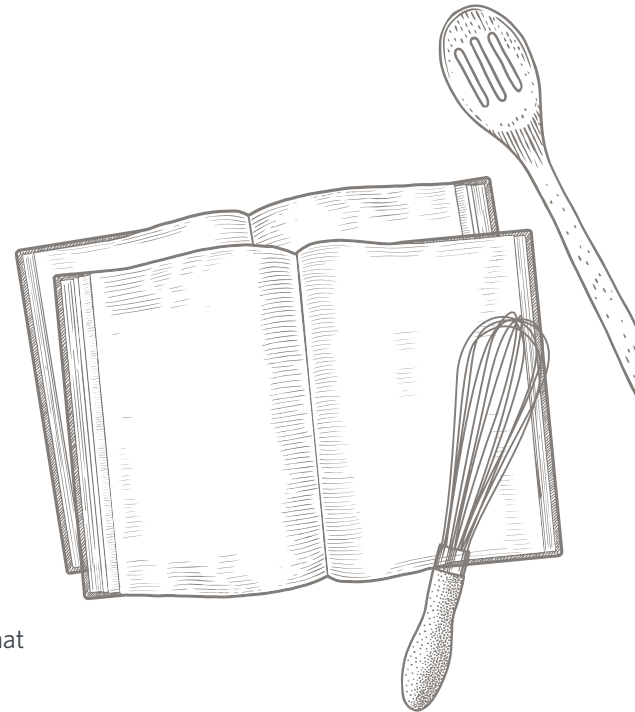


Reporting from the Test Kitchen:

Blended Learning at New Leaders



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The education sector is currently grappling with a number of important challenges: How do we prepare *all* students to succeed while providing sustainable work environments and meaningful support for teachers, principals, and other educators? How do we help educators to grow and improve in their practice while mitigating against the forces that can lead to burnout?

Blended learning, which combines independent online work with in-person group sessions, is an appealing option to help address these challenges: it promises time-savings, flexibility, learner autonomy, and ease of use — all *without sacrificing program quality*. Indeed, two decades of peer-reviewed studies of in-person, online, and blended instruction have consistently demonstrated that quality trumps delivery method. In fact, high-quality blended programs outperform low-quality online or in-person programs, and vice-versa.¹ But it's not foolproof. Building and delivering a high-quality blended program cannot be achieved without adequate preparation and thoughtful design.

To more deeply understand the opportunities and challenges of blended learning, New Leaders examined a series of innovative, blended programs designed specifically for public school leaders and faculty. These programs incorporated independent online instructional components with in-person professional development sessions, job-embedded practice, and personalized coaching.

The study examined programs implemented by New Leaders during school year 2017-18 with more than ten partners, including urban and rural districts and charter schools. The New Leaders researchers interviewed dozens of program participants and staff involved in the design and delivery of these blended programs.

While there isn't a single master recipe for blended programs, the analyses conducted for this evaluation reveal how issues pertaining to Relevance, Accountability, Self-Regulation, Motivation, and Prior Experience shaped the experiences of program participants. The investigation also details other key takeaways for the field and offers recommendations for building and delivering effective blended professional development for educators.

¹ Means, B., Toyama, Y., Murphy, R., Bakia, M., & Jones, K. (2009). Evaluation of evidence-based practices in online learning: A meta-analysis and review of online learning studies. U. S. Department of Education. Retrieved from <http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/opepd/ppss/reports.html>

Key Takeaway: Two Organizational Preconditions for a Successful Transition from Traditional to Blended Instruction

An effective blended learning program model is not simply a ratio of time spent in-person versus online; it requires more than retrofitting an existing in-person course with online discussion boards and YouTube links. Moreover, contrary to the common belief about immediate cost-savings, blended learning programs may initially be more expensive than traditional in-person programs because of essential investments in technology and other areas of support. New Leaders' research highlights two preconditions that must be in place before an organization can successfully transition from in-person to blended program delivery.

1. Organizational Alignment and Resource Allocation

First, organizations must precisely map out the necessary resources — in technology, in instructional staff, and in support staff — and make sure that organizational structures are in place to support the transition to a partially virtual environment. In addition, organizations must budget for start-up investment costs as well as ongoing training and technical support for instructors and students.

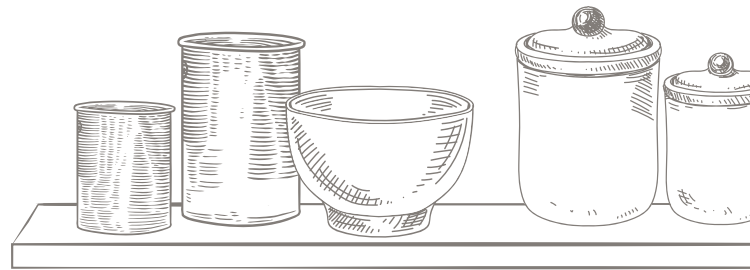
2. Buy-in from Staff and Cross-Team Coordination

Designers of blended adult professional development must determine how to create a thriving in-person and online community, engage participants in both independent and group work, build in flexibility, and facilitate participant learning.² When adequately supported, blended instructors often discover greater student satisfaction than in traditional course settings,³ with participants especially valuing opportunities to network with their peers and interact personally with their instructors both in person and online. Without sufficient planning and appropriate resources, this potential benefit of blended instruction is unlikely to be realized.

Key Takeaway: Five Key Ingredients of Blended Adult Professional Development

New Leaders' research identified five important dimensions of adult blended learners' experiences that should inform blended professional development program design and implementation.

- 1. Relevance** to participants' immediate work and professional priorities is crucial; content and vocabulary should be aligned with local standards and tools.
- 2. Accountability** supports participants to engage with program content and to incorporate what they learn into their practice.
- 3. Self-Regulation** is needed so that participants stay on top of scheduling time to effectively engage with independent online content and assignments.
- 4. Motivation**, or what participants want to get out of the blended learning experience, is an important consideration for blended program designers and facilitators.
- 5. Prior Experience** with online or blended instruction influences participants' expectations.



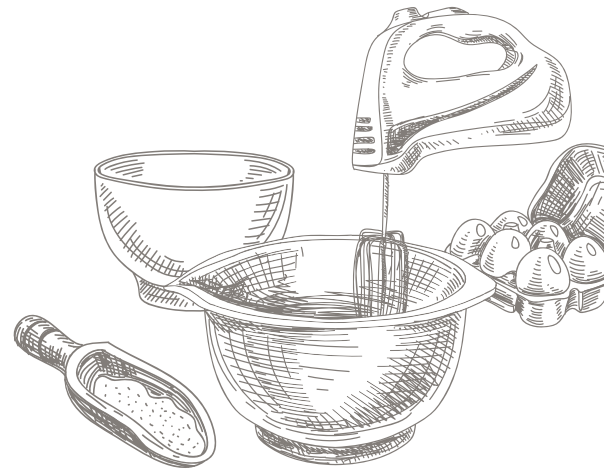
2 Boelens, R., De Wever, B., & Voet, M. (2017). Four key challenges to the design of blended learning: A systematic literature review. *Educational Research Review*, 22, 1-18.

3 Caravias, V (2018). Teachers' conceptions and approaches to blended learning: A literature review. In Oncioiu, I. (Ed.), *Driving Innovation and Business Success in the Digital Economy* (228-251). Hershey, PA: IGI Global.

Key Takeaway: Four Key Organizational Actions to Support Effective Blended Learning Programming

Based on New Leaders' research, here are four important actions organizations can take to support their transition from wholly in-person to blended professional development program design and implementation.

1. Blended instructional **staff need time to prepare content** and familiarize themselves with the online platform.
2. **Timely tech support for online tools** is crucial for blended program success, as technical difficulties dampen participants' enthusiasm.
3. Participants stay engaged with online content and accountable for their work when **expectations are communicated early and often**.
4. Participants benefit from and are motivated by **connecting with peers to exchange ideas and solutions** both in-person and online.



ABOUT NEW LEADERS

New Leaders transforms underperforming schools by developing outstanding leaders at every level of the education system — from teacher leaders to principals and their supervisors. We work in deep partnership with our state, district, and charter partners, delivering leadership solutions that build on their strengths and address their most-pressing priorities. Our evidence-based programming cultivates diverse, equity-driven leaders equipped with the skills to elevate instruction, enhance learning, and build vibrant, inclusive school communities. To encourage widespread adoption of effective, sustainable leadership practices, we also advocate for federal and state policies that support the work of school leaders everywhere. To date, New Leaders has trained 3,900 education leaders who annually reach nearly half a million PK-12 students, mostly students of color and children from low-income families. Our programs deliver breakthrough academic results and help build brighter futures for high-need urban and rural communities nationwide.