

USING BLENDED LEARNING TO KEEP STUDENTS ENGAGED, NO MATTER THE DISRUPTION

Angie Conklin earned a Rethink Education blended learning facilitator badge at the perfect time to share what she knows with her district.

Today, Angie Conklin is a Digital Learning and Teaching Facilitator for Onslow County Schools, a North Carolina district with more than 28,000 students. She partners with teachers in the remote academy to help them unleash the potential of technology in the classroom.

But when she started at the district 30 years ago, no one had a computer. She remembers the combination of excitement and confusion she felt when she received the first email. Over the decades, she saw the gradual adoption of computers and devices.

Reflecting on progress, she has a deep appreciation for the experience: "I got to be there through every transition. I got to participate in it and see how the world of education can change."



ANGIE'S FIRST FORAY INTO REMOTE LEARNING

Angie was first tossed into the world of remote and blended learning in the fall of 2018, when Hurricane Florence devastated the Carolinas, releasing record-breaking levels of rain and causing extreme flooding.

"It rained in my living room and I had to live out of one room of my house for months. It was an emotional time," says Angie.

Schools, roads and just about every facet of daily life was disrupted. Onslow County Schools suffered an estimated \$1 billion in damages. Despite it all, Angie, who was a brick-and-mortar elementary school teacher at the time, continued to teach students.

"We didn't need a hurricane to be prepared," Angie says. "Our county has a really strong one-to-one program. So even when the brick and mortar was taken out of the equation, we were still functional."

And when the COVID-19 pandemic closed schools in 2020, Angie and her district were prepared to keep students learning.



Blended learning helps educators pivot instruction, regardless if it's due to potential health, safety or weather disruptions, so students have a seamless school experience wherever they are learning.

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Angie Conklin

Digital Learning and Teaching Facilitator for Onslow County Schools

Recently, Angie signed up to be part of the Rethink Education Facilitator Badge professional development program. An initiative of the Office of Virtual Instruction Support Services at NCDPI, Rethink Education trains educators on blended learning models so they can use what they learned in their own classrooms—and then go on to train their peers.

Just after completing the course and earning her badge, she was assigned to work at a remote school and train her colleagues on blended learning. Angie marvels at the serendipity: “I thought: ‘Oh my goodness. I am in this. I am where I need to be right now getting what I need to get.’ I’m really thankful for that opportunity that I had so that I can bring that back to the teachers in my county.”

Rethink Education badged facilitators are making an impact in their school communities by training their peers on best practices in blended learning. According to a recent survey of educators who became badged facilitators:



41%

provide professional development to other educators.



24%

provide professional development across their school community.¹

Her first task in her new role was to compact the 50 hours of intense professional development she received into a 10-hour session for her new remote academy colleagues.

Pre-Assessment

She first sent out a pre-assessment to get to know them and how they use technology. She says: “That gave me so much information about who they were, where they were, their needs and that kind of thing and how they were using technology and how they were operating in the virtual world so I can know best how to serve them.”

Introducing Blended Learning Models

Armed with loads of information, she used one of the most popular blended learning models – the playlist – to kick off the first in-person professional development session. She says: “I provided them with the playlist so that they could actually participate in the playlist before even learning how to make a playlist.”

During the next session, she set up a virtual station rotation, another popular blended learning model, over Microsoft Teams.

“Station rotation gives learners the opportunity to take ownership and responsibility for their learning. For example, in our second station, teachers had a choice. They got to choose which type of AVID notes they wanted to use. And then there was an article that they could either listen to or read, and then they had to take notes in the Avid notes,” Angie describes.



A playlist gives students ownership over their learning by enabling them to select from a list of curated activities focused on a specific learning objective that they can work through at their own pace.

Most popular blended learning models among Rethink Education badged facilitators:

1. Station Rotation

2. Playlists

3. Choice Boards

4. Flipped Classroom²

Because blended learning is so flexible, educators can use blended learning models for all types of learners, children and adults.

Angie says: “The best part of blended learning is that it allows me to pull from all these different areas to serve my students best. It’s not a scripted curriculum. There’s all these different ways to harness that and integrate it to do the best I can for students.”

As a veteran educator, Angie recommends trying just one thing at a time and adjusting as needed. “So just be patient with yourself,” she advises.

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:

- Visit dpi.nc.gov to learn more about Rethink Education programs.
- Explore the Rethink Education 2023 Sustainability Survey results: <https://www.dpi.nc.gov/rethink-education-2023-sustainability-survey-results-february-2023/download?attachment>
- Reach out to rethink@ncpublicschools.gov with questions.

^{1,2} From the 2023 Rethink Education Sustainability Survey, a survey of educators who became badged facilitators



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