

Proof Points: Blended Learning Success in School Districts

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Washington, D.C.

INTRODUCTION

The District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) has developed three main blended-learning initiatives over the past several years:

1. Since the 2013–14 school year, district and school leaders have redesigned 17 schools (10 elementary schools, four middle schools, and three high schools) to incorporate blended learning. The schools selected for redesigns are in a K–12 feeder pattern so that students who are introduced to blended learning in elementary school do not have to change instructional methods as they progress through schools.
2. Many schools not selected for redesigns are also using blended learning in a variety of grade levels and subject areas to meet their school-level academic goals.
3. High schools offer credit-recovery programs using the Enriched Virtual model of blended learning in which content is delivered online and students meet with highly qualified teachers in their content areas at least two or three times per week.

To support these efforts, the district has made significant investments in online curriculum, network and wireless infrastructure, end-user devices, and professional development. It has also established a dedicated team at the central office to research, implement, and evaluate blended learning.

DCPS has recorded extensive and well-studied student gains in math and reading on district-wide assessments and the National Assessment of Educational Progress since implementing blended learning.

KEY ASPECTS OF BLENDED LEARNING PROGRAM

- The redesigned elementary schools use the Station Rotation model of blended learning for math and reading, with some variation based on decisions made by school leaders. The redesigned middle school uses the Individual Rotation model of blended learning for math and has worked with New Classrooms to design and implement the blended model.
- Across all schools (not just the blended schools), the district uses a variety of online curriculum products, including Lexia and myON for reading and ST Math, First in Math, and i-Ready for math. Science, social studies, and world languages classes also use online curriculum.
- The district retrained its teacher evaluators, known as Master Educators, on evaluation techniques applicable to blended-learning classrooms.
- The district's Office of Data and Strategy conducts extensive studies to compare the outcomes of students using different instructional approaches.



District Profile

District of Columbia Public Schools is the only public school district located in the nation's capital (although about 44% of students attend charter schools that are separate from the district)

47,500 students

111 schools, including three alternative high schools, two adult education schools, two special education schools, three youth engagement schools, and five magnet schools

The student population is 67% African American, 17% Hispanic, and 12% white; 76% of students qualify for free and reduced-price lunch, 16% receive special education services, and 10% are English Language Learners

The district graduation rate is 58%

Blended Learning Success Proof Points

Extensive studies by the district found that:

- ✓ Students in blended math classes outperformed students in traditional math classes.
- ✓ Students in blended reading classes were more likely to improve their state test scores than students in traditional reading classes.

DCPS improvements on the National Assessment of Educational Progress Trial Urban District Assessment (TUDA) also outpaced national averages.

BLENDING LEARNING AT DCPS

Because of the mix of district- and school-level decision-making within the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS), blended learning has taken various forms in different schooling settings. For example, in two of the district's redesigned elementary schools, students in reading and math classes rotate on a fixed schedule through three stations: one station is teacher-led small-group instruction, another is online learning, and a third is either independent practice or project-based learning. In the redesigned middle school, all students have a laptop that allows them to move through online curriculum at their own pace, with support from a team of teachers.

In addition to the redesigned schools, there are smaller blended-learning initiatives occurring in the district's other schools that focus primarily on math and reading. Across 17 elementary schools, more than 1,000 students in grades 3 through 5 used online learning for at least 50% of their math curriculum during the 2012–13 and 2013–14 school years. Nearly 2,000 elementary students used blended learning extensively for reading during the same time period.

To support these initiatives, DCPS has invested more than \$10 million in purchasing new devices for classrooms and has implemented a four-year refresh cycle for all district-owned devices. The district also brought in experts in the field—including New Schools and Education Elements—to help educators in the redesigned schools to design blended-learning models and choose online curriculum. Many of the blended-learning schools have ongoing access to an instructional technology coach, who helps teachers integrate online curriculum, devices, and face-to-face instruction. Online curriculum is vetted at the district level, with each individual school selecting among the content options.

DCPS has an Office of Data and Strategy that has conducted an extensive evaluation of blended-learning results. The Office has focused on the use of blended learning across the district, not just on whole-school implementations. It has also focused on identifying strategies that improve outcomes for the lowest performing students.

The district has recorded student gains in math and reading since implementing blended learning. Some of these gains include:

- DCPS used the DC Comprehensive Assessment System (CAS)—the district assessment prior to joining PARCC—to compare achievement scores for students using blended learning for math to those receiving traditional instruction. It found that scores for students in blended math programs rose 19 points, compared to an improvement of five points for students in the control group during the same time period. Students using the blended math program started with an average math achievement score below 70%.
- All DCPS 3rd-, 4th-, and 5th-grade students take the district Total Reading Comprehension (TRC) assessment three times per year to measure reading fluency. Across all subgroups, students who were in a blended-reading program were 13% more likely to improve their TRC scores than students who were not involved in blended learning. The biggest improvement was seen with students who were proficient in the TRC before beginning the program; these students were 32% more likely than students in the control group to improve their TRC score.
- DCPS participates in the National Assessment of Educational Progress Trial Urban District Assessment (NAEP TUDA), which is given to 4th- and 8th-grade students. DCPS students improved reading scores by five points and math scores by seven points, which compares favorably to the national average increase of one point for all participating schools in the NAEP TUDA. Similarly, 8th-grade students improved their math scale score by five points and reading scale score by 11 points, whereas the national average was one and two points, respectively.
- DCPS is seeing positive results with increased attendance and decreased truancy since the transition to blended learning. Across the district, daily attendance has risen 3% and truancy has declined 10% since the implementation of blended learning.