

Teacher Evaluation in a Blended Learning Environment

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Dear Dr. Söze,

On behalf of our team, thank you for the opportunity to examine blended learning as a concept and for the opportunity to analyze its potential and compile the recommendations that follow. Blended learning, according to Horn and Staker (2014), consists of an environment where students learn “at least in part through online learning, with some element of student control over time, place, path, and/or pace” (p. 34). While this concept may initially give the impression that the teacher is marginalized in the blended classroom, nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, the authors note that, “getting this right for teachers is important” and that “teachers are critical to the success of blended learning” (p. 169). However, the role of the teacher is shifting significantly, and thus the observant administrator must be well-versed in the characteristics of a well-run blended classroom. This document will present several recommendations to ensure those goals are addressed.

### **Formative Feedback**

Student Growth Objectives (SGOs) according to AchieveNJ’s SGO Scoring Checkpoints and Considerations document (New Jersey Department of Education, 2014) has teachers focus heavily on summative assessments to measure student learning. The Framework for Teaching Evaluation Instrument (Danielson, 2013) best known as the Danielson Framework, also refers to formative assessments as an indicator for component 1f: Designing Student Assessments, which states, “Formative assessments designed to inform minute-to-minute decision making by the teacher during instruction” (p. 27). In a blended learning environment, formative assessments are just as important as they are in traditional instruction. However, in a blended learning environment, formative assessments and feedback take place digitally. To make sure students do

well on the summative assessments that measure their progress and show growth in learning, providing regular formative feedback to students is crucial. There are some key recommendations with regard to formative feedback. Teachers should have time to provide useful and effective feedback throughout a particular unit. Additionally, teachers should give feedback as quickly as possible and provide students with their data. Allowing students access to their data can offer them the ability to track their own progress and help them feel and be successful (Horn & Staker, 2014). Making sure teachers also have access to specific software and programs will allow students to access learning resources and track their progress through online assessments and work on them until capable of mastery (Horn & Staker, 2014). A final key suggestion based on the work of Horn and Staker (2014) is that the feedback needs to be something the student can do something with; if a student receives useless feedback, it can have a negative effect on student learning. Therefore, feedback should be meaningful and useful.

### **Examples of Activities**

Horn and Staker (2014) share many ideas of how blended learning can be achieved. The activities used by teachers for the purpose of blended learning will meet the requirements of the Danielson Framework (Danielson, 2013) that refer to components 1b: Demonstrating Knowledge of Students and 1e: Designing Coherent Instruction, as well as all of Domain 3: Instruction. In turn, successful implementation of blended learning activities will hopefully help students achieve better in courses and ultimately on assessments for the purposes of SGOs.

In their book *Blended*, Horn and Staker (2014) discuss several different blended learning activities that can be used. All blended learning models should first and foremost be student-centered. No longer is the teacher standing in front of the classroom the entire period.

Rather, students are taking learning into their own hands. A student-centered learning design allows for differentiation of instruction and personalization (Horn & Staker, 2014). Each student will be able to access learning in a way that works best for them and they get what they need.

Within blended learning, there are four main models outlined by Horn and Staker (2014):

1. *Rotation*: Students rotate through different stations, which include technology or visiting a computer lab.
  - a. *Flipped Classroom*: Students complete online lessons independently at home or whenever homework is completed. Classroom time is for practice problems, discussions, or projects and allows teachers to provide individual assistance.
2. *Flex*: Completing an online course in a brick-and-mortar location so teacher support is available.
3. *A La Carte*: Taking a course online while going to a brick-and-mortar school for all other courses.
4. *Enriched Virtual*: Courses have required face-to-face learning, but with students completing remainder of their work from any location.

These models can be used in both middle and high school. Choosing an appropriate model will allow teachers to provide different types of activities that will fit each model. Teachers should be including collaborative projects, ePortfolios, virtual debates through discussion posts, blogging, use of social media, tutorials, project-based learning, video- and audio-casts, and others. With blended learning models and online activities, students can choose their own path to learning and be set up for success.

### **Expectations for Preparation**

Horn & Staker (2014) highlight the importance of integrating blended learning through a redesign of instruction that will bring about deeper learning. Ideally, this should be done by first looking at the desired student outcomes and then developing the other aspects of the program around that goal. The task of integrating teachers successfully is no small endeavor and teacher preparedness is a key component of a successful implementation strategy. The responsibility for effectively designed online programs lies with the instructor who is critical to the success of a blended learning program (2014). The Danielson framework highlights components and traits that an effective instructor will implement by demonstrating content and pedagogy knowledge, demonstrating knowledge of learners, setting instructional goals, demonstrating knowledge of available resources, designing effective instruction, and designing valid and reliable assessments (Danielson, 2013).

Teacher quality greatly impacts learner outcomes in any learning environment (Horn & Staker 2014). Planning and preparedness of teachers is therefore essential to the successful implementation of blended a learning program. A shift from top down instruction towards a student centered and individualized instructional model will provide opportunity to fill gaps in student achievement and allow the instructor more flexibility to revise instruction as needed throughout the implementation process (2014). Observation instruments can be utilized by administrators to provide feedback, coaching, and mentoring to teachers for purposes of constant revision of practices and procedures. Ongoing development and improvement toward desired outcomes highlights the importance of effective teacher development. The intended goal is to merge best practices of pedagogy with content knowledge while using the technological resources available. This fits within the TPACK- Technology, Pedagogy, and Content

Knowledge framework which is a commonly used and popular framework for technology integration. The TPACK framework focuses on the effective integration of content, pedagogy, and technology in to provide the best learning experiences and bring about intended outcomes (Koehler & Mishra 2009).

### **Classroom Environment**

The second Domain of the Danielson Framework deals with establishing an optimal classroom learning environment. Specifically, the Framework delineates five specific areas that are evaluated: Creating an Environment of Respect and Rapport, Establishing a Culture for Learning, Managing Classroom Procedures, Managing Student Behavior, and Organizing Physical Space (Danielson, 2013). These authors would argue that many of these components are inherent to any classroom, blended or traditional. However, the *Establishing a Culture for Learning* and *Organizing Physical Space* components have unique “look fors and listen fors” in a blended educational environment.

Beginning with the last component, *Organizing Physical Space*. According to Horn and Staker (2014), a school or classroom set up for blended learning will be very open, quite the antithesis of compartmentalization, to foster collaboration between students, peers, and teachers. Specific characteristics include movable furniture, spaces with high amounts of natural light, copious storage space--in short, flexibility (pp. 206-208).

In terms of *Establishing a Culture for Learning*, Horn and Staker (2014) recommend looking for teachers who implement policies like peer coaching and peer work evaluation, guiding students smoothly between online and offline activities to minimize wasted time, and communicating with parents who are treated as partners (pp. 254-258). Horn and Staker (2014)

outline eight concepts that delineate an effective classroom environment, including student empowerment as to their own learning plan, the notion that students do not move on until a concept is mastered, rapid and actionable feedback, transparency in overarching student learning goals, periods of quiet time for reading and studying, authentic work experiences, the collaboration with mentors, and positive experiences working in groups with peers (pp. 147-150). These facets together compose what an optimal blended learning environment looks like.

### **Conclusion**

Blended learning holds tremendous potential in our classrooms, bringing to life a personalization of education that is much overdue for our students. Fortunately, our 1:1 Chromebook initiative means that the hardware is in place for a smooth implementation. Now our task is to ensure that teachers are evaluated properly in light of this new environment. We feel that we have presented a multitude of “look fors and listen fors” as our district makes the transition, and look forward to any feedback and/or questions that you may have for us moving forward.

### References

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