# Blended Learning in Oakland

# Initiative Update
## Part 3, April 2014

*Prior Blended Learning Initative were released in [October 2012](#) and [January 2013](#).*

## Introduction

Since our last writing in January 2013, this "Pilot Update" describes an additional year's worth of planning, design and implementation progress for the Rogers Family Foundation's Blended Learning Initiative in Oakland, CA. Like the field in general, we continued to learn, grow and evolve, and hope that our experience can help you to ask the right questions, consider tradeoffs, and learn from challenges we have experienced. Please visit our [website](#) for a [resource list](#) and more information.

We remain incredibly hopeful about the progress and promise of blended personalized learning. We also maintain confidence that our teachers and students are already benefiting from this initiative, and expect that the short and long term results will be positive. That being said, we are in the "top of the second inning" in this work, and the "pitching changes" of online content and "late-game pinch hitters" that we expect will come with technology infrastructure evolution and continuous improvement of teacher professional development make this a complex, messy, but unquestionably innovative game changer for transforming education. We hope that this candid update will inspire you to pursue blended personalized learning and also highlight potential obstacles that you should anticipate and plan to encounter.



Student at Korematsu working independently on a chromebook.

## Updates from Pilot School Sites

In the Fall of 2013 we reached some major milestones in our Blended Learning Initiative. Our eight pilot schools launched their implementation at the beginning of the school year, differentiating instruction that collectively reach nearly 3,500 students every day. In large part, teachers in our pilots have the devices, network, and content infrastructure they need to deliver lessons in a blend of small group instruction and adaptive online content. In the course of a few short weeks at the beginning of the 2013-2014 school year, and with the excitement and enthusiasm of teachers and students, we successfully deployed approximately 1,000 chromebooks across the eight sites. At the same time, Oakland Unified School District's (OUSD) Network team installed over 40 state-of-the-art wireless access points to ensure that classrooms would not experience connectivity issues. Most of the initiative's on-going support focuses on helping teachers get as much out of this infrastructure recipe. This means:

- (re)training teachers on specific programs or tools;
- (re)connecting teachers to professional trainers and coaches;
- (re)connecting teachers to one another so they can learn from peers and ask questions;
- troubleshooting various (and relatively minor) technical issues.

We have a handful (and growing number) of teachers who are truly innovating at each site and are pushing their peers to both play and learn alongside their students.

## School Implementation Snapshots - Cohort I

Our original four pilot schools are all each growing and deepening their work. Last year's test results on the California Standards Test (CST) - R.I.P. CST - for our blended classrooms were mixed, with gains and dips across schools in both English Language Arts and Mathematics. While we are disappointed that not all of our blended learning classrooms immediately boosted student outcomes, we believe greatly that we will see dramatic increases in the years to come as Oakland, and California at large, complete their transition to the new Common Core State Standards and the new Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) online exams. It is our belief that when teachers and students both have more consistent experience in a blended environment that efficiencies will be realized and more personalized instruction will lead to better results for all students. To put it simply, our teachers and students rightfully still need more practice!
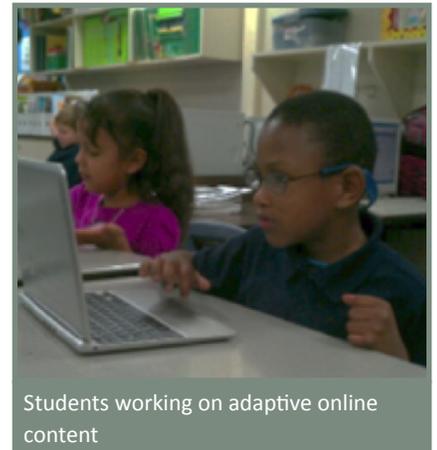


Students working on adaptive online content

We began augmenting Cohort I's Year Two plans well before student achievement scores arrived. **Madison Park Academy's** new 9th grade is now 1-to-1, with students able to take their chromebooks home and the school is working with families to get Wi-Fi access into their homes. **Elmhurst Community Prep Middle School** now has an upgraded wireless network capable of supporting the large number of devices at the site. **Korematsu Discovery Academy's** implementation grew from just two fourth grade classrooms last year to nearly every classroom in the school now infusing technology into the school day. Finally, **EnCompass Elementary** simplified their implementation, focusing on the use of Achieve3000 to further raise reading scores.

In the 2014-15 school year, Madison, Elmhurst, EnCompass and Korematsu will all enter their third and final year of support. All the schools are nearing 1-to-1 infrastructure capacity, and their implementation is growing to practically every single teacher and student at their sites. By this time next year, they will be considered fully blended school sites. The vast majority of on-going teacher support is facilitated by experienced blended teachers at these schools, and on-going digital content costs are sustained by the site or by OUSD's central dollars. Given the progress made so far, we are happy to report that beyond simply being "on budget," some of our sites are well within their original budget expectations and are in exploration as of this writing on how best to spend their final grant dollars. As such, this leads us to two key actions: 1) not spending resources until clear needs are surfaced and 2) help our sites push their thinking/learning innovation curve by facilitating visits to top innovative blended schools in Spring 2014 for OUSD principals, central staff and teacher leaders.

## School Implementation Snapshots - Cohort II

In 2013-14, we added a second cohort of four schools: two district schools and two charter schools. Through critical lessons learned from the original implementation sites, we enabled Cohort II to rapidly launch their programs and get students engaged quickly.

- **Edna Brewer** and **Bret Harte**, both OUSD middle schools, are in their first year of implementation with Edna Brewer focusing on English Language Arts and Bret Harte on Mathematics. Both schools transitioned their pilot classrooms to a blended environment much more quickly than what we experienced last year. The implementation at these Cohort II sites was simpler: same devices throughout; easy-to-customize launch pages; free single-sign-on options with "log-in with Google;" and an emphasis on digital citizenship and responsibility. Both schools are also focusing on a single academic content provider, which greatly streamlines their professional development needs. Each school plans on doubling its implementation in 2014-15. Our Spring 2014 planning is focusing on two questions: 1) how can current blended teachers lead and support their new-to-blended colleagues (sustainably scaling "the basics")?; and 2) how does the school create a space for innovative blended teachers to push what is possible and further experiment in a drive towards personalization? Both schools received more chromebook infrastructure from OUSD than we originally provided, (see "OUSD's Chromebook Deployment" below) and neither are using premium content solutions paid from grant funds. These remain lean, scalable and, supportable pilots, with a focus on teacher ownership and choice. The work now transitions to how we support teachers to further "let go" and create opportunities for students to drive decision-making and their own learning.

- Aspire Public Schools' **Millsmont Elementary** implemented a lab rotation model. Millsmont uses modular furniture in the lab in order to group students into "pods" of four. This orientation allows students to have face-to-face interactions as needed or work individually on their computers. The lab is very simple and cost effective: no charging cords running everywhere, no electrical outlet upgrades, and no internet wires. Everything is mobile, wireless, and the laptops charge in a cart overnight. We believe that this is the future of building computer labs: mobility and flexibility with minimal capital upgrades and limited impact of critical, dedicated facility space.

- **ASCEND** is the last of our new pilots and it too has experienced a relatively smooth start to the school year. Network upgrades needed to be addressed early on, resulting in a slightly delayed full launch of their implementation. ASCEND is a K-8 former OUSD school that is now a charter school with local CMO Education for Change. The ASCEND deployment is our largest – 200 chromebooks in 18 classrooms – reaching every teacher and every child in every classroom.



Aspire Millsmont students working in "pods" of four on chromebooks.

Greatly aided by their increased level of Home Office support specifically for blended personalized learning, both our charter schools, ASCEND and Millsmont, remain strong and future planning is well on track. With its unanimously approved new charter secured for Fall 2014, Millsmont will be re-launched as a brand new, all-blended school: **Aspire Triumph Technology Academy** (ATTA). The new school will be modeled on Aspire Titan in Los Angeles, now in its third year of blended learning. While ATCA is a wholly new school, all of our prior blended investments will continue to pay dividends, and our Year Two and Three dollars provide Aspire Public Schools the backbone to scale their proven Titan model here in Oakland. ASCEND's implementation already touches every single teacher and student across Kindergarten to 8th grade. Year Two funding will strengthen teacher practice with adaptive online content. Like Aspire, ASCEND – and all of Education for Change – is fortunate to have a Home Office-provided Director of Innovation and Technology, who supports the entire charter management organization's transition to fully blended schools.

# Preliminary Outcomes

## Evaluation of Year One:  Results from SRI Study

Before launching Cohort I, the Rogers Family Foundation commissioned SRI International to conduct an analysis of our pilot schools' first year of implementation. The evaluation looks closely at the formative development of implementing blended learning at these schools, and shares lessons learned. While there is great value in documenting this work for the field, it should also be noted that this work is fluid and fast-changing. Many of the recommended improvements in technology infrastructure, online content, and teacher training and development were identified early on by the Rogers Family Foundation staff and course corrected in time for the selection and deployment of Cohort II. Data for the evaluation was collected through teacher surveys, classroom observations, school visits, teacher and principal interviews, student focus groups and stakeholder interviews. The full evaluation can be found **here**.

## Trends from Sites

With respect to student outcomes, we can now share a few high-level data points. Results cannot be directly attributed to the introduction of blended personalized instruction, but they speak to the contributing impact of our initiative's work in these schools:
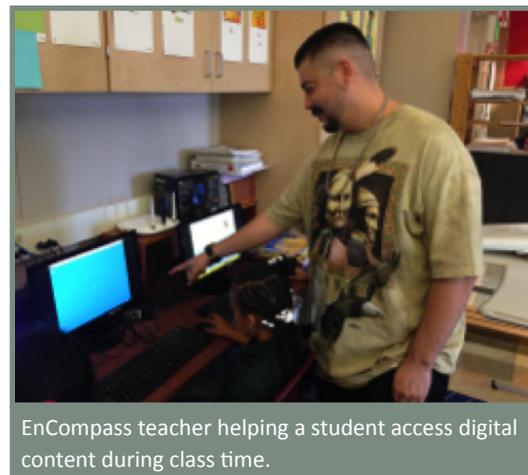
- Discipline referrals have dropped by 62% in Elmhurst's 1-to-1 8th grade classrooms.
- At Korematsu, the percentage of students reading at grade level, as measured by Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI), has more than doubled from 10% in August 2013 to 24% in January 2014.
- Based on results from the Children's Progress Academic Assessment, between ~70% of ASCEND's K-2 students achieved or surpassed their projected growth in Phonemic Awareness/ Phonics. Of these same students, between ~70% achieved or surpassed their projected growth in reading.
- In half a year at Edna Brewer, students have gained an average of 97 Lexile points in reading as measured by Achieve3000's LevelSet assessment - the equivalent of one year's growth in just half a school year.

An important new data point we are collecting this school year is the perception of both teachers and students regarding the blended personalized learning experience. Through brief 5-10 minute student and teacher surveys we are able to collect a perception of the quality of instruction and learning in a blended classroom. Although the overwhelming majority of students surveyed had just begun to experience blended learning last Fall, nearly six out of ten preferred working in a combination of small groups and with computers, as opposed to whole-class lessons with their teacher. Similarly, due to expansion within and across schools, the vast majority of our blended teachers were just in their opening months of implementation when surveyed, yet 94% of teachers were either neutral to or "pro-blended," with only 6% indicating that they would not recommend this work to a peer. Half of all teachers indicate that they are already *solid* supporters of the pedagogy. Additional findings include:

- In Fall 2013, students across the pilot sites agreed or strongly agreed that digital content helped them stay on-task (57%) and understand their lessons (58%). Comparatively, when asked about the use of small-groups, 51% reported it helped them stay on task and 60% reported it helped them understand the lesson.

- Teachers across sites agreed or strongly agreed that student engagement increased due to the use of small-group instruction (77%). In addition, when asked about increases in student understanding, 78% agreed or strongly agreed this was being supported by increased small group instruction. Teacher responses to the impact of digital content on student engagement and student understanding were slightly lower, coming in at 57% and 38% respectively. The difference between how teachers view small group instruction vs. digital content could be a reflection of how early the survey was given in relation to implementation as well as the fact that both teachers and students are still in an "early learning" phase with how to maximize the power of digital content for student learning.



EnCompass teacher helping a student access digital content during class time.

All of our sites have innovative teachers investigating how different their classrooms truly need to become to meet student needs. There are also teachers for whom implementing a single online content provider in a rotation model is all they can effectively manage at this point. Regardless of where they are on this professional development spectrum, we seek to push their practice and keep their eyes on the end goal of personalizing education for students, i.e., that this initiative is much more than simply having kids work online for part of the school day.

## Updates from the Systems Level

When we began this work in 2011, formal blended instruction did not exist in OUSD and only one or two "bleeding edge" innovative Oakland charter schools attempted this work. Our initiative was born of the need to push what was possible in our schools and as a response to our very own grantees who asked for more. Now three years later, our eight pilot schools are joined by at least five more district schools and practically every charter in the city in actively leveraging adaptive online content to personalize instruction. Over the past year, we have seen an extraordinary reach from the balance of schools in Oakland seeking knowledge capacity and technical assistance from us, and the opportunity to apply for future blended learning cohorts.

### OUSD's Chromebook Deployment

Beyond dramatically increasing the number of schools interested in doing this work, our blended initiative leveraged over $4 million from other philanthropic and public funding sources. Most of this comes in the form of OUSD investing half of its one-time Common Core dollars from the state on technology infrastructure ($3.5 million). OUSD is now poised to deliver significant device and network upgrades *to every school in the district* that builds off of our blended learning initiative's lessons on chromebooks, training teachers and SBAC-preparedness.

Beyond network connectivity, student devices and their ancillary operating systems are a second foundational, infrastructure ingredient in any blended, personalized implementation. Since the beginning of our initiative back in Winter 2012, schools and the Rogers Family Foundation have been concerned about mid- and longer-term sustainability, particularly when it comes to student device life cycles. To this end, we are very excited that OUSD dedicated the use of one-time funds issued by the state for Common Core implementation to deploy chromebooks at every OUSD school. A few high-level bullet points about what this $3.5 million deployment includes:

- OUSD is on pace to configure and deliver a total of approximately 8,000 chromebooks that will reach every school in the district by the end of April 2014.
- Every set of 34 chromebooks will come on a charging/security cart, and each cart comes with its own state-of-the-art, cloud-controlled wireless access point.
- The new access points will run a new, modern, optimized-for-chromebook wireless network, promising increased speeds and connectivity.
- Many district schools doubled-down on the deal by buying even more with their own site funds.
- Logistics and decision points – from device/cart to padlocks to authoring training documentation and support protocols for teachers – are directly informed by our pilot sites' experiences with chromebooks in classrooms.

**Why Chromebooks?**

After working with our pilot sites over the years and experiencing the pluses and minuses of a variety of devices, Blended Learning Director Greg Klein determined that chromebooks (at this time) are the simplest devices to set-up, deploy, maintain, and give tremendous curricular flexibilities. This fun animated video pretty much sums up the magic of the chromebook.



in a computer–like object

To be clear, 8,000 chromebooks is a lot. At the same time, it remains important to remember that this represents the absolute *minimum* OUSD needs to deploy in order to *minimally* administer the new SBAC assessments online beginning this Spring. It is roughly one-third of the way to a full 1-to-1 initiative. To teachers and principals, this absolutely feels like a first "down-payment" for what needs to be a much larger deployment by the district. It should be noted, however, that in our six district blended pilot sites this deployment fundamentally answers our sustainability concerns for the foreseeable future, and opens up new opportunities for how our grant dollars flow to new, more innovative areas of support.
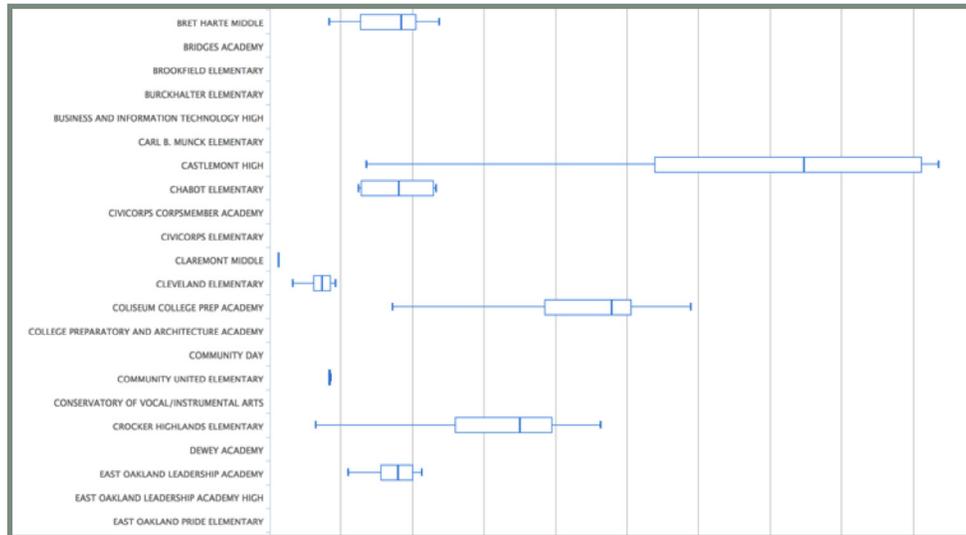
## The Federal Communications Commission and E-Rate Reform

Before devices can be successfully deployed, the foundational ingredient to any blended personalized learning implementation must be addressed: internet connectivity. OUSD is in need of major upgrades to meet the growing network demands of principals, teachers, and students. Our partner, the EducationSuperHighway, developed their national School Speed Test to give schools and districts the information they need to make smart upgrades. Oakland's connectivity needs are vast and varied, as depicted in the graphic below bandwidth speeds from 0-100 mbps. Even within this small school sample, there exists tremendous variability in the quality of connectivity in Oakland schools. While significant upgrades are planned for the short- and medium-term, this issue will need to be constantly revisited to maximize blended personalized teaching and learning.



In January, OUSD, the Rogers Family Foundation and EducationSuperHighway co-hosted Federal Communication Commission Chairman Tom Wheeler as he visited Edna Brewer Middle School. The visit was a rousing success, culminating in Mr. Wheeler commenting on **"the fact…that we have moved from the era of 'computers in the classroom' where a few PCs sat along the wall for occasional use, to 'computers on the desks' where students interact on an ongoing basis to not only learn their lessons, but also to acquire the computer literacy skills necessary for 21st Century careers."** Additionally, in his State of the Union address just a few weeks after this visit, President Obama put forth the goal of ensuring that 99% of the nation's public schools have their network connectivity and broadband needs met within five years.

# Looking Ahead

The pilot sites have proven to be critical and exciting learning laboratories that inform the work not only in Oakland, but nationally. Maintaining our multi-year commitments to our pilot sites is necessary as certainly there is much more work to be done in their classrooms. Not nearly enough of our pilot teachers can eloquently explain the power of this work. Nor are all our pilot implementation sites particularly bold compared to some of the Bay Area's most innovative charter management organizations. Nor do we have undeniable academic success stories to share across the board. A "hunkering down" with our current schools may best serve to create more consistent success and fidelity. Continuing momentum by adding more schools - while relatively expensive - may perhaps identify and nurture truly innovative-yet-currently-unknown leaders and teachers to champion this work.

## Personalized Learning in Oakland

In Summer 2013, OUSD, in collaboration with the Rogers Family Foundation, Oakland Public Education Fund and Education for Change (EFC), won a $100,000 planning grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to design a system-level approach that would expand and strengthen blended personalized learning for Oakland students. Our "System Design Team" was co-led by OUSD Technology Services Project Manager Tracey Logan and our Director of Blended Learning Greg Klein. The two worked closely with a technical assistance team from the Parthenon Group (provided also through Gates Foundation) over 18 weeks to plan for Oakland's at-scale transition to Personalized Learning schools. Planning for this work engaged all of OUSD's senior staff and leadership (Superintendent and the senior cabinet positions), and positively connected EFC and OUSD in wholly new ways. The Strategic Plan for this work was completed at the end of January 2014. At the time of this writing, the direction of future funding for this work remains uncertain, but much is being done to ensure that the plan will not be another that simply sits in some shared file system. The Rogers Family Foundation is committed to leading the way with both our own dollars as well as raising the necessary resources from several promising leads to ensure this work moves urgently forward.

While the work continues to identify funding resources to implement the system-wide blended personalized learning strategic plan, the plan's completion and the strengthening of relationships with OUSD and charter community is already proving fruitful in a few key ways:

- New conversation and planning is now in place for how OUSD might spend future curriculum adoption dollars in support of adaptive digital content, further enabling high-quality blended implementation that can be sustained and aligned within the district's existing funding streams.

- Building off the work of the System Design Team from the Fall planning process, district leadership has formally directed staff to form OUSD's new Personalized Learning Leadership Team, made up of six different cross-departmental staffers, representing 2.5 full time staff. This team further formalizes the working group that drafted our blended, personalized learning strategic plan.

- The Rogers Family Foundation continues to embrace and champion this work, and has begun to actively reach out to other local, regional, and national funders to seek support for the strategic plan's implementation.

Given all of this, the work of selecting a new cohort of schools will be completed in late Spring 2014. This Personalized Learning Cohort (as opposed to Blended Learning, see next page) will apply for planning grants and technical assistance supports. We anticipate schools will be chosen by May 2014, and will work over the summer to design a cohort of new Fall pilots. In early Winter 2015, these Personalized Learning schools will create and pitch more comprehensive implementation plans for the possibility of ongoing support from the Rogers Family Foundation.



**ACHIEVE3000 at Edna Brewer Middle School**
Rotation model / Whole class    Blended Learning
Developing program — started with Intervention beginning in core English classes

Average 1st semester Lexile gain
97L
Grades 6-8
15 classes    294 students
One of the data points used to measure student progress.

Teachers are the drivers of innovative curriculum and instruction at our school. They integrate and incorporate Achieve3000 in their own way.

Mr. Knowles class is using TeenBiz as part of a collaborative History unit on West Africa.

Flyer at Edna Brewer highlighting how Blended Learning is being used in one classroom.

## The Language of Blended Learning

There is clear movement in the field around the nomenclature of how we characterize this work. "Personalized Learning (PL)" or "Blended Personalized Learning" are quickly displacing "Blended Learning" – just as "Blended" displaced "Hybrid" about two years back. Equally as important, the terminology shift to "Personalized Learning" creates a bigger, more inclusive tent that embraces other philanthropic initiatives currently in play such as the Irvine Foundation's "Linked Learning" investments and the Hewlett Foundation's "Deeper Learning" approach. The move to the language of "Personalized Learning" serves to emphasize the notion that the work of Next Generation Schools remains committed to giving students much greater degrees of self-determination and choice in their education and that blending becomes one frequently-deployed strategy within the larger frame of personalization, self-pacing, mastery-based progression and self-direction. Perhaps most importantly, we believe this shift in theory and practice is very likely to further push teachers even more to firmly support and champion Next Generation learning.

Please be in touch with feedback and ideas!

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