



GOING BLENDED: ARE YOU READY?

Blended learning is the combination of online instruction, teacher led instruction and the interaction between the two. When considering if a school or classroom will adopt blended learning, educators should understand that blended learning is a tool that can be used by instructional school leaders and reflective teachers to achieve above-average results. Blended learning itself is not “a fix”, a curriculum, or an intervention. To achieve results with blended learning, strong teachers and school leaders need to approach teaching and learning through a different lens. Educators interested in beginning blended learning must understand that it is about more than just technology. Blended learning is about the *blend* of online and teacher led instruction to target student needs. Although it may increase technology access, blended learning also increases the student/teacher interaction, supports targeted small group instruction, and provides teachers the opportunity to celebrate character traits associated with academic improvement.

There are many schools that use blended learning, despite not being ready. These programs often have frustrated students and stressed out teachers, waste thousands of dollars, and achieve poor results. School administrators or teachers who are considering using blended learning should use the readiness list below to help determine if they are ready to go blended.

Blended learning readiness checklist

Ready	Not ready
School staff is filled with reflective practitioners who crave feedback and always believe there is a better way of doing things.	School staff includes people who are reluctant to change, overconfident/overzealous, and aren't hungry for feedback - the “we've always done it this way” people.
Teachers and leaders are not afraid to fail and learn from their mistakes.	Teachers and leaders think everything must be perfect the first time and struggle with changes.
The school budget allows for allocation of proper amounts for ongoing support, device management, etc.	The school has money to buy hundreds of computers, but doesn't have a thoughtful budget allocation plan for software, tech support, repairs, and future replacement costs.
School leadership reverse engineered strict policies and procedures that help the classroom flow and maximize instructional time. Leadership is willing to focus two+ weeks on teaching and practicing these procedures with students.	School leaders or teachers haven't planned out how to structure the blended learning classroom model (how students move across the room, what they have access to on their devices, etc.). They don't see the need for this level of planning or restructuring. They believe blended learning will just work.
School leadership conducted a minimum six months of research on devices, content, culture, etc. They engage teachers on what they need, the advantages/disadvantages of different programs, and run student data and evidence-based trials.	School leadership is ready to jump right in. They do not gain opinions from teachers. School staff does not do extensive research or have the time to run content trials/pilots.
School administrators understand the importance of high-quality professional development. They carve out multiple days for teacher development that focuses on ways for teachers to improve their practice, in addition to learning how to use new digital content.	Professional development plans consist of using PD from content providers, visiting/collaborating with other blended schools, or don't exist at all. School administrators do not believe teachers need to grow in their teaching practices.
Teachers, students, and parents have been included in the discussion of what blended learning is and school leadership garners feedback from these people.	Some key stakeholders - teachers, students, parents, board members, funders - are left out of blended learning decisions and planning.
School leadership identified three to five specific concerns at every grade level (K-2, 3-5, 6-8) that blended learning will help address.	School staff cannot articulate the problem that blended learning will try to solve.



A technology contractor has checked school infrastructure bandwidth, wiring, and electrical power to ensure everything works correctly.	The school has not done due diligence around infrastructure and does not have the capacity to run or manage a technological network.
School leadership believes blended learning is an opportunity to provide differentiation and small-group instruction to students through the combination of teacher-led and computer instruction.	School leadership wants to do something that is exciting, new, and buzzworthy. They just need to try something new.
School leadership believes blended learning is an opportunity to boost teacher / student relationships. School leaders value teachers, their hard work, and know that a teacher will always instruct better than a computer.	School administrators want to decrease staffing costs by replacing teachers with computers. They see blended learning as a computer-driven learning model that is independent from teachers.
The school wants to prepare students for a tech-centric world and prepare them for college and career in the future.	School administrators only want to go blended to increase enrollment. They are not thinking about how blended learning could help current students.
School administrators know that blended learning will help good teachers improve. Staff is hungry for real time mastery tracking data and are eager to leverage it.	School administrators believe that blended learning is a way to replace poor teaching. Staff wants blended learning to take the low achievers off their plate

For those looking for a place to start, check out some of the books below. These provide guidance, structures, and ideas that build a strong blended learning program.

- *Go Blended!* by Liz Arney
 - Liz Arney led the efforts of Aspire Public Schools. She’s one of the sharpest people in the field and this book is loaded with practical advice.
- *Leverage Leadership* by Paul Bambick-Santoyo
 - This is *Teach Like a Champion* for Leaders. Leverage Leadership takes principals through the biggest levers of being a true instructional leader in your building, from establishing student culture to holding feedback meetings, to making it all work in the packed schedule of a principal.
- *Driven by Data* by Paul Bambick-Santoyo
 - A great resource for school leaders who are shifting to utilizing data to drive instruction. Practical information that will support what can be a difficult shift.
- *Switch* by Chip and Dan Heath
 - Effecting change is very hard. In this book, two business professor brothers (one at Stanford GSB; the other at Duke) present research from psychology and sociology that forms a pattern you can use to make changes that matter to you. This will help existing leaders bring others on board to blended learning.
- *How Children Succeed* by Paul Tough
 - What character traits separate successful children from their peers? Paul Tough – a *New York Times* and *This American Life* contributor – answers this question via developmental psychology research. The result has major implications for running blended learning programs which inevitably get difficult for students.