K-12
BLUEPRINT

A planning resource for personalizing learning

Blended Learning and the Common Core   toolkits

Adhering To Standards Amidst Revolutionary Change

Doing more with less, and making more of *lessons*: this is the reality facing today's educators. And, with education spending scarce as we climb out of a recession, it's unlikely that this state of emergency will change any time soon. Despite the paucity of funds available for educators, there is widespread agreement that college and career readiness—particularly for low-income students—is critical to the future economic health of our society.

Both Race to the Top and the Common Core criteria champion standards that help bridge the gap toward college- and career-readiness. But, despite this, an alarming number of students graduate unprepared for the academic and professional challenges awaiting them.

In this time of technological change and budget shortfalls, administrators and educators are grappling with the implementation of the new Common Core State Standards. How can educators and students realize the promise and potential of the Common Core while our economy teeters on federal and state funding cliffs?

Instead of wasting time and resources assigning blame, our energies are better spent by defining objective standards. A lack of clear standards has been an obstacle to student readiness. With the advent of the Common Core, the limitations of our overburdened and underfunded education system can finally be addressed.

Nearly every state has adopted the Common Core standards. Now it's a question of implementing these higher standards. This involves freeing up more instructional time for already overtaxed educators And, since the funds to hire more educators or stretch out the school calendar simply don't exist, we have to be smarter about implementation—doing more with less— finding innovative solutions to eliminate the readiness gap.

The blended learning model, in its initial adoption phase, has already proved itself as a dynamic way to produce higher levels of achievement for students and improved working conditions for teachers. But how can it help educators adhere to Common Core standards and—more importantly—close the gap between where we are and where we need to be?

Blended learning is a cost-effective strategy that can help students achieve the Common Core within today's financial and time parameters. In fact, Project RED— a national research and advocacy plan to investigate how technology can help us re-engineer our education system—shows an average cost of moving from a traditional 3:1 classroom to a 1:1 classroom of $298 per student per year, with potential savings of more than $400 per student per year. Areas with the potential to generate direct savings include moving to digital materials and online assessments, reducing print and copying budgets, and moving professional development online. Additional savings are more indirect, such as reductions in the cost of post-secondary remediation.

Blended learning promises to revolutionize literacy learning and boost reading growth trajectories by supporting key instructional strategies both in and outside of the classroom.

Lexile® measures, for example, evaluate reading ability and text complexity, enabling the targeting of the reader with text essential for growth. The Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts offers recommended Lexile bands by grade levels that can be incorporated into instruction designed to prepare students for the reading demands of college and careers. Lexile measures are available from nearly 50 popular reading tests and programs, including more than twenty state assessments and the most commonly used norm-referenced and benchmark assessments.

To be ready for college, workforce training, and life in a technological society, students need the ability to: gather, comprehend, evaluate, synthesize, and report on information and ideas; conduct original research in order to answer questions or solve problems; and to analyze an extensive range of texts in media forms old and new. The need to conduct research and to produce and consume media is embedded into every aspect of today's curriculum. Similarly—with blended learning—research and media skills and understandings are embedded throughout the Standards.

This allows growth to be rationalized over each student's educational lifespan: a shared responsibility across the K-12 continuum, as opposed to only in the early elementary years. Policy makers, educators and families can have consistent, objective metrics to monitor progress and forecast growth. This creates the conditions for success.

By the end of the decade, most US schools will fully incorporate instructional technology into their structures and schedules, using predominately digital instructional materials aligned with the Common Core. The learning day and year will be extended. Learning will be more personalized. The reach of effective teachers will be expanded. Blended learning is not just another district initiative: it is a large-scale opportunity to develop schools that are more productive for students by ensuring that the right resources and interventions reach the right students at the right time.

Metrics and research tools have already transformed the way educators think about reading growth and the benefits of matching readers with texts. The Lexile Frameworks for Reading and Writing, for example, are currently being used to power more integrated, interactive utilities: technology-based personalized learning platforms. Teachers and administrators are already embracing these innovative learning systems—which recognize the value of blended learning—. Organizations, including Capstone Digital and Achieve3000, have utilized The Lexile Framework for Reading to offer programs and products that continue to spur the personalized learning movement.

By elegantly blending assessment with daily classroom instruction, technology-based learning platforms can serve as the cornerstone of revolutionary change. They have the potential to personalize the learning process; support teachers in enacting best teaching strategies; and help students meet ambitious and rigorous standards.