



Blended Professional Learning

How (and why) to structure a
blended or blended learning
model for individuals and groups






Table of Contents

Introduction.....	3
Blended learning: a crash course	4
The blended learning cycle	4
Is blended learning just another instructional fad?.....	6
Blended learning and the <i>Every Student Succeeds Act</i>	7
Blended learning for individuals	7
Blended learning for small groups, mentors and instructional coaches	9
Blended learning for large groups, schools and districts.....	10
Time to apply.....	12



Introduction

If you're a parent, you can relate: "Sorry, Jimmy, it's not healthy to have dessert every night. Finish your vegetables, do your homework, then it's off to bed." Eventually Jimmy's light goes out. You wait 15 minutes, just to be safe. ***At last, you can open the fridge and finish that key lime pie.***

It's funny — even when something is "good for you," we often don't apply it to ourselves.

You know how creative learning strategies help your students learn. You see the benefits when students absorb teaching outside of classroom time, then come together with teachers and classmates to practice and apply what they've learned. Trying (and sometimes failing) in a safe place solidifies the lesson.

"Blended learning" is clearly good for students. Why don't we offer it for our teachers?

Blended learning: a crash course

The key to a blended learning model is following up with practice and collaboration.

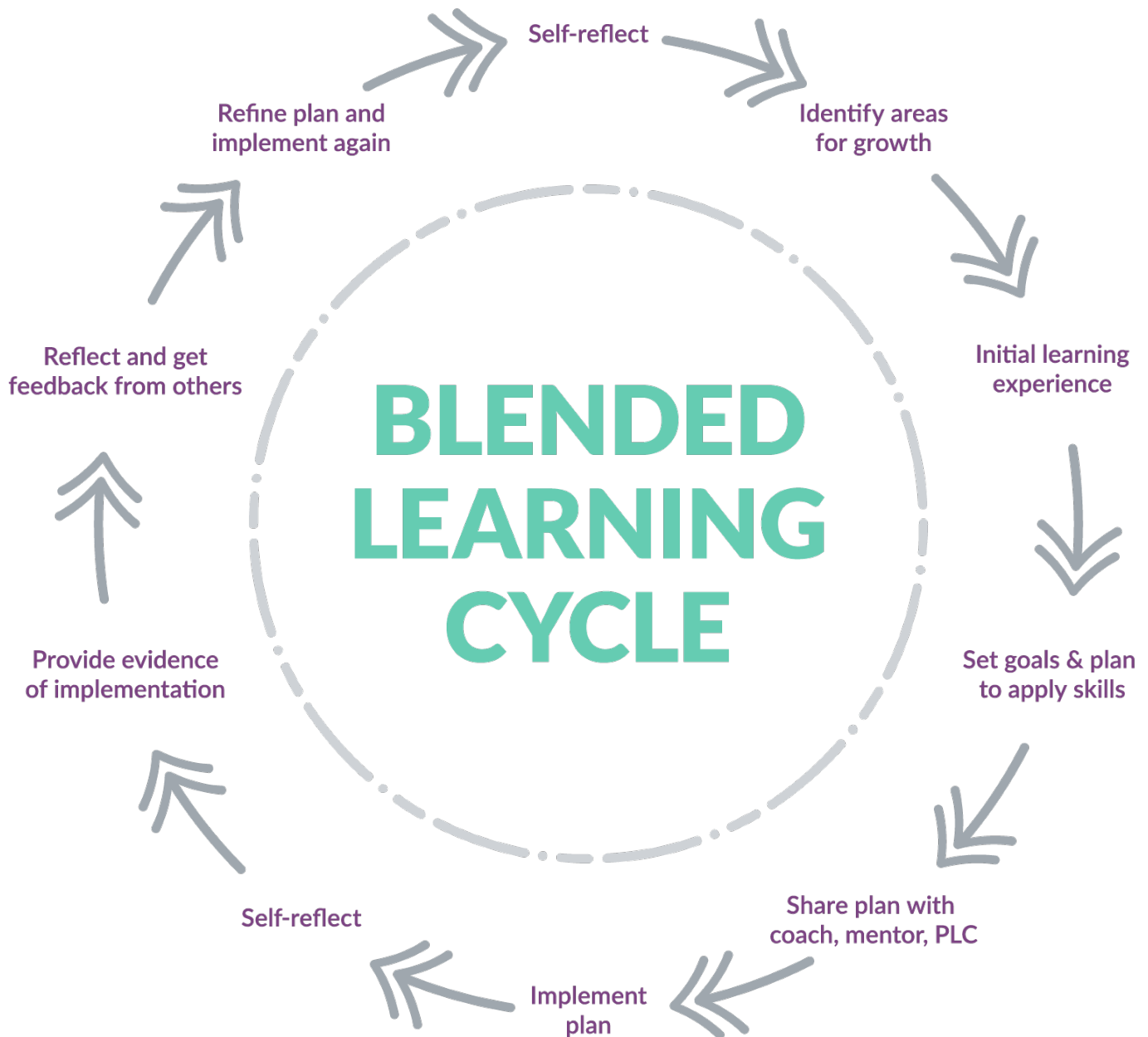
Blended professional learning for teachers is the equivalent of blended learning for our students. In a blended learning model, teachers can learn on their own time. They explore whatever information, courses and educational experiences they want (or need) — based on personal goals, evaluation results or areas for growth.

But it doesn't stop there. The key to a blended learning model is following up with practice and collaboration.

The blended learning cycle

1. Self-reflect based on feedback and evidence of practice.
2. Identify areas for growth.
3. Engage in an initial learning experience that provides information and assesses retention.
4. Set goals and create a plan to apply selected skills, techniques or behaviors you believe will have the **most impact on students**.
5. Share your plan with others — a principal, instructional coach, mentor, department or PLC. It's often helpful to get feedback at this stage.
6. Implement your plan.
7. Self-reflect — how did it go?
8. Provide evidence of your implementation to others — this may be a video of classroom instruction, or perhaps a classroom observation.
9. Meet with others to whom you're accountable to reflect and get feedback on your implementation so far.
10. Reflect, Plan, Act, Do... then repeat. It's the cycle for continuous improvement.

Using this cycle over time, you can transform skills, techniques or behaviors into more effective instructional practices. This is evident through observation, feedback from others and student outcomes that reflect growth.



Is blended learning just another instructional fad?

You might be tempted to think that. But in fact, blended learning is simply a form of blended learning. And blended learning is here to stay, because — when implemented well — it makes the cycle of learning **more possible** and **more effective**.

Providing targeted, personalized content for all of the teachers in your district is a huge task. Often, districts are so strapped for time and money that they're limited to covering their own core initiatives, leaving it to teachers to seek out additional, more personalized learning. But thanks to online learning, you can offer targeted content to many different people — without taking up valuable time during the school day.

Thanks to online learning, you can offer targeted content to many different people — without taking up valuable time during the school day.

New to a topic? Then it's generally best to explore that information at your own pace. Teachers can explore coursework, online lessons, videos and eBooks in the order that works best for them — and at a pace and time that fits into their schedule and learning style. Once they've absorbed that information, they're ready to take it out for a spin — putting it into practice and getting feedback from peers, mentors, coaches and observers. This is where blended learning shines.

Evidence suggests that teachers like it, too. In 2015-2016, Montour School District in Pennsylvania started the Montour Learning Network for EdTech and Innovation. Using a blended learning model, teachers and staff pursue individual learning opportunities while collaborating to support each other. The result? *Montour saw a 600% increase in participation in digital professional development.*¹

¹ Sams, A., & Aglio, J. (2016, September 12). *We blended professional development and our teachers loved it.* Retrieved November 08, 2016, from <http://www.eschoolnews.com/2016/09/12/we-blended-professional-development-and-our-teachers-loved-it/>

Blended learning and the Every Student Succeeds Act


If a best-practices argument isn't enough to get you to try blended learning for your professional development, how about this: guidelines in the *Every Student Succeeds Act* suggest that we must move toward using the entire learning cycle to create real impact on teacher skills and student achievement. Blended learning makes that kind of targeting and differentiation possible within a constant cycle of feedback.

Blended learning for individuals

When we think of a “blended” form of blended learning, we often picture groups of learners, like students — but it's ideal for individuals as well. How could an individual teacher use a blended model of professional development?

- *Ms. Schooley could use improvement in her communication skills with students who are English Language Learners. Feedback from a recent classroom observation shows that she still falls back on poor coping skills like raising her voice when she gets frustrated.*
- *Her principal recommends a series of online courses that cover best practices for working with ELLs in the elementary school age group. Ms. Schooley and her principal agree to a follow-up conversation in two weeks to discuss her “Application & Impact Plan,” which demonstrates how she'll implement her new learning in the classroom and measure its impact on student learning.*

*Blended learning makes
that kind of targeting and
differentiation possible
within a constant
cycle of feedback.*



A week later, the principal visits Ms. Schooley's classroom and notices a marked difference.

- Ms. Schooley takes the courses on her own time and bounces some ideas off a colleague who teaches a foreign language. She crafts her plan, describing the new tools she'll use to rephrase questions from her ELLs when communication breaks down, and the positive impact she believes applying this new technique will have on her ELLs and other students.
- She shares her plan with her principal, who approves it and assigns a follow-up conference for one month later. In the meantime, Ms. Schooley has a PLC meeting in two weeks.
- At the two-week mark, the PLC meets in an online Team Room — the collaboration center for PLC members to connect and support each other's learning through shared conversation and resources. PLC members come from several different schools across the district, and are grouped together according to similar topics and age groups, and dissimilar levels of experience in order to get different perspectives on the same topic.
- Ms. Schooley brings up the work she's doing on her new communication techniques, and mentions some of the challenges she's still working on. The group encourages her, and has ideas for a few tweaks, which are recorded in the team room. Ms. Schooley also adjusts her Impact Plan and shares it with her principal.
- Two weeks later, during the follow-up conversation with her principal, Ms. Schooley believes her skills are improving because she feels frustrated much less frequently, and her ELL students seem to be "on task" more often. The principal gives positive feedback for Ms. Schooley's commitment to her efforts, and asks when she might be willing to upload a video of herself or have the principal visit to continue to provide feedback.
- A week later, the principal visits Ms. Schooley's classroom and notices a marked difference — the students and teacher seem calmer, and when ELLs have questions, they don't seem afraid to raise their hands. The principal notes a few additional strategies Ms. Schooley could apply to refine her techniques, but the overall effectiveness of her practice has improved. Ms. Schooley's growth journey is evident through multiple sources that remain available for future reference.

Blended learning for small groups, mentors and instructional coaches

Blended learning can help facilitate learning for small groups as well. For example, an instructional coach or mentor may be responsible for guiding a group of fewer than 30 teachers. Using evaluation results, the coach determines the three areas of focus that will have the most impact for students of this group overall:

- *Communication skills*
- *Time management*
- *Consistency of assessment techniques*

The coach creates a “curriculum” that will cover the school year, each semester targeting one of the three topics. In each case, the semester begins with members of the group taking assigned courses on their own

The first semester...


The group takes courses in an identified area for growth — in this case, communication skills — covering how to communicate with students, colleagues, administrators and community members like parents. Over the course of 3 weeks, teachers work at their own pace to complete the online courses.

After 3 weeks...

Teachers meet in the online Team Room to share thoughts and experiences. With guidance from the coach, they identify key focus areas for growth: communication with colleagues and with parents.

Each member of the team commits to use one new communication tool with each group. Coaching conversations and group

*The semester begins
with members of
the group taking
assigned courses
on their own time.*



You can also use a blended approach to blended learning for large groups or even district-wide professional growth initiatives.

As the semester goes on...

discussions continue through the semester, and team members share what they've learned through the online Team Room.

PLC members share examples of written communications, and are encouraged to identify and upload exemplars as artifacts to demonstrate growth. They also discuss verbal communication they've had with their coach along the way, and receive ongoing feedback through coaching logs.

At the end of the semester...

Surveys are distributed to colleagues and parents. Results from the surveys show communication with PLC members has been professional, clear and effective at resolving issues. These results are also used as artifacts demonstrating the growth journey of PLC members and the increased effectiveness of their communication skills.

The next semester...

PLC members begin again with courses that address another area for growth, such as time management. Wash, rinse, repeat...

Blended learning for large groups, schools and districts

You can also use a blended approach to blended learning for large groups or even district-wide professional growth initiatives.

Let's say one of your goals is to strengthen the Response to Intervention process in your district. You've put a software solution into place, but

implementing that software was only the first step — now all of your teachers need to adopt behaviors that support the RTI process. That's no small task! Here's how it might look over the course of a school year.

Over the summer...

You begin by offering online courses that teachers can access throughout the summer. The goal is for teachers to work through the courses at their own pace before coming together on August 25 for a week of pre-service professional growth.

Principals have been through training ahead of time and are prepared to guide the teachers' questions and concerns about the RTI process. To break up the learning curve, each school chooses one major focus they'll bring to RTI adoption in the coming school year. The focus may differ from school to school, but each school must pick one focus together.


During the school year...

Within each school, the principal visits department meetings and facilitates 20-minute break-out sessions with teachers about the RTI initiative. Each break-out session is shared with the rest of the school in the online Team Rooms. This promotes collaborative learning discussions based on the strategies, progress, suggestions and experiences that were shared.

The principal also adds the district-wide RTI goal to the observation and evaluation rubric for the year. He includes the initiative "School RTI Sub-Goals" on informal observations to guide and support feedback conversations with teachers as they progress toward the school and district goals.

Once every semester, the teachers get together for a half-day brain-dump, brainstorm and redirect. They examine school RTI sub-goals and rewrite them

The principal and teachers work together to analyze the data, discuss successes and roadblocks and identify next steps toward their school goal.



What would it look like to apply some of these ideas to professional learning? To move past the sit-and-get workshop?

At year's end...

as needed. The principal and teachers work together to analyze the data, discuss successes and roadblocks and identify next steps toward their school goal, which may include additional online courses or other activities.

Each teacher shares one artifact that showcased the skills he or she mastered this year to support the school's RTI goal.

The day after school lets out, the whole district holds a professional growth day in which the principals share each school's goals and the amazing progress they've made in the district RTI efforts. Teachers are invited to share success stories from their journeys.

Looking to the coming school year, each

Time to apply

The blended learning concept is simple, but it's flexible enough to meet the needs of almost any individual or group. And the benefits are nothing to brush off: time that would have been required to teach a workshop can now be reclaimed (saving money on substitute teachers) or used for collaboration and application.

The search for more effective ways to teach students never ends. You research. You get creative. You lean in, put your weight into it. You do these things because knowledge — and the skills to gain knowledge — equips students for success in life.

What would it look like to apply some of these ideas to professional learning? To move past the sit-and-get workshop? To find creative ways to provide the kind of learning opportunities each individual teacher needs and wants?

Blended professional learning is a great place to start.



Learn More

For more information on how our K-12 solutions can help you

support educator professional learning, please visit:

www.FrontlineEducation.com

About Frontline Education

Frontline Education is the leading provider of school administration software, empowering strategic K-12 leaders with the right tools, data and insights to proactively manage human capital, business operations, student information and special education.

Educational organizations representing over 80,000 schools and millions of educators, administrators and support personnel have partnered with Frontline Education in their efforts to develop the next generation of learners. Frontline is dedicated to driving engagement across K-12 school systems and supporting the continuous improvement of employee effectiveness and efficiency with solutions for proactive recruiting and hiring, absence and time, professional growth, student information systems, special education and Medicaid reimbursement, school health management, payroll, benefits and financial management.

Frontline Education corporate headquarters are in Malvern, PA, with offices in Roseville, CA; Salinas, CA; Andover, MA; Walled Lake, MI; New York, NY; Rockville Centre, NY; Brecksville, OH and Austin, TX.