

Proof Points: Blended Learning Success in School Districts

HORRY COUNTY SCHOOLS

Conway, South Carolina

INTRODUCTION

Horry County Schools (HCS) began its blended-learning initiative, called the Personalized Digital Learning program, in the 2013–14 school year. The district had previously developed a strong culture of data usage and an emphasis on differentiation in classrooms using online content, which district leaders realized made for a natural transition to blended learning. HCS uses the Northwest Evaluation Association’s (NWEA) Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) and state assessments to track student progress. It began a 1:1 implementation with middle school students in early 2014, which it expanded to include elementary and high school students later that year. Elementary and middle school student growth scores in math and reading have improved since the district began implementing blended learning; these increases have been greatest in middle school, which has had the most comprehensive blended-learning implementation.



District Profile

Horry County Schools,
Conway, South Carolina

42,600 students

Fifty-six schools, including one alternative school and four charter schools

The student population is 64% white, 20% African American, and 9% Hispanic; 63% of students qualify for free and reduced-price lunch, 14% receive special education services, and 7% are English Language Learners

The district graduation rate is 79%

KEY ASPECTS OF BLENDED LEARNING PROGRAM

- Implementation varies slightly between schools because district leaders believe that teachers, school administrators, and students should have a role in determining the blended-learning approach.
- Most schools use either the Station Rotation or Individual Rotation models of blended learning.
- The district uses a variety of online curriculum products, including Achieve3000, ALEKS, Discovery Education Science Techbook, Defined STEM, USA Testprep, Achievement Series, CompassLearning Odyssey, and Gizmos.
- HCS has worked with Education Elements, which has provided a technology platform and assistance with planning and professional development.
- Teachers and administrators participate regularly in professional development to help them understand how to teach effectively in a blended environment. The district also hired six digital integration coaches to work closely with instructional coaches in each building to support blended learning in the classrooms.

Blended Learning Success Proof Points

Percentage of students meeting growth targets by grade level and subject area. Growth targets are determined by the district and based on NWEA MAP scores.

Grade Level	Reading			Math			Language		
	Spring '14*	Spring '15	Change	Spring '14*	Spring '15	Change	Spring '14*	Spring '15	Change
2	61	63	+2	79	77	-2	60	63	+3
3	57	64	+7	70	71	+1	61	64	+3
4	61	58	-3	69	74	+5	64	61	-3
5	64	64	0	72	72	0	66	62	-4
6	51	55	+4	53	56	+3	52	52	0
7	53	63	+10	54	67	+13	60	60	0
8	54	62	+8	60	66	+6	60	58	-2

- Highest level of Personalized Digital Learning implementation: using online content and a computer for each student
- Medium level of Personalized Digital Learning implementation: using online content but without a computer for each student
- Not currently using online content

*2014 is the baseline year because it was the first year in which Horry used the version of MAP aligned to the Common Core.

BLENDING LEARNING AT Horry COUNTY SCHOOLS

Horry County Schools (HCS) is continuing to develop a set of blended-learning options that include the following:

- The ongoing rollout of blended learning in schools through the district-wide Personalized Digital Learning program. The program began in 11 middle schools in early 2014 and has since expanded to include 14 high schools and high school programs and 27 elementary schools.
- HCS is supporting transformation at Whittemore Park Middle School, a low-performing, high-poverty school, by using blended learning in a competency-based learning setting.
- The Horry County Virtual School (HCVS) provides supplemental online courses to high school students for both original credit and credit recovery. In the 2013–14 school year, HCVS had 3,500 course enrollments.

“Blended learning allows us to individualize learning on a daily basis, access data as students are learning, foster student ownership of their learning, and maximize academic learning time.”

— Cindy Ambrose, Chief Academic Officer, Horry County Schools

HCS relies heavily on data from the Northwest Evaluation Association’s (NWEA) Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) and state assessments to differentiate classroom instruction and track student progress. Schools facilitate professional learning communities and collaborative planning sessions to discuss data and student progress, and teachers and administrators collaborate frequently with each other to make meaningful use of student data to improve outcomes.

HCS applied for and received a Next Generation Learning Challenges (NGLC) grant in October 2012 to turn around Whittemore Park Middle School. In Fall 2013, the school implemented the iCAN (individualized, college and career readiness, aspirations of students, and network of support) model designed to blend core subjects and provide an increased level of student support. Fluid groups of about 100 students meet with four academic teachers for five hours each day. During about 75% of that time, students learn using online learning. The school is located in an urban setting, where over 85% of students participate in the free and reduced-price lunch program.

Teachers and administrators across the district participate regularly in professional development to help them understand how to teach effectively in a blended-learning setting. In addition, HCS hired six digital-integration specialists to support existing staff with the blended-learning implementation. Each building has an instructional coach who collaborates with digital-integration and content-learning specialists to support blended learning in the classrooms. Teachers develop lesson plans that detail types of small-group differentiated instruction, collaborative work, and practice and review of concepts using online content, as well as how students will be grouped based on data.

Although the blended-learning program is still relatively new, HCS is beginning to see results in math and reading, according to NWEA MAP Rasch Unit (RIT) scores. This is particularly true for the middle schools, which are the furthest along in implementing blended learning. In middle school reading, the percentage of students meeting district growth targets increased between four and 10 percentage points between Spring 2014 and Spring 2015. In middle school math, the increases during the same time period ranged from three to 13 percentage points. Overall, growth scores for middle school math and reading increased by an average of 7.3 percentage points. In comparison, growth scores in language, which did not use online content, fell by 0.4 percentage points.