

BLENDED LEARNING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: PREPARING TEACHERS FOR THE BLEND

PROPOSAL

“PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT NEEDS TO QUICKLY EVOLVE TO MODEL BEST PRACTICES FOR BLENDED LEARNING, ALLOWING TEACHERS TO EXPERIENCE BLENDED, PERSONALIZED LEARNING THEMSELVES.” (POWELL, 2015)

Background: As a Digital Learning Specialist, one of my primary roles is to design, plan, and facilitate professional learning for teachers in digital tools. Sometimes it is sharing tools to help teachers increase their productivity and other times it is an invitation to change their pedagogical approach. Just last Spring, our school board approved our district’s new Education Technology Plan. Currently, we do not have a clearly defined instructional model for integrating technology, many teachers use technology inconsistently, and as a result see integrating technology as an “add-on” instead of an instructional tool. Some of the major recommendations given in the plan were:



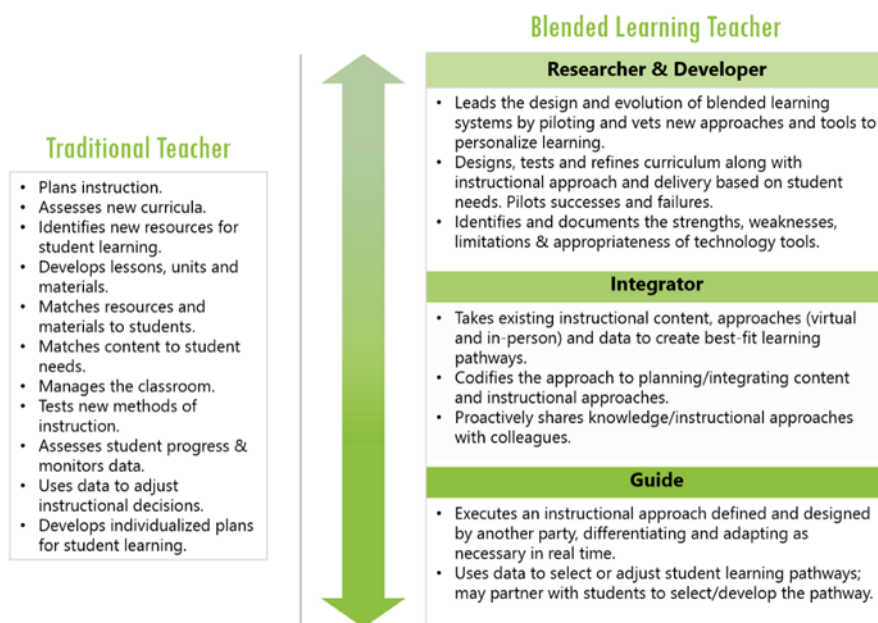
1. Adopt a “blended learning” instructional model as a way to bridge the gap of technology use, technology integration, and to meet the diverse needs of all learners. *(Verbiage taken from strategic plan)*
2. Provide a blended model of training which will consist of online access and face-to-face courses. This can also serve as a way to differentiate the technology training for those that are at different levels. The online portion of this training should be hosted in our learning management system.
3. Implement teacher training and staff development on classroom strategies as well as technology.
4. Implement a Blended Learning Pilot

Given these recommendations, I would like to design a “blended” professional learning course for the teachers in our district.

GOAL: THE GOAL OF THE BLENDED LEARNING COURSE IS TO INSPIRE AND EQUIP TEACHERS TO BE ABLE TO DESIGN AND IMPLEMENT A BLENDED LEARNING MODEL IN THEIR LEARNING ENVIRONMENT.

Proposal: After researching blended learning and professional development. It became clear that one of the greatest needs for a successful blended learning implementation was high quality teacher professional development. One of the reasons for this is because the teachers do not feel comfortable with: creating differentiated, personalized lessons, using data to help tailor instruction, nor having the proper mindsets and qualities for blended learning instruction. The role of the teacher in a blended learning environment varies from the role of the traditional instructor. This is best represented in the visual by The New Teacher Project in a working paper called, Reimagining Teaching in a Blended Classroom, as shown in Figure 1. (TNTP, 2014).

Figure 1. Blended Learning vs. Traditional Teacher Roles



Other organizations like iNACOL have prepared “Blended Learning” implementation guides and when it comes to professional development needs they cite several factors to consider in order to have effective professional development for blended learning instructors. Some of those factors are: a balance between teacher autonomy and a heavy structured program, clear expectations about how to make the most of blended learning in their classrooms, and how to balance online instruction with face- to-face instruction (Powell, 2015). Most importantly, they mention that professional development should “evolve to model the best practices for blended learning, allowing teachers to experience blended, personalized learning themselves (Powell, 2015).

The blended learning course would be designed and developed by the following curriculum departments: Digital Learning, Teacher Development, Curriculum and Instruction. It will also involve the support of some of our other instructional coaches (Special Education, Reading Specialist, ELL support) . We would begin with a blended professional learning course on



blended learning as it would allow this team to dig deeper in the research, models, and best practices of blended learning. It will also give our teachers the opportunity to sit in the learner’s seat of a blended learning course. We would also adhere to the recommendation of implementing a blended learning pilot. The teachers who want to participate in the blended learning pilot (and it would be voluntary) will be the first cohort in the blended learning course. However, this will become a dynamic learning community for them to learn and grow with in this new pedagogical approach. Since they will have chosen this

opportunity, they will also serve as campus leaders and advocates for blended learning as the model is scaled.

As the educators learn in this blended learning format, it will give them the experience of “blended learning” from a learner’s perspective. Then, they will be able to see best practices in “blended learning” modeled and reflect and develop a model that will work best in their own learning environments. This will give them the confidence to implement this new instructional model successfully and with support.

This course is a disruptive innovation in our district because we currently do not offer blended learning professional learning that addresses this area. Some of the “blended” courses we offer are not collaboratively designed with curriculum, teacher development, and are mostly about technology rather than best practices in instructional strategies, strong content area knowledge , and a purposeful integration of technology.

This blended learning course would allow us to design a differentiated course together that could serve as a model and guide for other courses- especially those that are district initiatives like *differentiated instruction*. Since both blended learning and differentiated instruction are districtwide initiatives we will have at least one course available for each core content area.

THE MODEL

For these blended learning professional development courses we will use the “flipped classroom” rotation model. This will be the one that most teachers will find easier to implement and it gives them access to the district’s curriculum and digital learning coaches for professional development and personalized coaching.

We will make approximately 40% of the instructional content online and the other 60% will be face-to-face full group professional development, individual coaching, and small group collaborative activities. This is allowing for differentiation as teachers are able to move along the online instructional content at their own pace. The other online component will be course discussions for teachers to share, collaborate, and support one another. *(Note: One of our upcoming courses will give us the task of designing a professional learning course. I will use that opportunity to build out what this course will actually include.)*

One thing the course will include is the task of creating their own blended learning lesson for their learning environment. This will make the learning more authentic and help them, them modify their existing lessons to one that is suitable for blended learning instruction. At Canyon Ridge High School, they accomplish this by having teachers start with their “golden nugget” lesson – those lessons that they believe were most effective and engaging with their students. This helps them to shift to this new instructional model with less stress and at their own level (Kleber, 2015). Because teachers, like students, will come with varied skill levels and confidence to the professional learning environment this is an opportunity for leadership to model the mindset that makes blended learning so effective. For example, help them keep the focus on what the students need to learn and know, embrace mistakes, move at your own pace, provide support and encouragement, and finally remember that teamwork is critical (Kleber, 2015).

THE TEAM

In order for this to be success we will create a lightweight team comprised of: directors, teacher development coordinators/facilitators, f curriculum coordinators, and digital learning specialists/coordinators. This team will create the structure, guidelines, and content for this blended learning professional learning experience. This team will meet twice a month for 3 months to design and create this professional learning content, and evaluation.



Blended Learning Team:

Stephanie Williams, Executive Director of Academic Services

Susan Voradakis, Director of Curriculum

Lynette Meyer, Director of Digital Learning

Curriculum and Instruction – Helping Teachers/Coordinators

Digital Learning – Specialists/Coordinators

SMART GOAL: THE CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION DEPARTMENT WILL COLLABORATE TO CREATE AT LEAST ONE BLENDED LEARNING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT COURSE FOR EACH CORE CONTENT AREA BY JUNE 2017.

THE MOTIVATORS



District Goal #1: *FBISD will recruit, develop, and retain effective teachers.* Throughout this collaborative professional development courses, we will give teachers the opportunity to experience blended learning from a student perspective. It will also give our departments to create professional learning that has the power to meet teachers where they are and make learning more authentic, differentiated, and flexible to their learning needs. We will also have the teachers create digital portfolios for reflecting on their learning.

District Goal #2. *FBISD will be a collaborative, effective, and efficient community of learners.* Allow teachers to teach in

teams. As we work in teams, we will seek to build teachers' content, pedagogical, and technological knowledge (TPACK). This is going to be ideal when it comes to creating blended learning environments. It's also representative of the CHOMP Framework as mentioned in Blended Learning in Action for professional development. The blended professional learning courses will be collaborative, hands-on, ongoing, promote ways to shift mindsets, and personalized.

THE TIMELINE

The projected time for preparing these blended learning courses is 3 months. After that time, the window will open for teachers to register for their summer professional learning courses. The blended learning course will be one of their options.

THE TOOLS

For this endeavor, we will need the following software:

Schoology (LMS and Blog/Portfolio)

Skype for Business

PowerPoint 2016/Office Mix

Blended Learning in Action (Book)

All teachers will be able to use their district provided laptop and webcam for accessing the online content and creating projects/tasks for the course.

References

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