

STARTING SMALL: HOW TO BEGIN YOUR BLENDED LEARNING JOURNEY

We all know that an amazing journey can begin with just one step. That principle applies to the professional development journey for educators taking on blended learning, too.

“Because blended learning is a disruptive practice that is reshaping education, it is important to think big about the possibilities, but start small to ensure success,” shares Kristine Barberio, NCDPI Virtual Instruction Consultant and co-host of The Education Empowered Podcast. “Just like we need to scaffold learning for our students, **we need to scaffold our learning and understanding of blended learning practices by starting with small achievable goals.**”

What does it look like to approach blended learning with these bite-size, manageable goals in mind? Here are a few tips, directly from educators like you, on how to begin your blended learning journey:



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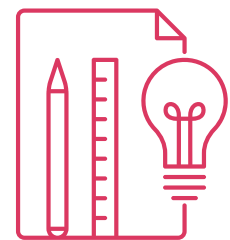
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TIP 1: ASSESS YOUR INSTRUCTIONAL NEEDS TO TRY SOMETHING NEW

“The first step to implementing blended learning instructional practices is to reflect on the growth areas in your own instruction,” shares Hayley Stamey, a blended learning coach in Buncombe County, North Carolina. “Then you can find a place to begin in small and meaningful ways to implement blended learning.”

Teachers who spend time reflecting on where they can evolve a classroom practice can easily spot the perfect place to try something new. For example, one educator coached by Stamey became inspired to explore using a digital notebook when required to use less printer paper. This meant simply trying one new practice that might eventually have an outsized impact on teaching and learning.

“[A paper shortage is] a perfect opportunity for me as a blended learning coach to say, hey, let’s take our notebooks, let’s make interactive digital notebooks!” says Stamey. “Let that be part of their playlist, or their rotation, or their small group... and pull that technology piece in there too!”



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TIP 2: MINOR CHANGES MAY YIELD UNEXPECTED BENEFITS

Blended learning coaches like Stamey suggest that **teachers who are just starting to integrate blended learning consider many possibilities and explore one thing to change.** Starting a blended learning practice in just one single area of instruction can make the adjustment easier and smoother.

"Maybe it's just finding a little corner, like science or social studies, that [a teacher] could start trying blended learning in their classroom," says Stamey.

But even small changes can result in powerful outcomes.

"Once [an educator has] done a couple of rounds of it and they've built those routines, **they're going to get a lot of time back into their classrooms,**" says Stamey. "I think if I had to pick the biggest benefit, it really is time... time working with their kids on a smaller individual level, or small group level."

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TIP 3: FAIL FORWARD



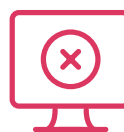
Another place to begin with blended learning is to "fail forward" by **reimagining a lesson plan or classroom practice that either recently stopped working or didn't work well.**

Dr. Chandra Eley is a veteran educator and instructional coach in Bertie County. Over the summer, she encourages teachers to reflect on what worked and what didn't during the previous school year.

"Teachers [should] brainstorm on how they can meet the needs of students that may have had a difficult time grasping the taught concepts," Eley shares, "and **strategize on how they can create more opportunities for students to show what they have learned and to apply their learning.**"

Kristin Stroud, a graduate of Rethink Education's Badged Facilitator Cohort and digital learning specialist for Lenoir County, shares that when she coaches teachers, sometimes they are hesitant to try something new because it may not work. She urges the teachers she works with to **instead think of failure as a way to learn.**

"Failure is how we all learn, and one of the biggest things is [learning what works with students] year to year," Stroud describes. "Different groups of students are comfortable at different levels with technology. [So if you try something that doesn't work the first time,] then moving forward, you're successfully using this tool, then it's not really a failure. You're going to move forward. The outcomes are going to be much greater."



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No matter where teachers start with blended learning, Dr. Eley describes a step-by-step process that any teacher can use. She shares:

“I would suggest teachers **have an open mind** as to the benefits of blended learning... Next, teachers need to **evaluate what types of blended learning they are already implementing**. Finally, I would challenge teachers to **step out of their comfort zone** and then to start implementing other blended learning models that can be incorporated.”

The four most popular models of blended learning among Rethink Education

Badged Facilitators are:

1. Station Rotation
2. Playlists
3. Choice Boards
4. Flipped Classroom

The bottom line? No matter where a teacher decides to start integrating blended learning - the most important thing to do is just that... start!

MORE ABOUT RETHINK EDUCATION

Rethink Education partners with districts and schools across the state to create a resilient future for North Carolina school communities where all K-8 students have access to seamless, effective blended and virtual learning.

To help meet the needs of all students, whether they are learning in person, at one of North Carolina’s virtual academies or in a blended learning environment, Rethink Education provides educator training that goes above and beyond the average professional development.

These professional learning programs not only impart best practices for using the statewide blended learning models, but enable the educators to train their peers on how to use blended learning.



FOR MORE INFORMATION:

- Educators can [learn more about Rethink Education programs online at dpi.nc.gov](https://dpi.nc.gov).
- [Listen to Episode 3 of The Education Empowered Podcast](#), hosted by the Office of Virtual Support at NCDPI and Rethink Education NC.
- Or, reach out to rethink@ncpublicschools.gov for more.



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