparing students to succeed in life beyond K-12, then student-centered learning is essential.

Communication and collaboration are necessary but should not be limited to the environment inside a school building. Learning occurs everywhere, connecting students beyond the actual classrooms. Students can work collaboratively as they connect with content and communicate with students and teachers around the world. The quest for 21st-century skills must include guided, purposeful, and supervised learning outside walls. With the integration of meaningful technology and face-to-face interactions, students can engage in active, improved learning. Thus, embracing blended learning appears to be a vital vehicle for addressing student needs and developing relevancy in learning. Blended learning combines meaningful online technology with active learning in the traditional classroom to create rigorous and engaging learning experiences for students. In conclusion, blended learning can result in improved educational outcomes and ensure students are prepared for college and careers.

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