



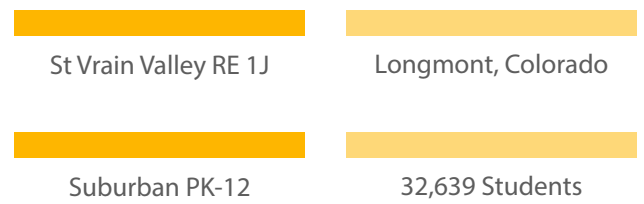
Taking a Grassroots Approach to Implementing Blended & Personalized Learning



Executive Summary

St. Vrain Valley Schools has created an environment where its teachers are leading the districtwide transition to a blended learning model, one that integrates technology with high-quality instruction to drive student outcomes. With the support of Colorado Empowered Learning and services delivered by [iLearn Collaborative](#), it has (a) assessed teachers' learning needs as they pertain to their experience in the blended and personalized learning space, (b) developed a certified train-the-trainer model of professional development, creating a cohort of teachers capable of leading districtwide implementation, and (c) provided micro-credentialing to acknowledge achievement and

Stats



The Idea

The best way to make change happen is to let those doing the work lead the way. St. Vrain Valley Schools has created an environment where its teachers are leading the districtwide transition to a blended learning model, one that integrates technology with high-quality instruction to drive student outcomes. See [St. Vrain Valley Schools Blended Learning 3-Year Plan](#).

How it Works

Identify Teacher Leaders: St. Vrain began five years ago by assembling eight teachers who were interested in blended learning, giving them an opportunity to learn, collaborate, and create together. These teachers were the first members of what became the Blended Collaborative. [Blended Learning Collaborative Guidelines](#)

Allow Those Teachers to Recruit Others: From this small beginning, excitement about this work spread. In its second year, participation more than tripled, with 28 teachers involved, including five from the original cohort who stayed on to provide support. By the third year, 42 teachers had joined. The initiative had scaled to create teams of teacher leaders at three elementary schools, four middle schools, and five high schools, demonstrating meaningful momentum. Today, St. Vrain has trained almost 300 teachers, and the Blended Collaborative has become so popular, with 95 teacher participants this year, that it has been divided into an East and a West cohort. [Teacher Recruitment Presentation](#).

Provide Leadership Support: To encourage this grassroots movement to expand beyond those initial enthusiastic teachers, St. Vrain Valley Schools set out to provide additional support and incentives. They created a six-person leadership support team for the Blended Collaborative that helps plan the online modules, set the agendas for meetings, and support teachers individually with observation, feedback, and planning.

[Blended Collaborative Committee Planning Guide](#). In the fifth year of the program, St. Vrain Valley Schools has made two additions to its leadership support. First, a version of the [teacher reflection training](#) is now brought to administrator training sessions, such as the leadership tech camp, so that even non-experts in blended are prepared to have constructive conversations with their teachers. Second, St. Vrain has started a new position: the Blended Building Leader. They currently have 16 teachers in this role, dedicated to coaching and mentoring fellow teachers. Moreover, with the volume of teachers trained, there is one trained teacher in nearly every building across the district available to support their peers.

Design a Scalable Professional Development Program: St. Vrain Valley Schools then needed an approach to provide professional development and recognition at larger scale. To address this need, they took advantage of the [state-supported professional development](#) available under the Colorado Empowered Learning program and delivered by iLearn Collaborative, which can be delivered virtually and contextualized by local Blended Building Leaders and peers. Today, they offer five distinct courses to teachers, including one that they co-created with Colorado Empowered Learning – a new course that is now available statewide on inquiry-based learning in a blended environment.

Leverage Digital Tools: To further extend the impact of the program, St. Vrain Valley Schools has started using a new video coaching tool, Edthena, which makes it possible for teachers

to look inside other teachers' classrooms without having to go to their classrooms. Teachers can video tape a station, or have their student aid video tape what the rotation looks like. Teachers can then reflect on the definition of student engagement in a log and push each other on strategies for better meeting the learning objectives. To support this process, St. Vrain has created a [video reflection rubric](#). Collectively, this approach allows each mentor to effectively and consistently support six to eight teachers, allowing St. Vrain to fully leverage its internal expertise to accelerate staff learning.

Enable Teachers to Choose Level of Engagement: With the support of the Colorado Empowered Learning program and services from iLearn Collaborative, St. Vrain has set the stage for teachers of varying levels of interest to all participate in the districtwide transition to blended learning. Teachers who wanted to commit and dive deeper into Blended apply for the Blended Collaborative in teacher teams to build leadership at their schools. They could earn their Micro Credential in Blended partially through the Collaborative and partially through the professional development supported by Colorado Empowered Learning. Teachers who wanted to learn about blended but did not want to commit to the Collaborative could earn their Blended Micro Credential by taking a designated set of five virtual courses that cover the components and best practices of blended learning. Today 84 teachers have taken at least three courses, and 20 have taken the full certification series. [See the CEL Course Catalog](#).

Purpose & Impact

To ensure that students get as much support from their teachers as possible, St. Vrain Valley Schools does not pull teachers out of the classroom for professional development and has a policy that avoids the use of substitute teachers for this purpose. Rather than see this as a roadblock, however, it has provided an opportunity for St. Vrain to strengthen professional development programming. St. Vrain has had strong success leveraging blended learning for professional development, where digital components introduce concepts and then teachers receive contextualized support in applying what they are learning in their buildings. This allows the district to provide effective training for its teachers while minimizing the amount of teacher time devoted to professional development in the evenings, weekends, and over the summer and maximizing teacher time with students.

To assess the impact of training efforts and inform future professional development, St. Vrain Valley Schools has created reflection rubrics for the components of strong blended instructional practice and collects before and after data according to those rubrics. These include: transformed class time, quality online content, station rotation, and formative assessment. This data allows them to see how teachers have shifted their philosophies, understanding, and implementation. This data is then supplemented with survey data collected by Kickup. At the close of each semester, they meet to review the pre and post data to understand where teachers are still struggling and inform where to focus for the following semester. These data collection efforts are what have propelled the continued growth of the Blended Collaborative: 64 percent of St. Vrain Valley Schools educators are interested in the group collaborative work, whereas only 15-20 percent would be content with learning entirely virtually.

Purpose & Impact

In a survey given to Blended Collaborative teachers, they found the following impacts to their classroom from a single year of implementation. Students are:

1. Becoming more active learners
2. Taking more ownership of their learning
3. Engaged in critical thinking
4. Partaking in more collaborative and academic conversations
5. Exploring real world applications

In addition, the impact on teachers has been extremely positive. Here are some quotes from teachers in the Collaborative:

“Blended Learning has transformed my vision of what is possible within a classroom. It has allowed me to initiate and practice the values that I feel are very important in how students learn. Those values include: student choice in terms of type of learning, length/pace of learning, individual vs. group/partner work and other types of differentiation dependent on interest, challenge and needs.” ~Kerri Courtney, Longmont High Social Studies Teacher

“Blended learning has changed the entire way I view how kids learn. Now that I am a few years into it, I do very little whole group instruction. Blended learning encourages the students to be the leaders of their own learning, even in third grade. It allows me to guide them in what they need based on formative assessments.” ~Farah Holburn, Mead Elementary 3rd Grade Teacher

Similarly, the district-level impact has been inspiring. St. Vrain Valley Schools has seen tremendous support and buy-in from teachers across the district with increasing numbers applying to join the Blended Collaborative and asking for additional professional development opportunities.

Lessons Learned

Successful blended implementation requires peer support from fellow teachers and other district

colleagues. "I realized through my own experience as a blended teacher, that taking classes on Blended was not enough to support its implementation. The support of fellow teachers and other district colleagues was essential to a successful implementation. After the first year of the Collaborative, I saw the success of all the teachers involved. These teachers became leaders at their schools, sharing their ideas and recruiting others to want to learn more. This year we had teacher teams apply to the collaborative so that they could support each other as they implemented Blended practices and worked together to support and teach others at their school. They motivated others to want to learn more – this is the key to our grassroots approach."

Leadership plays a big role in making teachers feel comfortable stepping out of their comfort zone and trying

new things. "Our biggest challenge is to get teachers to step out of their comfort zone and try new things. This is where the leadership team support plays a big role. It is important to have teachers currently implementing Blended to have the opportunity to talk with teachers new to the implementation."

About Colorado Empowered Learning

Colorado Empowered Learning is the implementation support program that aims to help educators statewide combine the use of technology with great instructional practices. Program services are delivered by non-profit providers Colorado Digital Learning Solutions and iLearn Collaborative.

Teachers need an initial set of digital curriculum resources and the time required to tailor those resources to the needs of their individual

classes. "Another challenge is finding time and resources to build the online content needed to implement Blended Learning. One thing that has helped support this process is the movement St. Vrain Valley Schools has made to all digital curriculum. Digital curriculum gives teachers content and resources to create, build on and tailor to the needs of their individual class – they are not starting from scratch. We have also built in one credit (15 hours) of time that teachers can use to create lessons and online components for their classroom. Teachers appreciate time set aside just for lesson planning and building, although many put in many more hours than we give them. They feel that credit gives them a start."

Leadership needs to be developed at both the school and district levels.

"I think developing levels of leadership in both the schools and at the district level is key. We have a team of district support staff that come from PD, instructional technology and curriculum backgrounds that have helped plan and support this model. Engaged staff from all departments creates consistency, buy-in and capacity to support Blended across the district. Their work, along with the teacher leaders from the Blended Collaborative, have created a strong infrastructure to support Blended Implementation in St. Vrain Valley Schools."