Master's Theses & Capstone Projects   Education

Summer 2020

Blended Learning and Return to Learn Plan

Erin Lorch

Blended Learning and Return to Learn Plan

Erin Lorch

Northwestern College

A School Improvement Project Presented

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Master of Education

Table of Contents

Abstract

The purpose of the school improvement project was to determine the importance of blended

learning, especially in relationship with the impact the COVID-19 pandemic has had on schools.

An extensive review of literature on blended learning is provided, along with a comprehensive

Return to Learn created by a task force from Sheldon High School, a public school located in

Northwest Iowa. The task force was made up of leaders and administrators that collaborated

virtually and created plans for the next school year that incorporated blended learning. The

review of literature provided current research and potential strategies to implement technology.

A comprehensive definition of blended learning, along with the various types of blended

learning, benefits of blended learning, and implementation steps for blended learning are also

included in the review of literature. The Return to Learn plan consisted of three possible options

for teaching in the fall based on the situation of COVID-19 at that time. The options included

on-site learning, hybrid learning, and remote learning, along with remediation strategies for

students. Finally, the comprehensive Return to Learn plan included expectations for teachers,

students, communication between home and school, the delivery platform for online learning,

professional development for teachers, and support for stakeholders.

Key words: blended learning, COVID-19, Return to Learn, technology

Blended Learning and Return to Learn Plan

Introduction

Blended learning is more relevant today than it ever has been. Blended learning is the usage of technology to enhance learning, both in the brick-and-mortar school building and online. Blended learning improves learning outcomes and student engagement. Therefore, courses that are designed with blended learning strategies have higher success rates than face-to-face courses and fully online courses (Megeid, 2014). Blended learning is extremely relevant due to the impact COVID-19 has made on education across the globe. For students to have success in remote learning, blended learning activities must be provided to directly respond to the global concern of COVID-19 and its effects on education.

In March 2020, COVID-19, the deadly virus, and its devastating consequences, became a predominant issue on the news, social media, and conversation. In Sheldon, Iowa, some residents were very alarmed at the possibility of this virus affecting U.S. citizens on U.S. soil, while others thought it was merely a hoax. Sheldon High School, like all schools in Iowa, was unprepared when Governor Kim Reynolds made the recommendation to close school buildings due to the concern of COVID-19 affecting schools for the remainder of the 2019-2020 school year.

As the 2020 school year is set to begin in August 2020, all schools in the state of Iowa are required to submit to the Iowa Department of Education a Return to Learn plan in order to meet the needs of each school district. Alijani (2014) and her team researched how public schools in New Orleans coped after Hurricane Katrina. After Hurricane Katrina, public schools implemented and studied blended learning after this tragedy. A study by Alijani (2014) determined that about 50% of educators surveyed agreed that blended learning provided higher

quality instructional methods than traditional face-to-face instruction. In the same study, a

majority of the respondents indicated that blended learning had the propensity to increase scholar

success (Alijani, et al., 2014). Like schools in New Orleans, Sheldon High School will

implement blended learning strategies to teach students during this global pandemic. The Return

to Learn plan will also state what digital tools need to be incorporated in the 2020-2021 school

year in preparation for restrictions placed by the Iowa Department of Education due to COVID-

19.

   Intentional academic planning incorporating digital tools has always been recommended,

but is now required due to the pandemic. Mortera-Gutierrez (2006) said that one of the worst

practices that was problematic for e-learning was solely utilizing the e-learning platform, such as

BlackBoard, as the virtual space of blended learning courses. Without the incorporation of face-

to-face learning elements, blended learning did not take place (Mortera-Gutierrez, 2006). This

information is urgent and crucial to all teachers since it asks them to make important changes to

incorporate the best of both face-to-face and digital learning strategies.

   As part of the school improvement project, a review of literature was conducted. The

purpose of the included review of literature was to inform and educate the task force on blended

learning. It defined blended learning and provided examples of various types of blended

learning. Examples of the benefits of blended learning and how to implement it in multiple

settings are explained. The goal was to provide solutions for Sheldon High School to ensure

learning is continual next school year as the world learns to adapt to the conditions of the global

pandemic.

Review of Literature

Blended Learning Definition

Blended learning is defined as an approach in education that combines both the traditional on-site classroom methods along with interactive online tools (Smith, B. & Brame, C., 2015). Blended learning requires traditional face-to-face presence of both the educator and his or her students along with the use of digital tools. The time and location of when and where the educator and his or her students gather is flexible.   Up until March 2020, students in public schools learned on-site in a school building with educators five days a week for up to eight hours per day. There, students had face-to-face interaction with peers and teachers in a structured environment. Learning materials and tools were provided.   Current research states that blended learning can take place both inside and outside of the walls of classrooms, as well as beyond the average time frame schools are normally in session (Acree, L., et al., 2017).

Recent studies provide insight on the importance of implementing technology into learning. The United States Department of Education completed a study focusing on online learning in K-12 schools from 1996-2008. Researchers found that students performed better, on average, in a remote, online setting than those learning the same content in on-site face-to-face instruction (Smith & Brame, 2015). Means, et. al (2010) agreed with Smith and Brame (2015) that students performed better using online tools. However, Means, et. al (2010) went a step further and proved that blended learning had a larger advantage than purely online instruction (Means, et. al, 2010). According to Antoniou and Ioannou (2018), students trusted technology and considered it an appropriate channel for addressing relevant issues (Antoniou & Ioannou, 2018). Blended learning incorporates the best of face-to-face and technology tools for students in the 21st century.

Types of Blended Learning

Blended learning includes both face-to-face and online elements. There are a number of recognized models of blended learning. According to Acree (2017), there are four effective models of blended learning called the Rotation model, Flex model, A la carte model, and Enriched virtual model (Acree, L., et al., 2017). In addition, Malczyk (2018) has created another blended learning model called the Hybrid format model (Malczyk, 2018).

During the Rotation model, the teacher rotates students between online and face-to-face learning (Acree, L., et al., 2017). There are four sub-models within the Rotation model called Station Rotation, Lab Rotation, Flipped Classroom, and Individual Rotation. In this model, most of the learning takes place in an on-site setting while homework is remote. There are various ways to go about this. One way is through a flipped classroom model, where students engage in learning online prior to classroom activities. In summary, new learning happens independently online and practice takes place collectively in the classroom (Acree, L., et al., 2017).

Student learning takes place online while using the Flex model, except the course is taken online and support is provided as needed by teachers in the school building (Acree, L., et al., 2017). The A la carte model provides both school building and online learning platforms. Students take an online course that compliments the course that is taken in the school building. The online teacher, however, is the one keeping record of students' work (Acree, L., et al., 2017). In the Enriched virtual model, students attend at least one face-to face meeting and then do the coursework at an individualized pace online (Acree, L., et al., 2017).

Malczyk (2018) created a student-centered model of blended learning called the Hybrid format model. Rather than teachers differentiating instruction for the students, students dictate how instruction will be differentiated in a blended course (Malczyk, 2018). Students in a

multimodal course choose to participate in learning activities synchronously online, asynchronously online, or face-to-face on a weekly basis (Malczyk, 2018). The Hybrid formal model aligns with current trends in higher education and global current events.

Acree (2017) and Malczyk (2018) differ in models of blended learning. Malczyk's (2018) model is student-centered which comes from the constructivist theory that students are constructors of knowledge while the teacher functions more like a facilitator. An educator remains the authority figure in both a student-centered and teacher-centered classroom. Acree's (2017) four models are more teacher-centered. This educational approach has traditional roots where the teachers instruct while the students listen. Little to no collaboration takes place when this theory is strictly implemented. Blended learning is highly adaptable and reflects the needs of individual learners. Educators across the globe need to be prepared for various instruction scenarios. Individual schools and districts can determine which model of blended learning would be most appropriate for their students.

Benefits of Blended Learning

Recent studies have proved that blended learning has a plethora of advantages for 21st century learners. First, blended learning is flexible for all learners (Megeid, 2014). This is extremely beneficial for students in subgroups, such as students with learning disabilities or English learner (EL) students. Blended learning gives students some control over the pace of learning, as well as the ability to learn remotely. It also provides a more comprehensive understanding of any course's content. Another benefit for students is the ability to interact with teachers and peers regardless of location. It also incorporates digital tools which students typically prefer (Megeid, 2014).

Blended learning has advantages for educators. First, by using more digital tools, there are little to no printed materials. It is more efficient and organized to keep assignments and materials in a digital format rather than keeping track of paper materials. Online learning platforms, such as Google Classroom, collect and compile data in a reader friendly format on which students have participated and which students have incomplete work. By providing assessments online, immediate feedback can be given when the answer key is provided by the educator, which is a time effective element. Assessment That Matters, authored by Meldrum (2018), has an intended audience of educators who intend to integrate technology into assessments. The point of Meldrum's (2018) text is that educators can transform students' learning experiences by providing meaningful experiences with the use of technology in conjunction with face-to-face instruction (Sabourin, 2018). Technology allows learning to take place anywhere, both on-site or in remote learning spaces.

Implementing Blended Learning

Kevin Oakes and David Green (2003) run Click2Learn, an organization that designs and develops blended learning solutions. According to Oakes and Casewit (2003), blended learning has been in existence for years prior to technological advancements that are currently in place (Oakes & Casewit, 2003). In the traditional model of teaching, students learn through a passive role in the classroom by sitting quietly, listening, and taking notes from educators' lectures. After school, students complete homework outside of the classroom. This mode of teaching and learning lacks authentic learning experiences, due to the absence of technology. It also fails in being student-centered. Educators need to match the right delivery methods to learners' needs (Oakes & Casewit, 2003). Together with Thomson NETg, Oakes & Casewit (2003) conducted research to prove that a robust blended approach would maximize the return of investment of a

complete curriculum. They found that blended learning generated a 30% increase in performance accuracy and 41% increase in performance speed (Oakes & Casewit, 2003). Learners can be more successful with the help of new technology and differentiated methods of instruction to meet various needs. Some may argue, like Oakes and Casewit have presented, that blended learning is already happening in the traditional school fashion of lecturing to students and then having them read or respond to a multiple choice quiz. However, in a blended-learning environment, the learning is student-centered and offers both teacher and student various ways of delivering and receiving information with both face-to-face instruction and even remote learning through the use of technology.

In order to incorporate blended learning, students and teachers must have access to technology. Experts state that in order to implement technology effectively, it must go in phases. This could be up to five years for proper implementation. Southeast Missouri State University's College of Education implemented the 1:1 technology initiative in the Teacher Education Program to research and study how to plan and implement the 1:1 technology initiative. The goal of EDvolution, this 2014 study, was to prepare their students for their future classrooms as well as be a resource for other institutions and local schools who had yet to have implemented 1:1. In summary, they found the importance of communicating clear goals, stakeholder investment, adequate training, appropriate infrastructure, and sustainability (Fridley & Rogers-Adkinson, 2015). The first phase of implementation during years one and two was when technology was used as a learning tool with regular staff and student meetings to continue learning about educational apps and general questions for both students and teachers (Fridley & Rogers-Adkinson, 2015). The second phase during years two and three was to use technology in order for students to collaborate for classroom instructions (Fridley & Rogers-Adkinson, 2015).

Teachers have collaborated using digital tools for committees, curriculum planning, and other necessary work tasks. The final phase during years three and four was to use technology to enhance the learning opportunities (Fridley & Rogers-Adkinson, 2015).

Educators, students, and parents of students need to be provided training and support to avoid confusion. Digital literacy is necessary in today's digital world. Blended learning has allowed for strong educational and social-emotional practices. Educators that have utilized technology have enhanced and transformed traditional classroom activities and assignments (McGinnis, 2019). Technology has not replaced the role of educators in the classroom. Educators have provided a safe, inclusive, and engaging learning environment with on-site learning with the help of technology.   The investment in time and technology has allowed for proper implementation and informed decision making among educators, especially during these uncertain times.

The Shell Exploration and Production business and researchers Collis, et al. (2005) from the University of Twente collaborated to study the implementation of blended learning practices in a corporate setting. Rather than integrating outside online courses or independent study opportunities, work-based activities were created that also incorporated digital tools online within the Shell Exploration and Production business. Shell Exploration and Production found value in the employees learning from one another and inside of the company. The goal was for employees to take an active, rather than passive, role in learning (Collis, et al., 2005). Blended learning was implemented successfully and it gave the employees an active role in the professional development program and training. Learners in the work force and schools need to be engaged in solving real-world problems (Collis, et al., 2005). Authentic learning in the 21st century ought to involve the use of technology and face-to-face interaction for meaningful work.

This format of blended learning causes a shift where the work is hands on and authentic due to its learner-centered model.

McGinnis (2019) is a proponent of the SAMR model. The SAMR model is a framework created by Dr. Ruben Puentedura. It provided four degrees of classroom technology integration (McGinnis, 2019). The four degrees are called Substitution, Augmentation, Modification, and Redefinition (McGinnis, 2019). Substitution and Augmentation have enhanced the original assignment created without technology in mind. The degrees of Modification and Redefinition have transformed the original task and have provided the most authentic tasks for students. Technology tools have transformed learning. McGinnis (2019) discovered increased student engagement and student achievement, especially among at-risk students during the implementation of the SAMR model (McGinnis, 2019). Educators that have utilized the SAMR model have engaged all learners and transformed tasks into more authentic work.

Empowering English through Project-Based Learning in ICT by Marwan (2015) reports the findings of an action research project on the use of project-based learning (PBL) and information and communication technology (ICT) in an English classroom. One of the exciting outcomes of the research is that the learning outcomes with technology is better than traditional classroom teaching without technology. (Marwan, 2015). It was also found that students were more highly motivated to participate and made positive gains with the use of PBL and technology. Marwan (2015) chose English versus another subject, claiming it was underrepresented in the literature on the topic. The focus was on students learning English in Indonesia (Marwan, 2015). Teaching English in the United States in the traditional format is far from engaging and creates more resistance in the classroom setting. This article is relevant for educators of all subject matters.

Social media has provided a virtual space for people to communicate information and ideas. Amry (2018) conducted a case study on the effectiveness of blended learning while incorporating Web 2.0 tools, namely the social media application, Twitter. Two classes were taught. One included 75% classroom instruction as well as 25% Twitter learning activities, while the other only had classroom instruction. Amry (2018) found that the students in the experimental group that utilized Twitter performed higher on an achievement test, had more participation in class discussions, and had a greater attitude towards learning than the control group (Amry, 2018). Research has proved that Web 2.0 tools incorporated in classroom instruction resulted in higher scores and nourished a growth mindset.

Learning from Higher Education

Schools across the globe will need to adapt due to the continuation or possible resurgence of COVID-19. Without a vaccine, educators and students will be faced with the challenge of remaining safe and healthy when required to return to the classroom in the fall of 2020. In light of all of this, researchers have provided insight on the importance of embracing blended learning. From the perspective of higher education, professors and instructors have also had to make decisions in what is now a fluid and unprecedented environment. Most research activities have ceased operation. Rashawn Ray (2020), an Associate Professor of Sociology at the University of Maryland, College Park, and the Brookings Institution, provided advice for universities and professors. According to Ray (2020), lectures and all classroom instruction should be recorded and posted in a virtual classroom (Ray, 2020). Equal opportunities must be provided to each student. Students should not be constrained to time limits during these unprecedented times. The reality is that students may be sharing technological devices with other family members and being a part of a live remote class may not be possible (Ray, 2020). Another piece of advice is

that educators provide virtual office hours. Virtual office hours allow students to ask clarifying questions and allows educators to provide face-to-face intervention. Ray (2020) also recommended that educators create briefer assignments and to be innovative during this time of uncertainty. He suggested providing virtual work for students since it can be assessed and graded in a more manageable and systematic way (Ray, 2020).

Douglas Harris (2020) is a nonresident senior fellow in the Brown Center on Education Policy at Brookings. Harris is also a professor of economics, the Schleider Foundation chair in public education, and founding director of the Education Research Alliance for New Orleans at Tulane University. Currently his work with the Education Research Alliance for New Orleans focuses on the unprecedented post-Katrina school reforms. In regards to the COVID-19 pandemic, Harris (2020) provided an article that is useful for all educators due to the COVID-19 pandemic. An interesting point that was made was the idea of grade retention for students, especially those with disabilities. Harris (2020) has suggested that students who were struggling or failing prior to the pandemic ought to be retained, or held back at the start of the 2020-2021 school year. Like Ray (2020), he has implored educators to prepare for and provide remote learning opportunities for students (Harris, 2020). Ray (2020) and Harris (2020) have encouraged the use of blended learning during these unprecedented times. They have stated that the achievement gap is very real and can be eliminated when equal learning opportunities are provided to all students.

Educators in the state of Iowa can expect to integrate face-to-face instruction and technology tools during the 2020-2021 school year both in classrooms and remotely through the hybrid, or entirely remote during the 2020-2021 school year. As of March 2020, many educators in the United States integrated technology tools in order to teach and provide educational

activities for students. The use of technology with face-to-face instruction online through tools like Google Meet provides both equal learning opportunities and a sense of normalcy to all students. The routine and normal routine of students ended back in March when school buildings were closed. Blended learning is the approach educators should take with or without a global pandemic taking place. When digital tools are not integrated, students are deprived with the tools needed in order to be successful in the work force and society. Technology does not need to take the place of face-to-face interaction either. A balanced blend allows for the best traditional and modern teaching approaches for students in schools today.

In March 2020, students and educators at Sheldon High School were not prepared for remote learning. Some educators were already using a virtual platform, such as Google Classroom, for learning activities and assessments. Others utilized traditional approaches, such as handing out and collecting hard copy assignments, conducting lectures, and rarely used technology. When the Sheldon High School physical campus closed in March and learning began remotely via online, educators acted quickly to adapt lessons to this new format. The transition from on-site instruction to remote instruction was difficult.

The Iowa Department of Education has requested every school district in the state of Iowa submit a Return to Learn plan, proposing three plans for what the 2020-2021 school year might look like. The COVID-19 pandemic has created great uncertainty for schools. In order to prepare to potentially be interrupted again by the pandemic, Sheldon High School has created a Return to Learn plan. The plan includes options for on-site learning, a hybrid model for learning, and distance learning. Depending on the conditions of COVID-19, every plan may be utilized during the 2020-2021 school year.

Data Collection

Sheldon High School Return to Learn Plan

Over the past several weeks during the summer months, a Sheldon High School task

force including teacher leaders, instructional coaches, and administrators met, planned, surveyed,

and worked together to create plans in order to return to school this fall. Below are a few

important highlights and an explanation of where Sheldon High School finds itself in this

process. Sheldon High School is committed to supporting students, families and staff. The

Return to Learn Plan is intended to communicate the plans for returning to regular classes in Fall

of 2020 or On-Site Learning, a combination of online learning and in-person learning referred to

as Hybrid Learning, and Distance Learning or continuation of learning in the event that school

would need to close for an extended period of time. Additional Information on Distance

Learning Roles and Responsibilities is included in the Appendix. Appendix A includes

information on the school roles and responsibilities. Appendix B includes student roles and

responsibilities. Appendix C includes family roles and responsibilities. Blended learning

strategies have been recommended and applied to the three separate possibilities for the

upcoming school year.

Guidelines for On-site Learning

On-Site Learning will occur when a decision is made that buildings can operate, and

students can return to school. The adopted calendar and normal schedule for students will be

followed. Educators will continue to utilize Google Classroom as a virtual space for assignments

to be completed and graded. They are welcome to share personal websites and YouTube

channels as done previously to provide online resources for students to access anywhere at any

time. Blended learning will take place since students will have both face-to-face instruction as well as online instruction.

Students and staff will take extra precautions to wash hands regularly and practice social distancing whenever possible. High-touch areas of the buildings will be sanitized multiple times per day. Students will be encouraged to bring a mask to wear in situations where it is impossible to social distance. All of these measures are in place to avoid the hybrid and remote learning plans.

During the first couple of weeks, assessments will be administered. A data analysis will be conducted in order to determine the skill attainment and proficiency of students. Gaps in learning are expected to have occurred during the school closure. Sheldon High School teachers are prepared to work to close those gaps. Students will receive instruction about remote learning to be better prepared in the event COVID-19 causes a disruption to on-site face-to-face learning.

Guidelines for Hybrid Learning

A Hybrid format will contain both face-to-face learning and remote learning. Sheldon High School has two options planned for Hybrid learning and will be implemented based on whichever best suites the needs of students. Option 1 allows for school to be in regular session. If students are not able to attend due to illness or health related concerns, they will attend all coursework virtually through Google Meet and Google Classroom and will follow his or her regular schedule in a virtual format. Teachers will record direct instruction and post onto the Google Classroom pages in case students need to watch at a later date or time. Students already take home school-issued Chromebooks and will utilize those at home. The State of Iowa will likely provide internet connectivity to families that are unable to acquire access. If internet connectivity is not available to a family, paper copies of learning material will be provided.

Option 2 will also contain face-to-face and remote learning. In this option, only 50% of the students will be in the building at one time. Students will attend online through Google Meet and Google Classroom if on-site learning is not an option. The schedule will function on an every other day basis, and the days will alternate on a two week basis. On Week A, students with last names beginning with A-M will attend school on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. Students with last names beginning with N-Z will attend school on Tuesday and Thursday. During Week B, students with last names beginning with A-M will attend school Tuesday and Thursdays. Students with last names beginning with N-Z will attend school on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. Teachers will provide instruction with a normal schedule. Some students will be present in person in the classroom. Other students will be present online. Students will join via Google Meet. Teachers will record direct instruction in case students need to participate in instruction at a later time or date on the Google Classroom pages. On days students are not scheduled in the building, they will need to keep pace by attending the Google Meet sessions and completing the required assignments.

Hybrid learning would occur if the decision is made by Governor Kim Reynolds or the Department of Public Health that schools can only operate with half capacity. This means the school week would be split up with half of the students attending a couple days and the other half of the students attending on the other days. On days students are assigned to be out of the building, remote learning is required. The specific details may have to be revised based on student need.

Guidelines for Remote Learning

In the event that school is closed for an extended period, the remote learning plan will be invoked for all students. All assignments will be posted on Google Classroom. Teachers will

provide direct instruction via Google Meet. Google Meet is a video chat application provided by

Google. Blended learning will still be provided to a degree since students will have some face-

to-face interaction through Google Meet. However, they will be face-to-face virtually. Teachers

will schedule Google Meets with individuals or small groups for re-teaching, enrichment, or time

extensions during the afternoons. Teachers will host office hours via Google Meet to answer

student questions in the afternoon after classes have been taught.

Remote learning could be implemented school wide or could be utilized for a single

classroom to mitigate COVID-19 exposure beyond that classroom. Remote learning may also be

available to families with health concerns, as allowed by the Department of Education. Remote

Learning, should it occur, will be more structured than what previously took place at the end of

the 2019-2020 school year. Students would be expected to participate daily and teachers will be

providing more direct instruction. There would be a set schedule for all students with the

majority of the direct instruction occurring in the morning and time in the afternoon for teachers

to assist students individually or in small group instruction. There would also be a consistent

method of content delivery to provide more continuity for students and families. Additional

online training modules would also be made available to ensure teachers, staff, students, and

families all understand how to use the learning management system and communication tools.

Students needing accommodations will receive them virtually during this time. Our

English Learners (EL) will receive support. The EL staff will attend Google Meet classes to be

aware of course content and will then be able to support students through an individual or small

group Google Meet. The Special Education staff will also attend classes virtually with students

having an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). If specific designed instruction (SDI) is called

for on a student's IEP, this will be delivered either during small group work time or during

individual afternoon sessions. All IEPs will be reviewed with the IEP team to ensure that appropriate plans are in place to meet individual student needs. The Talented and Gifted (TAG) instructor will schedule afternoon enrichment sessions with TAG students.

In addition to students attending classes virtually, students will meet with the Teacher Advisors (TA) and peers on Google Meet. During this time, teachers will check-in with students and offer Social Emotional Learning (SEL). The TA curriculum is written and addresses the topics of leadership, peer pressure, career choice, and grit. Any student who does not have internet access at home will be provided paper copies. This is not an ideal learning format as there will not be direct teaching instruction available in this format.

Future Directions

          The current plan for Sheldon High School is to resume on-site learning with the use of

blended learning strategies beginning August 12, 2020. This decision is based on guidance from

the Iowa Department of Education and Iowa Department of Public Health. If guidance changes,

the plan will be adjusted, and families will be notified. To assess the Return to Learn Plan,

classroom data would be collected about how blended learning strategies were implemented

during the 2020-2021 school year. The data would be used to determine the positive impact

blended learning strategies made at Sheldon High School. The comparison of common formative

assessments from the 2019-2020 school year to the 2020-2021 school year would be utilized to

prove if there was growth and improvement. Since students did not take the Iowa Statewide

Assessment of Student Progress (ISASP) in April, data is not available to be used for

comparison. It would be intriguing to compare student achievement scores and find blended

learning strategies were the answer to increasing student achievement, especially during the

current global pandemic. The hope is blended learning strategies will improve the learning

experience for all students, especially those who are often underrepresented, such as students

with disabilities and language barriers. It is recommended to begin the 2020-2021 school year

with blended learning strategies while on-site learning is in session. This time period would also

be used to prepare students for what instruction might look like with a hybrid or virtual format.

One, if not all, of the plans in the Return to Learn plan will be utilized this upcoming school

year. If this school improvement project were to be replicated or transferred to another school,

more communication between educators in the building is suggested. The task force was made

up of a small group of school leaders and administrators who created the Return to Learn plan.

The information was communicated to the teachers after submission rather than during the

planning stages. Teachers who work in the classroom have valuable insights should go hand-in-hand with research-based methods. Like students, teachers prefer communication and inclusion rather than isolation and exclusion. In the future, the input of more teachers should be included to make the Return to Learn plan a more effective plan. In addition, the schools' Return to Learn plan should be shared with the teaching staff before sharing stakeholders, parents, and students. Teachers need adequate time for preparation of various scenarios and conditions. The need for blended learning is evident. Blended learning implementation is the reform schools need in order to ensure the continuation of learning before, during, and post the COVID-19 pandemic.

Appendix A

Table 1. School Roles and Responsibilities

School Roles and Responsibilities	
Administration	● Create and distribute the Return to Learn Plan (RTL) ● Support faculty and students/families shifting to a distance learning environment ● Help teachers implement RTL
Technology Department	● Provide at least one device per student in grades 9-12. ● Support faculty and students/families shifting to a distance learning environment ● Provide written/video support to assist faculty with using district identified resources ● Be available for teachers and students as needed for support and respond to identified technology issues. Complete a help desk ticket when necessary. Tech may be contacted at support@sheldonschools.com
Principal	● Monitor communication between teachers and their students ● Be an instructor in every Google Classroom and complete "virtual walk-throughs" ● Review records of student attendance. ● Work with teachers to reach out to students who have not actively participated ● Support faculty and students/families shifting to a distance learning environment ● Help teachers implement RTL; respond when issues arise.
Core Teachers	● Collaborate with other support members on your team to coordinate learning ● Use district curriculum and resources (ex. Google, Moodle, Zoom, online textbooks, Flipgrid) to communicate and deliver content ● Keep records of students' attendance at each daily session and work completion ● Communicate with parents which online resources your students will access upon implementation of the plan and when changes are made. Include the name of the resource in your communication. ● Communicate with and provide timely feedback 2-3 times a week with your students; reach out to students who have not actively participated ● Communicate with parents, as necessary ● Paper packets will be provided to students who are struggling to be successful with online learning after multiple attempts working with teachers or to students who are having problems with connectivity.

Table 1 (continued).

Special Education Teachers	● Schedule IEP meetings with student, parent/guardian, Special Education teacher, other teachers or support staff to complete page "I" of the IEP addressing each of the items listed. ● Participate as support staff in scheduled courses ● Provide activities that support IEP goals ● Communicate regularly with students and parents ● Revisit IEPs to ensure all goals are being supported ● Provide paper/pencil packets of work when a student is not being successful with online learning or is not able to be connected to online learning.
EL, TAG	● Participate as support staff in scheduled courses ● Communicate regularly with students on your caseload and/or their parents ● Provide small group remediation or extension activities
Club Advisors	● Coordinate with other club advisors to make sure there is no overlap in meetings ● Schedule weekly or every other week afternoon club meeting to insure continuity of program goals and objectives
Counselors	● Serve as a liaison for communication with students/families in crisis ● Provide resources for students and families to support them while they are away from school ● Communicate regularly with classroom teachers to see if students in their classes need support. ● Provide office hours (Google, Zoom) to support students in crisis. ● Provide referrals to outside agencies if appropriate
Media Specialist	● Collaborate with colleagues to find resources for high-quality distance learning experiences and research ● Regularly check in with subject and classroom teachers to identify ways to support their design of distance learning experiences
Associates & Other Classified Employees	● Participate as support staff in scheduled courses ● Associates may be asked to assist Special Education teachers to support the academic and social-emotional needs of students they serve. This could include reading to students, Zooming, making packets, etc.
Instructional Coaches	● Provide instructional support to teachers ● Provide technology support as needed

Appendix B

Table 2. Student Roles and Responsibilities

Student Roles and Responsibilities	
- Participate daily from 8:00 - 1:05 in core class work - Complete all necessary school work and keep pace with deadlines - Identify a space in your home where you can work effectively and successfully - Identify a space in your home where you can participate in online learning. - During any live online learning (Google Meet) sit at a table and wear school appropriate attire - Check email daily (when writing emails, write in the text box and not memo line) - Engage in all learning with academic honesty - Communicate proactively with your teachers if you cannot meet deadlines or require additional support - Comply with Orab Net policies	
For questions about...	**Contact**
a course, assignment, or resource	Teacher
a technology related problem or issue	Teacher or Tech Department
a personal, academic or social-emotional concern	Counselor
other issues related to distance learning	Principal

Appendix C

Table 3. Family Roles and Responsibilities

Family Roles and Responsibilities	
Provide support for your student by: ● Establishing routines and expectations ● Defining the physical space for your student to study ● Monitoring communications from your child's teachers ● Taking an active role in helping your child process his/her learning ● Establishing times for quiet and reflection ● Encouraging physical activity and/or exercise ● Remaining mindful of your child's stress or worry ● Monitoring how much time your child is spending online ● Keeping your child social, but set rules around their social media interactions	
For questions about...	**Contact**
a course, assignment, or resource	Teacher
a technology-related problem or issue	Teacher or Tech Department
a personal, academic or social-emotional concern	Counselor
other issues related to distance learning	Principal

References

Acree, L., Gibson, T., Mangum, N., Wolf, M. A., Kellogg, S., & Branon, S. (2017).

Supporting school Leaders in blended learning with blended learning. Journal

of Online Learning Research, 3(2), 105-143. Retrieved May 20, 2020, from

http://ezproxy.nwciowa.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.nwcio

wa.edu/docview/1969012150?accountid=28306

Alijani, G. S., Kwun, O., & Yu, Y. (2014). *Effectiveness of blended learning in KIPP*

New Orleans' schools. Academy of Educational Leadership Journal, 18(2),

125. Retrieved from

https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.nwciowa.edu/apps/doc/A396615711/PROF?u=nwc

ollege&sid=PROF&xid=864f29d1

Amry, A. (2018). *The effect of Twitter activities in a blended learning classroom*

guided by activity theory on students' achievement and attitudes. The

Turkish Online Journal of Educational Technology, 17(2). Retrieved from

http://ezproxy.nwciowa.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.nwcio

wa.edu/docview/2025353236?accountid=28306

Antoniou, C. G., & Ioannou, A. (2018). *Technology for social change in school contexts:*

A new landscape for K-12 educational technology research. Education and

Information Technologies, 23(6), 2363-2378.

http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.nwciowa.edu/10.1007/s10639-018-9721-7

Collis, B., Margaryan, A., & Amory, M. (2005). *Multiple perspectives on blended*

learning design. Journal of Learning Design, 1(1), 12-21. Retrieved *May* 23,

2020, from

http://ezproxy.nwciowa.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.nwcio

wa.edu/docview/1720061812?accountid=28306

Fridley, D., & Rogers-Adkinson, D. (2015). *Implementing a one-to-one technology*

Initiative in higher education. Administrative Issues Journal: Connecting

Education, Practice, and Research, 5(2), 38-50. Retrieved May 22, 2020, from

http://ezproxy.nwciowa.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.nwcio

wa.edu/docview/1826519505?accountid=28306

Harris, D. N. (2020). *A broad strategy for schools during the COVID-19 pandemic.*

Washington: The Brookings Institution. Retrieved from

http://ezproxy.nwciowa.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.nwcio

wa.edu/docview/2383693604?accountid=28306

Malczyk, B. R. (2018). *Multimodal instruction, the new hybrid: a student-centered*

approach to blended learning. Journal of Nonprofit Education and Leadership,

8(1), 16. Retrieved from

https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.nwciowa.edu/apps/doc/A529948746/PROF?u=nwc

ollege&sid=PROF&xid=a59a0261

Marwan, A. (2015). *Empowering english through project-based learning with ICT.*

The Turkish Online Journal of Educational Technology, 14(4). Retrieved from

http://ezproxy.nwciowa.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.nwcio

wa.edu/docview/1761237419?accountid=28306

McGinnis, P. (2019, November-December). *Moving up the SAMR model.* Science

Scope, 43(4), 1. Retrieved from

https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.nwciowa.edu/apps/doc/A605510851/PROF?u=nwc

ollege&sid=PROF&xid=ba5f471a

Megeid, N.(2014). *E-learning versus blended learning in accounting courses.*

Quarterly Review of Distance Education, 15(2), 35-55,70. Retrieved May 20,

2020, from

http://ezproxy.nwciowa.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.nwcio

wa.edu/docview/1625397049?accountid=28306

Mortera-Gutierrez, F. (2006). *Faculty best practices using blended learning in*

e-learning and face-to-face instruction. International Journal on E-Learning,

5(3), 313. Retrieved from

https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.nwciowa.edu/apps/doc/A148046304/PROF?u=nwc

ollege&sid=PROF&xid=70ef23e6

Oakes, K., & Casewit, C. W. (2003). *E-learning: the answer is blended*

learning, now what was the question again?. T+D, vol. 57, no. 10, p. 17.

Retrieved from

https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.nwciowa.edu/apps/doc/A108787956/PROF?u=nwc

ollege&sid=PROF&xid=54cdd627

Ray, R. (2020). *8 recommendations for universities and professors during the*

coronavirus pandemic. Washington: The Brookings Institution. Retrieved from

http://ezproxy.nwciowa.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.nwcio

wa.edu/docview/2385835527?accountid=28306

Rentroia-Bonito, M. A., Goncalves, D., & Jorge, J. A. (2015). *Clustering students based*

on motivation to learn: a blended learning approach. International Journal of

Mobile and Blended Learning, 7(3). Retrieved from

https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.nwciowa.edu/apps/doc/A424714260/PROF?u=nwc

ollege&sid=PROF&xid=3e677a2b

Sabourin, B. (2018). *Assessment that matters: using technology to personalize*

Learning. Canadian Journal of Education, 41(4), XV. Retrieved from

https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.nwciowa.edu/apps/doc/A573558017/PROF?u=nwc

ollege&sid=PROF&xid=d5b44c0a

Smith, B. & Brame, C. (2015) *Blended and online learning.* Vanderbilt University.

Retrieved May 18, 2020, from

https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/blended-and-online-learning/