

FUEL EDUCATION GUIDE

Jumpstart the 2016-2017 School Year

Six Blended Learning Tips from Educators



We asked educators from around the country to offer [practical tips on blended learning](#) that others could take and implement in their schools. We narrowed it down to [six tips](#) and provided additional resources to make it as simple as possible for you to jumpstart blended learning in the new school year.

Why Blended Learning?

This flexible model involves using both online and in-person instruction. Blended learning is available in [different models, like lab rotation and flex](#), but a general example includes having students attend a class taught by a teacher in a traditional classroom setting, while also independently completing online components of the course inside or outside of class. The online and in-person learning experiences are designed to parallel and complement one another. Blended learning provides administrators and teachers diverse ways to meet students' needs and improve their outcomes.

Advances in technology-supported learning are transforming the one-size-fits-all school model, broadening its ability to reach young minds. After incorporating changes beyond a traditional approach to learning, schools have found that [blended learning](#) offered students flexibility, rigor, and personalized learning in a 21st-century classroom.

The following is a selection of strategies, personal experiences, and top tips from educators that can help you a strong start for the new school year.

“Blended learning provides administrators and teachers diverse ways to meet students’ needs and improve their outcomes.”



Stories from Schools that Have Implemented Blended Learning

The Benefits of Change and Shifting Paradigms

I'm part of a blended learning initiative in my district that is encouraging teachers to move toward a student-centered model. I can say now, after nearly two years of putting the pieces in place to implement these changes, my students have benefited and I feel like I'm a better teacher for it. Change is good and modeling adaptability to your students is the right place to start. We all recognize the need to create relationships and bond with students. This [blended model](#), which incorporates individualized learning, provides greater opportunity for that outcome. I'm able to move around my class and interact with students who are also engaged with one another. To be successful, some important shifts in both teacher and student paradigms must occur:

For the Students

- Show respect and be patient with each other and the learning process.
- Listen, then respond.
- Be open to criticism, and critique someone from the perspective of that individual. (We do a lot of debate and discussion, openly and via discussion boards.)

For the Teacher

- Have high expectations of the students and implement rigor in all facets of the class.
- Move emphasis away from achieving grades and [focus on mastery](#). Emphasize learning as the goal, not the grade.
- Assess students' abilities by having them demonstrate their knowledge (i.e., have them teach concepts to each other).

—STEVE PENLEY
BUSINESS EDUCATION PROFESSIONAL
INDIAN PRAIRIE SCHOOL DISTRICT



Discover how [blended learning](#) offers flexible solutions that can be customized for your district and school needs. [Watch this video on Evergreen Public Schools](#) to see successful blended learning options in action.



Stories from Schools that Have Implemented Blended Learning

Meet the Students Where They Are

At ASF, we have been employing blended learning strategies to better differentiate instruction and meet the needs of our diverse learners. Embedding technology into daily instruction requires teachers to manage classrooms differently, with a focus on small group instruction and rotations. Teachers are able to meet with groups of students while other students work either independently using technology or in small groups. In our current model, students use iPads and laptops to access standards-based programs focused on the development of students' reading and mathematics skills. These programs meet the children where they are and take a systematic approach to build upon what students already know and are able to do. The focus is on mastery and the data shows tremendous growth in students who use the programs on a daily basis.

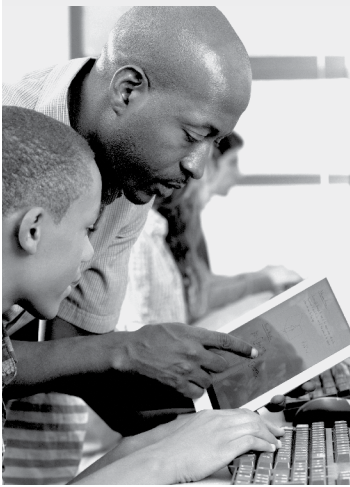
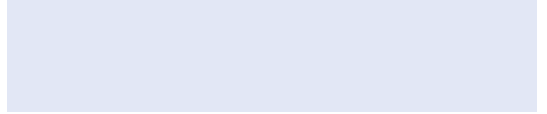
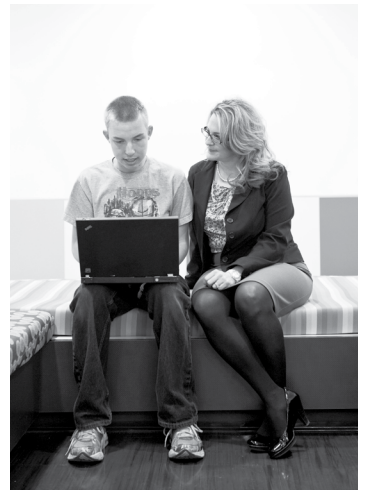
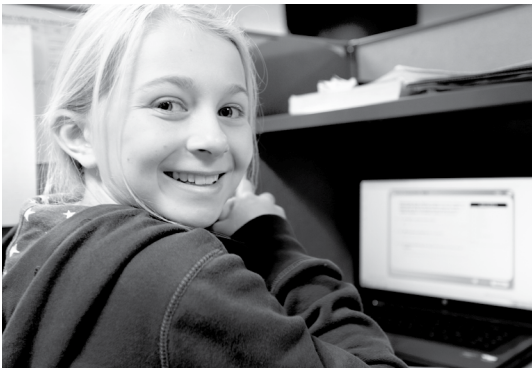
—CYNTHIA SCHELLER
PRINCIPAL
ALAN SHAWN FEINSTEIN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL



“... meet the children where they are ... The focus is on mastery and the data shows tremendous growth in students ...”



Learn how blended learning programs can extend education opportunities for your students. Download [How to Successfully Scale Personalized Learning: Six Key Lessons from Effective Programs](#).



MAKE PERSONAL CONNECTIONS

Unlike a traditional classroom, in a blended learning model, some of a student's time is spent outside of the classroom, resulting in fewer opportunities to establish relationships with peers and instructors. It's important to quickly make a personal connection with students so they feel engaged and comfortable asking questions to keep them on track with assignments. While blended learning affords a lot of opportunity to engage students in project-based learning and provide exposure to real world situations, it's important not to forget that connection with people is an integral part of any learning environment.

Following are a few examples from other educators who have successfully established a personal connection with students in a blended environment, which is critical to academic success.



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“I have had dynamic success in my classroom by incorporating culturally responsive teaching pedagogy.”

—MEGAN S. WEDDERBURN
4TH GRADE TEACHER, DOWA YALANNE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

The Expectations Diagnosis

In my research, I've found that 50 percent of students don't trust their teacher or the other students. This lack of trust can greatly impact learning. Also, most classrooms today have students from very different backgrounds, which will create different student expectations for the teacher.

Here is a technique I used as a teacher to build trust and learn about my students' backgrounds and expectations. I call it the "Expectations Diagnosis."



Give students three 3 x 5 index cards. Ask them to list one rule on each card to help manage behavior in the classroom.



Sort the cards into common piles.



Enter the most frequently mentioned rules on a chart. The chart should contain at least ten rules. (More can be added, but the more rules you have, the more difficult teacher enforcement becomes.)

If a teacher wants a rule that has not been identified, he or she can add it to the chart. Students will never know the teacher included that rule. (One rule students usually don't offer is, "Turn in homework on time.")



"... build trust
and learn
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and expectations."

The same technique can be used to find out what students expect of their teacher. Give your students three 3 x 5 cards and ask them, "What do you expect of me as your teacher?" With the variety of student backgrounds, a teacher might be surprised by their expectations. These two activities build trust because teachers can show they care about the students, they're listening to them, they trust them, and they are there to meet their needs.

—DR. CLETUS R. BULACH
CEO, PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND ASSESSMENT CENTER

Shift to the Positive

A great English teacher I know has her students work on Gratitude Journals. She takes the typical writing assignment, like “What I did for summer,” and makes a simple change such as “Who did something really wonderful for you this summer?” or “What are you grateful for now that you’re back at school?” Making little shifts in creating a positive school environment can help engage students.

—HEATHER HIEBSCH
PRINCIPAL
GLOBAL ACADEMY, Poudre School District*

*Middle school students averaged more than 200 percent of typical growth in math and reading in 2015 on NWEA MAP assessments.

Connect on a Student’s Level

I’ve taught high school history for 20 years, mostly in an urban setting. I’ve found students want to learn. I have also found that positive connections and relationships go hand-in-hand with all types of learning. When I speak directly to teenagers and not talk down to them or about them, I get better results and their level of learning increases. Students have to have trust. When I work with a student one-to-one, the level of learning and understanding goes even further than one might expect.

—GARY BOISSEAU, MEd
HISTORY TEACHER
SPRINGFIELD CENTRAL HIGH SCHOOL

Turn the Tables in Learning

Teachers need to turn the tables and involve students in their learning experiences and to work cooperatively with each other. Encourage students to ask how and why questions (as opposed to when, where, who, or what) and have other students respond. The teacher needs to guide the questions to enhance critical thinking. And, of course, we should not forget [project-based learning](#)—one of the best ways to engage students and keep them motivated.

—MERVAT ALY
TEACHER
ALUM ROCK SCHOOL DISTRICT

Promote a Sense of School Affiliation

Students need to feel an affiliation with their school, especially in a blended learning program that may not be considered by the students as part of the larger school district. A freshman in high school told the staff she loved our online school. This student had been in other online schools her entire school career. We as a staff were just starting to talk about student engagement, affiliation, and the affective needs of our students. We asked her, “What is it, what did you love?” We were expecting an answer about our amazing instruction, or the level of engagement she had in math. She said, “You guys have sweatshirts! I finally have a school sweatshirt.” And it hit us; that’s exactly what our kids wanted. They wanted to belong to a school, to be part of a learning community—but they still wanted the flexibility, self-pacing, and technology of an online school.

—HEATHER HIEBSCH

GIVE STUDENTS CHOICES

Most educators can agree that a one-size-fits-all model is not the best approach to education. Each student learns differently and absorbs information at a different rate. Blended learning provides students with flexibility in terms of path, pace, and schedule. It also gives students expanded opportunities in what courses they can participate in for unique learning experiences in line with their needs and interests. As for administrators, blended learning provides a variety of program options that will improve their school offerings while empowering their students' growth as independent learners.

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“Whenever possible, I give students choices in assignment, topic, and medium.”

—TONIA KIRBY
TEACHER, CHAMPAIGN UNIT 4 SCHOOLS

Let Students Have Their Say

Make students part of the planning. Allow students to have a say in what they would like to learn (subject level), aspects of a lesson plan they find interesting (differentiation), and how they would like to be assessed (alternate assessments). I suspect this would lead to discussions about multidisciplinary topics, as well as students learning and working across grade boundaries.

—JOHN FAIG, CFA
DIRECTOR OF TECHNOLOGY
SAINT PATRICK'S EPISCOPAL DAY SCHOOL

Encourage Autonomous Learning

I believe our emphasis should be on forming autonomous learners. The more responsibility and autonomy students are given, the more intrinsically motivated they become. We are a middle school, and we know that high school is a much different environment. We focus on helping students experience autonomy in their learning—because without this skill, most likely they will not be successful in high school. I recommend teaching skills to self-regulate learning. Leave room for implicit learning and slowly remove crutches. [Genius Hour](#)* is also a great idea!

*Genius Hour is a movement that allows students to explore their own passions and encourages creativity in the classroom. It provides students a choice in what they learn during a set period of time during school.

—DAVID PALANK
PRINCIPAL
SAN MIGUEL SCHOOL DC

Offer Students Flexibility

We know it may not necessarily work well for students to be in a typical school building atmosphere, so our district provides a lot of alternative programs. I teach middle school language arts and our program provides a great opportunity for students to learn content effectively online. They have flexibility to learn at any point during the day depending on their schedule. Students really enjoy that flexibility.

—ADAM AGUILERA
LANGUAGE ARTS-ENGLISH TEACHER
EVERGREEN SCHOOL DISTRICT

Expand Your School's Course Offerings

In a small school, we couldn't provide the full course catalog that other comprehensive high schools offer, so we decided to [give students a virtual option](#). In our brick-and-mortar classes, students can take Spanish and American Sign Language as components to graduate. We also decided to offer them French, German, and Chinese as online courses with [Fuel Education](#). Students like the options of using online courses to continue their chosen language. Also, if they don't have room in their schedule for a certain class, then the online course gives them options to take it after school or they can expand their course load and go beyond what's available in the brick-and-mortar setting.

—JULIE TUMELTY
PRINCIPAL
HENRIETTA LACKS HIGH SCHOOL

OFFER PERSONALIZED LEARNING EXPERIENCES

Just as you can personalize your order at Starbucks, students should be afforded the same opportunity with their learning experiences. Not all students learn the same way; consequently, having a curriculum customized to their needs produces better student outcomes. Tiered lessons, flexible grouping, and the Harkness model are some of the methods the educators we spoke to suggested as ways to personalize learning experiences. In addition, recognizing the need for differentiation, educators shared the ways they are embracing change to offer students an individualized approach to their education.



Are you looking for a way to personalize, integrate, and manage your online learning programs? Find out more about [PEAK](#), Fuel Education's award-winning, open technology platform. Or [take a demo](#).



Focus on Differentiated Instruction

My major focus is differentiated instruction. A [tiered lesson](#) prepared at the level of readiness for high, middle, and low learners allows students to learn the objective at their level. The tiered lesson could be a leveled text reading. I also like taking this one step further by [flexible grouping](#) the students. This involves having the high, middle, and low learners work together on a task after they complete a tiered objective.

—PETER HOOKE
TEACHER
PASSAIC COUNTY EDUCATIONAL
SERVICES COMMISSION

Differentiate and Assess

Differentiation, creating both [formative](#) and deconstructed assessments (tailoring them to the children), and exposing students to various strategies as well as student-created strategies enables them to decide what works best for them. Students love having choices and holding themselves accountable for monitoring their success.

—MARIA AMAVISCA
4TH GRADE TEACHER
GLENDALE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL DISTRICT

Transition into New Areas of Learning

I'm a teacher at a small Christian private school that offered a traditional pre-K through 6th grade program. We were experiencing reductions in staff because of lower enrollment, competition from larger private schools, and our books and resources were out-of-date. We transitioned to the [PEAK program through FuelEd](#) and that has opened up [a huge variety of course options](#) for us. For example, my math students can be enrolled in several different courses at once, from basic math to Algebra I. The curriculum and resources are all online, they're up-to-date, and are state aligned. As a mentor teacher in the classroom, I work one-to-one with the students and help support and facilitate their online learning. I can also personalize learning by selecting, deleting, or modifying assignments in the curriculum that will work best for each student. Our school began by offering 7th and 8th grade online learning and is now expanding to online high school.

—CATHY BUTTERWORTH
MENTOR TEACHER
BELVOIR CHRISTIAN ACADEMY

INTEGRATE TECHNOLOGY

Today's technology-savvy generation—from pre-elementary to high school—seeks opportunities to use digital tools. In a blended model, technology is incorporated into lessons to enhance learning with real-world visuals to make them more relevant.

By incorporating technology into the learning experience, students gain 21st-century skills to help them prepare for the workplace.

Read on to see how educators are leveraging blended learning's combination of in-person instruction and the latest developments in [online technologies](#) to allow students to learn in the ways that fit them best.



“I asked one of my 5th-graders how to improve learning and she said, ‘Use more technology.’ ”

—PAMELA REDD
PRINCIPAL, SPRING BRANCH ISD

Here's What Students Are Saying

In this Speak Up flyer, students share their thoughts as today's digital learners: [Ten Things Everyone Should Know about K-12 Students' Digital Learning](#). The stats are pretty eye-opening, like 46 percent of high schoolers use Twitter, and two-thirds of students want to use digital games in school because they make understanding concepts easier.

—KELLY HOULE
EDUCATION CONSULTANT
FUEL EDUCATION

Show Students How to Use Social Media Safely

When I first started teaching with technology, I didn't let my students use social media because we'd had some instances of online bullying. But then, as I started to warm up to social platforms, I actually started using them in the classroom. Last week, I had a major assessment due and I had some of my students who were absent from school on Google+ with the students who were in school. Together they reviewed the concepts that were going to be on the test. I was also on the Google+ platform with them to monitor what was said. The students were able to use the platform productively and in a positive way. If I were to give one tip on how to use technology in the classroom, I would say show your students how to use social platforms in a safe and productive way to get academic results.

—JOSH YOUNG
MIDDLE SCHOOL LANGUAGE ARTS
TEACHER IN MARYLAND

Align Assessments to 21st-Century Skills

I've changed my assessments to align with 21st-century skills. This year in my language arts class, I incorporated more digital technologies. In my research unit, I didn't just have my students create a research paper; instead, they created a group research paper along with a website. They shared their website with other students, teachers, and their family members. Next year, instead of having students write the typical personal narrative, I plan on having them make autobiographical documentaries. Using a personal narrative script they've written, students will record themselves using their phones or other technology in class and then they'll piece together a video. I'm hoping to publish those videos on YouTube or on a group vlog, some place where students can share their writings and videos with larger audiences.

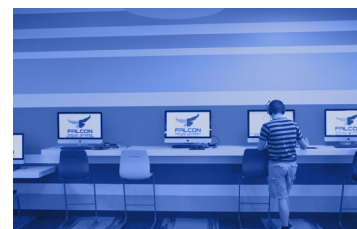
—JOSH YOUNG

CREATE A COLLABORATIVE SPACE

The physical environment is one of the noticeable differences in most blended learning schools. By having a “Starbucks meets Google” setting (demonstrated in the video below), blended learning promotes an environment of collaboration in stark contrast to traditional schools where students sit in rows with the teacher at the head of the class. From [station rotation to flex to flipped](#), the model you choose will determine how to configure the classroom.



View this video from Springs Studio for Academic Excellence (formerly Falcon Virtual Academy) to see their “Starbucks meets Google” blended learning environment.



Configure Seating for Optimum Learning

In the blended learning format—depending on the lesson, activities, and objective for the day—I may set up my classroom in pods (four desks per pod) to facilitate pair-and-share and small group work. For large group discussion, student presentations, etc., I set up stadium seating. For assessments (even though most are online), I arrange the room in traditional rows to reduce cross talk and roaming eyes. Two to three days after assessments, some students will be involved in credit recovery (demonstrating mastery) so the room can be set up in a combination of these arrangements to accommodate the many facets employed on that day. It took a few weeks for the kids to get used to the changing set up, but now they’ve adjusted, and they move easily to their respective areas, including choosing partners and groups to expand their learning.

—STEVE PENLEY

Address Personalities, Intelligences, and Effort

There’s no one way to improve learning. Each student comes with his or her own personality, intelligences, and work ethic. As a teacher, my responsibility is to know each student in these ways. To help them, I tailor learning experiences that address personality (introvert-extrovert), help to build upon existing intelligences and strengthen weak ones, and stress the importance of consistent effort. For differentiation, our math curriculum comes with many online options. And my classroom is arranged in a [Harkness model](#), which fosters discussion-based, student-centered learning. I am a facilitator of their learning. Students who learn better without constant collaboration are given the space to be creative in solitude. Those who seek peer input and discussion are encouraged to do so. Mistakes are celebrated. Risks, stretches, and challenges are part of the everyday classroom. As a middle school teacher, the [growth mindset](#) is a huge part of my philosophy.

—EILEEN FINNEY
MATHEMATICS TEACHER
THE ARCHER SCHOOL FOR GIRLS

DEVELOP EDUCATORS WHO MODEL LEARNING

While technology continues to change the look of today's schools, one thing remains the same—the need for quality educators. For educators who embrace blended learning, [professional development](#) is key to providing effective learning experiences. The teaching style in a blended learning environment is very different from the traditional teaching role. Teachers are facilitators and orchestrators, stepping in where needed, as opposed to acting as instructors. And, as the educators we spoke to shared, they must hold a common passion for learning, personal growth, and making a difference in children's lives.



Discover [blended learning forums and symposiums](#) where educators learn about best practices and evolving trends.

Be Open to Change

As educators, I think we need to be open to change, willing to step outside our comfort zone, and not fall in the trap of complacency. Just because we always did it this way doesn't mean it's the right way to do it for kids today. If we're not taking risks, how can we expect our students to do this in their learning? We have to model our expectations for learning so students have concrete examples of what they should be doing to take ownership of their learning.

—TINA MITCHELL, EdD
PRINCIPAL, ADJUNCT PROFESSOR, CONSULTANT

Stride with the Times

We improve learning—and teaching—by never resting. In other words, the education field is moving just as fast as the world, and what was new yesterday will be old tomorrow. While I do believe we should evaluate all our learning tools so we don't discard the best regardless of age, I also know we can no longer say we have all we need. Thankfully, obviously, we have information at our fingertips in a way we have never had before. What strides we're making in teaching!

—MARYALICE LEISTER
EDUCATOR, WRITER, INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGNER

Keep Growing Personally


My desire to continue improving has to be the single most helpful trait in my quest to help students learn in my classroom. I have never stopped taking more courses or sitting in on peers who are trying new methods or ideas in the classroom. I freely admit that I do not know it all, and when there is an opportunity to learn more, I leap at it. It keeps me fresh as well as on top of the newest technology. I even ask the students to wow me with the latest educational technology they find through their own networking. Keeping it new and fresh in my classroom benefits all of us.

—PHILLIPS SEAN
HIGH SCHOOL SOCIAL STUDIES TEACHER
BLISSFIELD COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

Develop a Professional Learning Community

I feel we need intra- and inter-departmental and cross-curricular conversations. We need time to meet with openness and honesty in [professional learning communities](#) so we can plan and develop new approaches to instruction. Most teachers work in isolation and meet for their weekly or monthly department gathering without having a real discussion about best practices. I believe we must move to a bigger vision of instruction in which all teachers are respected for their voice and vision.

—SUSAN TWIGG
TEACHER
MARYLAND SCHOOLS



We hope this paper provided you with an effective starting place to find out about blended learning and to get excited about its possibilities for creating better outcomes for the students you serve.

Transitioning to a blended learning model won't happen overnight. It requires rethinking the education experience to create environments, instructional models, and technologies that seamlessly operate to create personalized learning experiences for students. However, incorporating elements of blended learning into your classroom requires less time and effort than you may think. We'd love to discuss your needs and the solutions we have available to meet them. And, for those who have already implemented blended learning, we offer strategic ways to enhance your existing programs.

We welcome you to continue the conversation at “Blended Learning for K–12,” our [LinkedIn Group](#) and our [Fuel Education Blog](#).

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