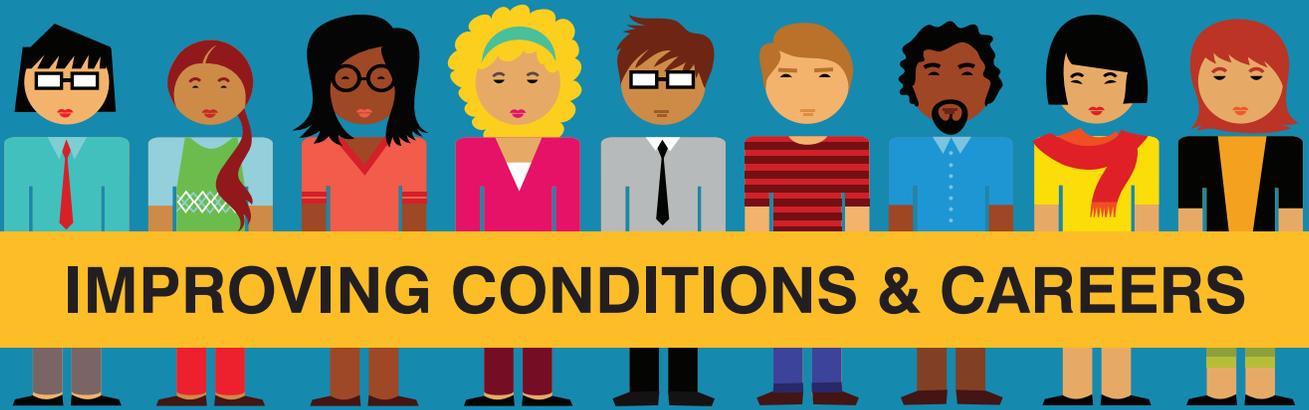




DIGITAL LEARNING NOW!

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IMPROVING CONDITIONS & CAREERS

HOW BLENDED LEARNING CAN IMPROVE THE TEACHING PROFESSION

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Authors:
John Bailey
Bryan Hassel
Emily Ayscue Hassel
Carri Schneider
Tom Vander Ark

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



According to the 2013 [MetLife Survey of the American Teacher: Challenges for School Leadership](#), teacher satisfaction has declined to the lowest level in 25 years.³ This is not surprising, given the fact that today's teachers face mounting pressures, fiscal constraints, increased populations of high-need students and an ever-rising bar of expectations.

As student roles evolve within increasingly blended learning environments that are changing to meet the demands of new college and career-ready standards and the next generation of assessments, there is an unprecedented national opportunity to reimagine and reinvigorate the teaching profession.

This paper, which serves to inform educators, leaders, educational stakeholders, policymakers and influencers, presents a vision of blended learning that offers better teaching conditions and enables better career opportunities. In addition to confronting misconceptions about blended learning, the authors advocate for thoughtful policies that will allow teachers to create personalized learning experiences and facilitate the deeper learning necessary to master higher standards.

IMPROVING TEACHING CONDITIONS

In the section on improved teaching conditions, the authors assert that blended learning environments can create more and better opportunities for teacher collaboration, enable differentiated staffing and boost meaningful professional development opportunities. When blended learning tears down the walls of a traditional classroom, teachers have more opportunities to collaborate with one another and to put their individual talents to work in differentiated staffing models. Teaching in online and blended environments necessitates the development of new skillsets. Professional learning to develop these skills will be improved in a blended environment where the principles of individualized, competency-based progressions can be applied to teacher professional development. With sophisticated data systems, teachers have a flood of expanded and enhanced student data at their fingertips — improving efficiency and cutting down on time spent with routine tasks and record-keeping. Time saved from the thoughtful implementation of technology can be reinvested working with students, collaborating with other teachers and developing the new roles discussed in the next section.

IMPROVING CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

Drawing on work from Public Impact’s Opportunity Culture initiative, the authors explain how shifts to online and blended learning create an expanded set of career options for teachers. By leveraging technology, schools can extend the reach of great teachers to impact more learners, while simultaneously improving the teachers’ experiences as empowered professionals. Specifically, the paper explores three ways in which digital learning creates these opportunities:

- The implementation of blended learning to “extend the reach” of in-person excellent teachers to more students and to teaching peers;
- The ability to teach remotely, allowing great teachers to reach students anywhere and to have more flexible careers; and
- The opportunity for “boundless instruction” and expanded impact through online sharing of teacher-created content.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Building on the Digital Learning Now! 10 Elements of High Quality Digital Learning, the paper ends with a discussion of policy enablers for blended learning. These include funding, evaluation, pay/career options, operations, timing and scalability, and performance incentives. Addressing these areas is necessary to eliminate existing policy barriers and increase the odds that blended-learning innovations will result in better teaching and learning.

CONCLUSION

With calls for deeper learning opportunities, personalized learning, meaningful assessments and engaging new technologies, it is an exciting time to be a student. Teachers also stand to benefit from well-designed blended learning that provides unprecedented career advancement opportunities, time for collaboration and development, teacher-leadership roles, opportunities to earn higher pay, and job flexibility. Core to this is a belief that technology does not replace a teacher, but rather it empowers teachers and enhances their work. Altogether, these changes offer much promise for improving teachers’ working conditions and true professionalization of teaching careers.



WHAT IS BLENDED LEARNING?

According to the [Innosight Institute](#) (recently changed to the Clayton Christensen Institute for Disruptive Innovation), blended learning is “a formal education program in which a student learns at least in part through online delivery of content and instruction with some element of student control over time, place, path and/or pace.”¹ In the [Blended Learning Implementation Guide, Digital Learning Now!](#) adds to this definition a statement of intent, noting that “blended learning is a shift to online delivery for a portion of the day to make students, teachers and schools more productive, both academically and financially.”²