Proof Points: Blended Learning Success in School Districts

HAMILTON COUNTY COMMUNITY UNIT SCHOOL DISTRICT 10

McLeansboro, Illinois

INTRODUCTION

Hamilton County Community Unit School District 10 began exploring blended learning during the 2012–13 school year as a way to shift its instructional model from whole-group instruction to personalized learning. The district implemented blended learning at the start of the 2013–14 school year in 2nd-grade math and reading classes; it then expanded the program the following year to include 3rd- and 4th-grade math and reading classes. Teachers of grades 5–8 have also begun blending their classrooms; the district plans to formally support these teachers with blended-learning coaching during the 2015–16 school year. An evaluation based on Northwest Evaluation Association's (NWEA) Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) shows students in grades using blended learning outperforming students in grades not using blended learning.

KEY ASPECTS OF BLENDED LEARNING PROGRAM

- The district uses the Station Rotation model of blended learning in both of its elementary schools. Students rotate between individual, collaborative, and direct-instruction stations in math and reading classes.

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

- Teachers participated in personalized coaching-style professional development based on the Blended Learning Readiness Assessment offered by the Alvo Institute.

- The district uses online content from a variety of vendors including DreamBox Learning, Reading Eggs, Khan Academy, Front Row, and IXL Learning.

McLeansboro, IL

District Profile

Hamilton County Community Unit School District 10, McLeansboro, Illinois

1,240 students

Four schools, including two elementary schools, a preschool, and a junior/senior high school

The student population is 97% white and 1% Hispanic; 51% of students qualify for free and reduced-price lunch, 20% receive special education services, and fewer than 1% are English Language Learners

The district graduation rate is 86%, which matches the state average

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Blended Learning Success Proof Points

Grade levels that blended their math and reading classes outperformed grade levels that used traditional instructional methods during the 2014–15 school year.

- ✓ In math, grades using blended learning outpaced their expected gains by 169%, compared to non-blended grades that outpaced their expected gains by 120%.

- ✓ In reading, grades using blended learning outpaced their expected gains by 130%, compared to non-blended grades that outpaced their expected gains by 107%.

Percentage of Expected Growth Based on NWEA MAP Scores

GRADE	MATH		READING	
	Traditional classes	Blended classes	Traditional classes	Blended classes
K	121%		105%	
1	142%		121%	
2		201%		121%
3		130%		107%
4		176%		163%
5	96%		113%	
6	122%		88%	
Average	120%	169%	107%	130%

BLENDED LEARNING AT HAMILTON COUNTY COMMUNITY UNIT SCHOOL DISTRICT 10

Hamilton County Community Unit School District 10 began exploring blended learning in Winter 2012. At that time, the district's elementary schools employed a conventional whole-group academic model in which students sat at desks facing the front of the classroom as teachers delivered instruction. The district believed that combining its strong instructional staff with quality online content, as well as changing classroom configurations to allow students to work collaboratively with each other, would create personalized learning options for students and increase student achievement.

The district developed its blended-learning program based on several critical factors:

- Implementation began with a well-defined plan and a small initial set of teachers who were comfortable with change and some ambiguity in the plan and process. The district began planning its blended-learning program in Spring 2013. During the summer before the start of the 2013–14 school year, the district held a two-day workshop with the Alvo Institute to explore different blended-learning models and decide what would work best for the district.

- As planning and implementation progressed, teachers regularly met as a team to share ideas and lessons learned. The initial focus was on ensuring that teachers were adept at facilitating small-group instruction. Once that goal was met, teachers and administrators developed a rubric to use when selecting online content.

- In Fall 2013, the district launched the program with four 2nd-grade teachers using blended learning in their classrooms. Based on initial positive results, the district expanded the blended-learning program in Fall 2014 to include four 3rd-grade and four 4th-grade teachers.

- Concurrent with planning and teacher development, the district invested in computers and improved bandwidth. For the 2013–14 school year, the district purchased 100 Chromebooks so that each 2nd grader would have her own computer and implemented infrastructure and bandwidth upgrades to both of its elementary schools. For the 2014–15 school year, the district purchased an additional 200 Chromebooks to allow for a 1:1 student-computer ratio in 3rd- and 4th-grade classrooms as well.

- The change in classroom configurations has been particularly important. Prior to implementing blended learning, all classrooms had students at desks placed in orderly rows facing the front of the room. With the change, all classrooms are now set up in pods of three or four with students sitting in small groups. In some cases, the district has bought new furniture and in other cases, it uses existing tables and chairs to create the pods. In addition, the district has provided teachers in blended classrooms with "kidney" tables that allow them to work with small groups of students while the rest of the class is working in groups or on individualized learning.

Blended learning at Hamilton County Community Unit School District 10 has expanded through a combination of organic and planned growth. The expansion from 2nd grade to 3rd and 4th grades was planned, but some 5th- and 6th-grade teachers began organically using the online content after the district purchased site licenses that covered the entire school. Use of online content is less extensive in 5th and 6th grades because students have limited time on computers (about four hours per week) as a result of the limited number of computers available in 5th- and 6th-grade classrooms. Although the district's initial subject area focus was math and reading, teachers have been applying small-group and individual instructional methods to science and social studies courses as well.

With the implementation of the new academic approach, the leadership team felt that it was important to have a valid measure of student growth throughout the academic year. In Fall 2013, the district used funding from a grant from the James Family Foundation to implement NWEA MAP assessments to monitor student progress in grades K–10. MAP scores quickly became a reliable measure of student growth in blended classes and showed students in blended classrooms outperforming students in traditional classrooms.

The district's teachers and leaders are encouraged by the progress they are seeing with the move to blended learning. The district plans to formally support 5th- and 6th-grade teachers with blended-learning coaching in the 2015–16 school year. Additionally, it is eliminating study halls in the junior high school and instead implementing a blended-learning lab where students will work on online assignments that have been customized based on the instruction they are receiving in their classrooms. Every junior high student will have at least one period in the blended-learning lab.