

# BRINGING OUT THE BEST IN ALL STUDENTS THROUGH BLENDED LEARNING

## How educators are using blended and virtual learning to support students' needs, even after the learning disruptions caused by a pandemic

For educators and students, the COVID-19 pandemic was a difficult time, and it accelerated changes in the way we work and learn. North Carolina **educators are working to empower students as independent learners and close gaps in academic learning**, while at the same time addressing the many challenges faced by students, families and school communities that were heightened by the pandemic.

Recently, educators joined The Education Empowered Podcast, hosted by the Office of Virtual Support at NCDPI and Rethink Education NC, to reflect on efforts to respond to and heal from challenges like the isolation and learning loss that resulted from the pandemic. They share how **blended learning models continue to play a key role in bringing out the best in every student**.



"I think kids are lonely. There's something about the pandemic that has brought [challenges] to the forefront. It has seemed to kind of magnify them to a degree," shares Tericia Eller, a 24-year veteran educator and the Northwest Regional Professional Development Coordinator for Rethink Education at NCDPI.

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**Laura Conway**

School Counselor, Therapist and a National Certified Counselor

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With the support of Rethink Education training and resources, educators have been able to take what they learned from the challenges of responding to COVID-19 – challenges like disengagement and learning loss – and rethink how we educate our students.

"We always look for the positive. So one positive from the pandemic is that we got some new tools in our toolbox," adds Laura Conway, a school counselor, therapist and a National Certified Counselor.

Today, **blending and virtual learning models continue to provide educators with the tools needed for seamless, effective student learning**. Here are four powerful tips from expert educators who have used these tools to help engage and support students.

## ESTABLISH MANAGEMENT ROUTINES AND PROCEDURES

Today, **classrooms incorporate blended learning models to empower and help students excel no matter where learning takes place**. These tools can be anything from online stations, choice boards, playlists, or even the lab model – which focuses on effective remote content and instruction.

"In order for these powerful instructional methods to be used effectively, establishing strong routines and procedures becomes a must," shares Betsy Hicks, NCDPI Northeast Virtual Instruction Consultant and host of The Education Empowered Podcast.



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**Routines and procedures provide clarity for students that results in more flexibility** – flexibility that puts students at the center of their learning.

“Students have to know that the expectations are high for the work that’s being completed online. So in addition to the face-to-face expectations, you’re adding in the expectations of online work,” says Sarah Luckey, a fourth grade teacher and graduate of Rethink Education’s first Badged Facilitator Cohort.

Being clear about what students should be working on, or how they should be focusing their time online, ultimately strengthens their engagement and can support positive learning outcomes all while not compromising on high standards.

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## CREATE LEARNING PROFILES FOR STUDENTS



Educators share a simple but powerful reminder, one that has supported them in connecting with students: **you can tap into students’ curiosity by showing that you care and that you’re interested.**

“I think sometimes we forget that, you know, and these are real people that are sitting in these seats that have likes and dislikes and learning preferences,” says Kendra Cameron Jarvis, a blended learning coach and an adjunct professor at UNC-Asheville. “If we tap into those areas, we can really empower students and engage them and spark curiosity to want to learn our content.”

This can be as simple as creating an online form and asking students to fill out their likes, dislikes and interests. Jarvis recommends updating those profiles every nine weeks, because, as she says, “our likes and dislikes change, and our strengths and areas of needed growth change.”

## ALLOW STUDENTS TO WORK AT THEIR OWN PACE

Blended learning allows the educator to help students learn at their own pace with differentiated levels of instruction.

“All students can be successful in this type of environment. It may take some students longer than others, but you differentiate assignments as needed and hold the students to it,” shares fourth grade teacher Sarah Luckey.

Luckey shares that teachers can be successful if they get to know their students, and what their needs are, and let them move through their playlists and tasks at their own customized pace. This **student-centered approach is an important feature of the blended learning model.**



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## FOSTER A COMMUNITY

“I used to say to my kids all the time, nobody wants to come to school every day so that people can be mean to them and it’s no fun to be there. So I said, it’s up to us to foster a community where we all want to be here,” says Kristine Barberio, NCDPI Virtual Instruction Consultant and host of The Education Empowered Podcast.

**Fostering a community with your students through both blended learning and in-classroom time can be hugely beneficial.** Jake Miller, an educator and author focused on integrating technology into learning, shares that educators can find their own way to connect with students.

“Maybe your style is telling stories or telling jokes or playing little games to be in class periods. I think you’ve got to find what works for you,” says Miller. “But as soon as the kids start to see that you’re there to do more than just teaching that information, the rest kind of flows from there.”

While educators continue to help all students adapt and succeed, there are plenty of resources available through Rethink Education.



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## FIND OUT 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).
- [Episode 2.1 and 2.2 of The Education Empowered Podcast](#), hosted by the Office of Virtual Support at NCDPI and Rethink Education NC.
- Reach out to [rethink@ncpublicschools.gov](mailto:rethink@ncpublicschools.gov) with questions.

