

Proof Points: Blended Learning Success in School Districts

RANDOLPH CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

Randolph, New York

INTRODUCTION

Randolph Central School District in western New York had been characterized by mediocre academic results until district leaders set out to improve their students' academic performance by implementing a blended-learning program at the elementary school that focused on differentiated instruction. Since implementing the blended program, math scores on state assessments have improved significantly across the board and ELA scores on state assessments are beginning to show improvements in certain areas.

KEY ASPECTS OF BLENDED LEARNING PROGRAM

- District leaders initially implemented blended learning at the elementary school with the primary goal of raising math and ELA scores on state assessments.
- The district changed its approach to teaching and learning by making decisions based on individual student data. Instruction is consistently adjusted to meet individual student needs.
- Teachers create and manage individual learning paths for all K–6 students by differentiating instruction with the help of technology-based diagnostic instruction and adaptive testing.
- Teachers place students in “fluid ability groups” based on individual student data from online diagnostic content and adaptive testing.
- Teachers, administrators, students, and parents communicate constantly to ensure that students are on track and that learning is being tailored to students' individual needs.



District Profile

Randolph Central School District,
Randolph, New York

Small town in western New York

968 students

One PK–6 elementary school, one
combined middle/high school

52% of students qualify for free and
reduced-price lunch

Buffalo Business First ranked
Randolph 91st out of 98 area school
districts for youth poverty and
socioeconomic climate

Blended Learning Success Proof Points

- ✓ Math scores on state assessments in grades 3 through 8 have improved significantly. For example, the percentage of 3rd-grade students scoring at the upper end of the scale (a score of three or four) on the state test went from 56% to 72%. This improvement placed the elementary school at the top of 39 schools in the region.
- ✓ Of the 276 western New York elementary schools ranked by *Buffalo Business First*, Randolph's school rose from 174th to 104th—the second best gain of any elementary school in western New York.
- ✓ Changes in ELA scores on state assessments have been mixed—some grades have improved, but others have stayed flat or declined.

BLENDING LEARNING IN RANDOLPH CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

Randolph Central School District Superintendent Kimberly Moritz knew that change was needed to improve the academic performance of the district. Her first target was to improve math and ELA scores on state assessments by implementing a blended-learning program at the elementary school. She and her team decided that, besides adding technology, the design and creation of the blended program would require numerous changes in instruction, administration, and communication.

When the district looked closely at its students at the beginning of the process, it found that they were being led along a “random path” irrespective of their talents and needs. Some were two or more years behind grade level, whereas others were on grade level or ahead. But all were being taught in classrooms in which teachers had few tools or information to make data-informed decisions that took into account students’ individual needs in order to tailor instruction to each accordingly. In addition, teachers worked in isolation from one another, often with different instructional materials and curriculum.

District leaders inaugurated changes based on the goal of finding new approaches to teaching and evaluation. Math and ELA students in grades K–6 now take online formative assessments and participate in an extra block of academic intervention services as needed. Based on data from these frequent and ongoing assessments, teachers place students in “fluid ability groups” relative to their grade level. In addition to student groupings, teachers use individual student data to differentiate instruction and assign online content. Math and ELA students rotate at the teacher’s discretion between online learning, small-group print materials, and teacher-led instruction. Students use i-Ready and IXL Learning for online content and assessments.

Additional key implementation elements included:

- **Collaborative leadership.** The district characterizes its leadership as “open, honest, transparent, and approachable.” District leaders created program guidelines, which they adjust regularly based on teacher feedback. The process has been collaborative, consistent, and continual.
- **Constant communication.** Communication had to be constant and repetitive with “boorish redundancy.” Communications reached a variety of stakeholders; parents were informed and invited to participate in evening meetings.
- **A focus on data.** Teachers use student data to create fluid, flexible student-ability groupings. They use online content and tools to create and manage student data.
- **Professional development.** District leaders hired professional development support staff to assist teachers in gathering information and facilitating the sharing of findings and teaching experiences.

The blended program at the elementary school has been effective in improving math scores on state assessments. The district expects similar results from ELA, which is already showing signs of improvement. District leaders plan to implement a blended program for writing at the elementary school starting in the 2015–16 school year. They also plan to implement a blended program at the middle school/high school in the near future. Most of the improvement has come from math scores. Changes in ELA scores have been mixed; some grades have improved, but others have stayed flat or declined. Looking to the future, the district will refine its blended-learning program to improve ELA scores and determine how to bring blended learning to its high school as well.

“We use blended learning for all students in several grades...decades of mediocrity provided the control group data. Our program has increased our test scores and improved the ranking of our elementary school among schools in western New York. The changes and improvements would not have been possible without implementing blended learning.”

— Kimberly Moritz, Superintendent,
Randolph Central School District
