Proof Points: Blended Learning Success in School Districts

SPRING CITY ELEMENTARY HYBRID LEARNING SCHOOL

Royerford, Pennsylvania

INTRODUCTION

Spring-Ford Area School District was among the first school districts in the United States to introduce a whole-school, blended-learning program for elementary school-aged children. In Fall 2012, it launched the Spring City Elementary Hybrid Learning School, a community school serving 130 students in grades K–4. District leaders were members of the Pennsylvania Hybrid Learning Institute, a group of educators and blended-learning specialists focused on creating student-centered approaches to learning in Pennsylvania. The school uses the Station Rotation model of blended learning for its core subjects. Since implementing blended learning, the school has seen improved test scores in math, reading, and science.

KEY ASPECTS OF BLENDED LEARNING PROGRAM

- The school uses the Station Rotation model of blended learning. Students rotate every 20 minutes between individual, collaborative, and direct-instruction stations in English language arts, math, science, and social studies classes.

- Students use online curriculum during the individual station, and teachers use data from the online curriculum to create dynamic groupings for the direct-instruction and collaborative stations and then target learning activities accordingly.

- The school implemented blended learning at the start of the 2012–13 school year and slowly phased technology into the classrooms to emphasize that blended learning is an instructional delivery model, not a technology initiative.

- Teachers participated in nine full days of professional development before the launch of the blended-learning program.

Royersford, PA

District Profile

Spring-Ford Area School District, Royersford, Pennsylvania, a suburb of Philadelphia

7,800 students in grades K–12

Twelve schools, including a blended elementary school, virtual school, and career and technical school

The student population is 83% white, 6% Asian, 4% African American, and 3% Latino; 15% of students qualify for free and reduced-price lunch, 17% are in special education, and fewer than 1% are English Language Learners

The district is high performing, with a 94.5% graduation rate

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Blended Learning Success Proof Points

- ✓ The percentage of students scoring at "proficient" or "advanced" levels on the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) improved by at least 19 percentage points in each of reading, math, and science.

- ✓ Students with IEPs had an average increase of 29% in PSSA scores.

BLENDED LEARNING AT SPRING CITY ELEMENTARY HYBRID LEARNING SCHOOL

In Fall 2012, Spring City Elementary Hybrid Learning School implemented a whole-school, blended-learning program. From the onset, school leaders involved all teachers and grade levels in the transformation. Teachers participated in nine full days of professional development to prepare themselves and their classrooms for the transition. Before the school began integrating technology, teachers redesigned the physical layouts of their classrooms to fit the blended model. School and district leaders phased technology slowly into classrooms to emphasize that blended learning is an instructional delivery model, not a technology plan. Each classroom began with just a few tower computers and over time has added computers, tablets, and interactive whiteboards.

The school uses the Station Rotation model of blended learning for its core subjects. Students rotate between three learning stations—individual, collaborative, and direct instruction—every 20 minutes and then change subjects after a full set of rotations. Students spend at least 80% of the school day learning in the blended model and have some control over their pacing when using online curriculum.

Since launching the blended program, school leaders have continued to evaluate the effectiveness of the online curriculum and change products as needed; the school is currently using Compass Learning, Achieve3000, ST Math, Reading Eggs, and Education City. Teachers use data from the online curriculum to target direct instruction and decide on collaborative-learning activities and groupings. Collaborative learning often involves project-based activities that may span several days. Student groupings are fluid and change regularly.

The school's test scores on the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) have risen for all grades and subjects since the implementation of the blended program, with the highest gains for students with IEPs. Between 2013 and 2014, the percentage of students scoring at "proficient" or "advanced" levels on reading scores on the PSSA rose 19 points to 82.9%, math scores rose 24 points to 85.4%, and science scores rose 27 points to 90%. Students with IEPs showed an average increase in PSSA scores of 29%, which is three points higher than the average increase for the total school population.

The test scores of a cohort of students who took the PSSA in 3rd grade in 2013 and in 4th grade in 2014 also show increases, with greater improvements in math than in reading. In math, the number of students scoring at "basic" or "below basic" levels dropped by eight points, and the number of students scoring "proficient" increased by seven points. In reading, the major improvement was in the number of students moving from "proficient" to "advanced": the number of students scoring at "basic" or "below basic" levels dropped by one point, the number of students scoring "proficient" dropped by five points, and the number of students scoring "advanced" increased by five points.

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