

# UTeach Professional Development

What do educators learn from our Foundations of Blended Learning course?

Educators enrolled in the [Foundations of Blended Learning](#) professional development course take four modules. We selected a few of their assignments to give you a sense of what they are learning. All educators gave us permission to share their work products. These reflection papers are from the 2020–2021 school year, with most teachers taking Foundations of Blended Learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Reflection papers from other school years are [available here](#).

## Module 4, Capstone Blended Learning Reflections

### Assignment: Blended Learning Reflection Paper

The final activity in Foundations of Blended Learning requires participants to answer a driving question: *How do I best combine the technology-enhanced tools, differentiation strategies, and management tools to transform my classroom into a blended learning environment?*

Throughout the reflection paper, participants elaborate on the following topics:

1. Share what you are specifically trying to accomplish in your blended learning classroom.
2. Discuss changes you have made or plan to make to foster a blended learning environment.
3. Communicate how these changes will enhance student learning and describe what evidence you will use to determine improvement.

These reflection papers were written by educators taking the Blended Learning course series:

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**Brooklyn Arias, Pre-K Teacher, Blackshear Elementary School, Ector County ISD, Texas**

*Brooklyn Arias shares her rather unique perspective as a pre-K teacher, leading and facilitating a group of emerging readers and writers in a blended setting with great success! Brooklyn is surprised and encouraged that her planning of blended lessons and creation of choice boards to engage her young learners is relatively low-prep in terms of time spent and resources needed. She uses the ISTE for Educators as a philosophical basis to direct her approach, as she takes on new primary roles of designer and facilitator of this transitioning blended setting. Brooklyn is aided by the strong norms and procedures that she previously used to guide centers and small group interactions, which also work well to guide focus and transitions in her blended classroom. While some teachers may be reticent to use online platforms with such young students, Brooklyn champions programs like Imagine Learning, Starfall, and Seesaw as useful options to embed in her choice boards and streamline her ability to differentiate and optimize outcomes as her students build foundational skills.*

My name is Brooklyn Arias and I am a third-year Pre-K teacher for Ector County Independent School District in Odessa, Texas. I am currently at Blackshear Elementary. My Assistant Principal for the past two years is now the Blended Learning Coordinator for our district and challenged me to take this course. Of course, I couldn't say no. Since starting this course I have come to realize so many things about blended learning and how it can fit into my life and my classroom.

One of the main things that I realized just not two lessons ago, was it doesn't have to be hard. I wrote a menu choice board at the beginning of this course and rewrote it this week just changing up a few things to fit into the lesson for the week. It took me about five or ten minutes and my students love doing the choice board. It is a great way to create a sense of agency and community in the classroom. Students who learn the same, choose the same things and build friendships. The menu choice board has become my favorite tool to incorporate the blended model. With such a young group of students, they deserve to have some say in what and how they are learning.

The most important thing that I have learned taking this course is about the ISTE Standards. Until this class, I hadn't even heard about them. I think it is important to know and to understand how to use tools to help support these standards in the classroom. I also was able to see just how many free resources are available to teachers who are interested in incorporating the blended learning model into their classrooms. There are a ton. This morning I was searching choice boards on Teachers Pay Teachers for letter knowledge and there were so many available. I think it is great that teachers are able to find help with any question they have. The digital age makes it so much easier on us.

In my classroom, my students get so excited when I pull up our choice board. They have learned the routines and procedures on what that time looks like and the expectations. I am lucky to have an aide who can help redirect students who are off task and allow me time to teach a small group during this block of time. I believe that the students enjoy it, they understand the

expectations, and most importantly, they are able to learn in their own way which is why it has worked so smoothly for me and my young learners. I am excited to do this more often and I know my students are as well.

The great thing about this blended learning approach is the same expectations that I used for independent centers and groups are used for blended learning so the transition was easy for them. We have been working on those expectations since day one at school. We also use a ton of visuals including an online timer and quiet music.

I know my students are benefiting from blended learning because they are excited, engaged and are in charge of their own learning.

I also like the idea that blended learning doesn't mean you have to have a lot of fancy technology. We are lucky to have an interactive Smart board and individual iPads for students and access to many other technology choices such as Google Expedition goggles, coding robots such as Sphero and Dash and Dot, and other fun manipulatives like OSMO. But really, you can do blended learning without all of this, and in fact, we haven't used many of these resources yet.

My goal was to create one blended learning lesson a week and my students have really shown me that this is a great way for them to learn. They get to pick how they learn and kids love working on iPads so they enjoy the lessons that are on SeeSaw and Imagine Learning and Starfall.

Thank you for allowing me to take this course. I have enjoyed it and have gained confidence in my ability to teach with different approaches.

**Paula Packer, 2nd-Grade Teacher, Shields Elementary School, Victoria ISD, Texas**

*In these thoughtful reflections, veteran elementary school teacher Paula Packer shares her developing and energized perspective in guiding student learning and engagement in a blended setting. Paula was able to pivot this past year during pandemic-affected instruction and use her prior experience integrating Montessori work plans to connect with students in a more individualized and accountable way. She will build on this approach as she makes a full and in-person transition to blended learning this year and implements blended frameworks like digital choice boards to more effectively connect with students and leverage technology resources to streamline planning and targeted feedback. Google Classroom as a foundational platform, coupled with integration of online adaptive programs like Lexia, will form a strong basis for her student-centered lessons. Paula will use continual formative assessment to not only inform her planning and grouping, but also support her students with direction and guidance in a more autonomous learning environment.*

In my 33 years of teaching, I can only think of one other training that changed, challenged, and fueled me. In 1995 I had the opportunity to get Montessori trained and certified to teach

students from the ages of 6-9 and 9-12 years old. That experience changed the way I taught and gave me a love for a more hands-on approach to learning. Unfortunately, the school ended up losing its funding and the school became more traditional as the years went by. So, when I heard about the opportunity our school had to become a Blended Learning Campus, all that training came back to me and seems valuable once again.

This online opportunity to learn more about the Foundations of Blended Learning has been very beneficial. It has refocused me as an educator and has given me a chance to be a part of something exciting for our school and students.

One goal I have for the 2021-2022 school year is to create a more inviting classroom environment that promotes and nurtures learning at its best. I will incorporate a more open concept which will make transitions flow a little quicker. Within this design, I will begin to individualize instruction and activities and give students the opportunity to take ownership of their learning by making academic choices that are appropriate for them.

Creating Menu Boards is another goal I have for the next school year. This year I piloted Individualized Work Plans that mirrored what a Montessori Work Plan looked like. For the most part, it has been very successful. However, after going through this training, I definitely want to move towards a digital choice board that embeds more technology.

Training on different programs this summer is certainly another goal I have. Since our school will be using Lexia and Google Classroom, I definitely want to get as much training as possible so I can confidently use each with ease. This year I used Seesaw with my students, but not as consistently as I should have. For my second graders, at the beginning of the school year, getting laptops, logging on, and trying to navigate school programs, was very challenging. However, after Christmas the process became much easier. I look forward to a more fluid use of technology next school year.

How will I know if my students are learning? Analyzing data from different computer programs, daily observations, weekly tests, monthly fluency tracking, and campus and district benchmarks, are just a few ways to measure student growth and success.

In closing, I look forward to the 2021-2022 school year. I am eager to implement all the strategies and ideas I have learned through this online course.

**Kileigh Eblen, 4th Grade Teacher, Shields Elementary School, Victoria ISD, Texas**

*Kileigh Eblen, a 4th-grade math teacher from Victoria ISD, is beyond excited to plan and implement blended learning tools and practices in her classroom this year. In her reflections, she outlines a detailed plan that highlights initial steps to establish norms, procedures, and differentiated groups to start the year and a resource-rich classroom to engage every type and level of learner throughout the school year. Kileigh has identified many specific technology platforms that are both content-based and assessment-focused to offer students choice in how they explore new materials and how they share and express takeaways. Her use of relatively low-prep and content-rich resources like STEMscopes and Khan Academy will streamline planning, giving her more time to scaffold learning for those in her classroom that need more support. We hope that Kileigh will keep these reflections as a guide and action plan as she executes her complex vision. We're sure that the result will be higher student engagement and improved scores!*

Oprah Winfrey, a former talk show host, would get excited about her audience, during her Christmas show she would always yell “YOU GET A PRESENT, YOU GET A PRESENT, AND YOU GET A PRESENT.” This in itself should be how we respond to our students, “YOU GET AN EDUCATION, YOU GET AN EDUCATION, AND YOU GET AN EDUCATION.” Many teachers believe this and want to be a superhero for everyone, but it becomes difficult because all of the mandates. Blended learning is the answer to the million-dollar question, how can every student receive an education? How can we not leave students behind? Incorporating technology that works with the students’ learning will differentiate their choices to learn. This with the use of management skills and understanding of the inner workings of technology will provide an opportunity for students to form their own future.

Blended learning has been thought to be embedded in many classrooms, unfortunately many may think they are blended because they incorporate technology. I once thought that. Formerly in my classroom, I would conduct a lab to allow students to explore, direct teach one day to help students understand Cornell Notes and how to study, followed by station rotations and the use of technology. Stations would consist of STAAR questions, inquiry-based learning, and research. Otherwise, students used technology for a quiz review or for their projects. I thought my methods worked well and had decent turn out in my passing rates, relatively high engagement, but I do not think I fully embraced the 21<sup>st</sup> century style of learning. I was still doing most of the work, still telling students what they needed to complete, though I gave them choice in how they wanted to complete their work. I used more conversation in my class to help students learn from peers. After completing the UTeach Professional Development Foundations of Blended Learning, I have learned that blended learning is incorporating technology, but allowing students to work at their own pace with the choice of when, where, and how they learn (UTeach PD, Introduction). Blended learning is personalized, but creates independence and ownership for students. (UTeach PD, Introduction).

Technology is what allows students to choose their pathway of learning. Technology can range from how it is being used in the classroom to ways students learn. The first way I will be incorporating technology is within my station rotations. Students will learn the rules, procedures, and the layout of what will be expected in the first couple days of school. Students will enter the class, pick up their device, and locate their seat. Students will begin on a warmup that will be associated to how they did on their exit ticket. The first problem encountering this layout was the thought that many students are going to be more focused on the moving from room to room and not on the topic. In laying out how students will rotate, I tried to have the Medium to High Achieving students do most of the back and forth, keeping the struggling students contained the most. Once students understand the layout of the rotations, after the first cue, identifying that the warmup is complete, a transitional time will begin having students proceed to their first station; students will know their station through a visual on the board.

Eventually students will work through four stations, consisting of teacher-led small groups, computer, collaboration, and an independent activity. However, to begin the process and to help students understand the expectations and procedures, we will begin with three stations: teacher led, independent, and computer. It would be difficult to change the schedule after learning the ropes, so to best use the time given, I would like students to meet with me twice, filling in the collaboration time until we are ready to implement. In laying out the information, I think I have found a way for it to work. I think the struggling students will begin at the computer station; this will help them turn on their minds and begin focusing on the topic of the day. Their second station will begin with me at the teacher-led station. Here I can help them through hands-on learning and then move into tips to help them with notes and ways to study, stations 2 and 3. I believe this will help students become engaged and begin thinking towards the tasks at hand and what will needed to be accomplished. I believe students will be able to apply what they have learned with me to the other stations, building a strong foundation. Finally, they would be able to complete their independent activity, 3-5 questions, and their SMART goal, depicting their struggles, their understanding, and their new ideas. If my principal agrees with this idea, please see Figure 1, page 3, for the other station rotations.

Figure 1.

	<b>Group 1 (Struggling Students)</b>	<b>Group 2 Low-Medium Achieving)</b>	<b>Group 3 (Medium-High Achieving)</b>	<b>Group 4 (High Achieving)</b>
First Nine Weeks	Computer	Teacher Small Group- Hands-on	Teacher Small Group- Notes/Study Tips	Independent Activity

	Teacher Small Group- Hands-on	Teacher Small Group- Notes/Study Tips	Independent Activity	Computer
	Teacher Small Group- Notes/Study Tips	Independent Activity	Computer	Teacher Small Group- Hands-on
	Independent Activity	Computer	Teacher Small Group- Hands-on	Teacher Small Group- Notes/Study Tips

Figure 2.

	<b>Group 1 (Struggling Students)</b>	<b>Group 2 Low-Medium Achieving)</b>	<b>Group 3 (Medium-High Achieving)</b>	<b>Group 4 (High Achieving)</b>
Second Nine Weeks - EOY	Computer	Collaboration	Teacher Small Group- Hands-on/ Notes/ Study Tips	Independent Activity
	Collaboration	Teacher Small Group- Hands-on/ Notes/ Study Tips	Independent Activity	Computer
	Teacher Small Group- Hands-on/ Notes/ Study Tips	Independent Activity	Computer	Collaboration
	Independent Activity	Computer	Collaboration	Teacher Small Group- Hands-on/ Notes/ Study Tips

The station rotation from Figure 1 will continue for the duration of the first nine weeks. The second nine weeks will comprise the four stations: collaboration replacing one of the teacher-led stations. (See Figure 2.) During the collaboration stations, students will pick an activity and will have the ability to talk to one another about how to complete, what to complete, and peer communicate other questions they have. This station will consist of tips to communicate with one another as well as sentence frames so all students can form their thoughts.

The second way I will incorporate technology is what students will use to guide their learning. (See Figure 3.) The computer station will help fill in gaps of multiplication facts. Students will be able to recollect the facts to help them further themselves throughout Math. This software will be able to adjust to how quick the student is inputting answers as well adapt to their individualized instruction (Reflex Math). The collaboration station will consist of 6 activities that will be assigned based on their knowledge level, that must be completed throughout the week as well as 3-4 May Dos. I was trying to think of 6 applications that could be used each week so students would have consistency in understanding how to get to each app; we luckily have a single sign on account which will make it easier for the students. However, what I came up with was 6 activities that would help with cross curriculum, Nearpod, STEMscopes, Reading, Writing, Game Time, and Khan Academy. The problem I discovered with this notion is how to divide the essential standards we have decided must be taught. My idea was that Nearpod would consist of a review/how to do the task with questions. This would be accessible during school hours as well as at home. Students could return to see how it was worked or explained.

STEMscopes has many activities to choose from to help with the hook all the way to elaboration. Each unit would range on the activities based on what is needed to be taught and reviewed. For example, during the first unit, I would like to use STEMscopes Show what you know, Skills test, and STAAR-based questions in addition to the Reading and Writing activities already created within STEMscopes. Game time would be another form of learning through STEMscopes or Legends of Learning. This would show that learning can be fun. My concern with this is continuing to keep the information at the rigor it needs to be.

The last application would be Khan Academy, a video, another way to introduce the information, and then provide questions to process what they saw. I was thinking these would span a larger understanding of each topic that will be mastered in the Fourth Grade. For the May Dos, I was thinking of keeping to the same apps, but choosing another activity, however, Kahoot and Quizziz are fun opportunities for students to collaborate and learn from one another. There are many different resources, but I believe these will be the best for my blended learning classroom. The independent station would be used for the exit ticket, the 3-5 questions would be created in Eduphoria, composed of the same questions for each student to help me analyze how they are progressing as well as what TEKS they have mastered. Students would take the test online and receive immediate feedback. Students would then fill in their SMART goal from the week's TEKS, I am struggling with the location of where to house the SMART goals, I was thinking Google Docs. I also know the importance of data tracking, but I do not want to get behind and forget to use this as the steps to forward teaching. I do not want these to get lost in translation and just become another piece of paper.

Figure 3.

Computer Station	Collaboration Station	Independent Station
Reflex Math	Nearpod	Eduphoria
Imagine Math	STEMscopes	Google Docs
	Google Docs	
	Legends of Learning	
	Khan Academy	
	Kahoot	
	Quizziz	

I am still working out the kinks for students to move effortlessly to their station if they were late. I know the visual will help, but students are usually present the first couple days, maybe the first week of school, it will be practice in how to implement the effectiveness when students begin arriving late.

Furthermore, students will not only have to learn the rotation stations, the cues and how to log on, they will also have to learn how to manage themselves and their peers on the computers. In the first couple of weeks as we walk students through the rotations, they will begin learning about their computers. They will be able to locate their device upon arriving to school, log into their warmup, handle the computer as the transition from one station to the next, as well as how to act while on the computer. In addition, students will know how to plug in their computer at the end of the day. However, students are going to try and push the boundaries to be on social media or other sites that entertains them, even go as far as revolt when others are trying to learn. During the computer and independent stations, students will have to sit with their back to the teacher, so that screens are constantly visible. Consequences will have to be in place for students who have broken the rules. One consequence that we will be implementing if a student does not comply with the seating arrangement, will be to call parents; this of course would occur after speaking with the student. One consequence we are implementing when students are on sites they are not supposed to be on, is that the device will be taken away for a day. A third consequence the students will face is if they do not correctly plug in their computers, they will have to sit by a plug or sacrifice the day without technology. Students who do not have a device will have to complete the task on paper or suffer with a low grade. As a school we have developed CHAMPS rules and procedures that will be visibly posted as reminders of the expectations. We will use this to help hold students accountable

as well as understand the importance of digital citizenship and internet safety. We will be implementing the importance of safety especially during the first couple weeks of school but will continue using the reminders as we move forward.

Blended learning is composed of many factors such as technology, differentiation, and management tools for the classroom and the technology. The UTeach Professional Development has laid the foundation of aspects of each component as well as how it would look in my specific classroom. With the foundations in place, I will be able to move forward using these techniques to better the learning of the students, giving each one their own education. This will require losing some control but giving students independence and ownership, making learning fun again.

### **Molly Montgomery, 4th-Grade Math Teacher, Vidor Elementary School, Vidor ISD, Texas**

*Molly Montgomery, a teacher at Vidor Elementary School, came into the UTeach Foundations of Blended Learning course with an undefined view of what blended learning would actually entail, past technology integration, for students working in her 4th-grade math classroom. She leaves with a wide breadth of ideas and resources to guide more student-centered and differentiated lessons for her students using blended tools and practices. Molly champions the use of a platform like Google Classroom to not only organize her lessons, but to differentiate and support self-pacing for her diverse students to work towards mastery using various strategies and multimodal elements. Molly has redefined her station rotation plan to include purposeful technology, collaborative interactions, and creative ways for students to explore and share learning through choice of work products. Her students are already responding to her initial implementation efforts with a renewed enthusiasm for learning, encouraging her to continue this transformation to benefit students, as well as her own experience each day in this more targeted and engaging blended learning setting.*

I came into this professional development course not knowing what blended learning even was. I am now coming out of it with so much more knowledge and experience than I ever have with any other type of professional development I have been to. I thought blended learning just meant you incorporated technology some way, somehow throughout your lesson, but it is so much more than that. It is incorporating meaningful technology-based tools that enhance student engagement and mastery at their own pace.

Before beginning this professional development course, I implemented station rotations almost daily. After learning what a blended learning station rotation looked like, I realized I was doing it all wrong and not really helping or benefiting my students' learning to their full potential. Now my station rotations incorporate at least two stations with access to Chromebooks where the students are engaged in a learning activity, game, or assessment that is formed around the lesson that was taught. My other stations are collaborative stations where my students work together to

enhance mastery and provide products of their learning. I also provide a choice board type paper where they have complete control on what they do and what they produce. This creates a desire to learn in my students that I have not seen in previous years.

I find one of the most difficult things to accomplish in teaching is successful differentiation. Students are at so many different levels in their learning, in how they learn, and what interests them most when learning. It is extremely difficult to make sure you are not leaving anyone behind. I realized with blended learning, especially with Google Classroom, that I can differentiate so much easier and progress monitor my students in a more organized way. The reason why I say Google Classroom as a great differentiation tool is because I can assign different assignments to different students. I could have a group of students working on comparing fractions, another group of students matching fractions and decimals, and some students working on place value of decimals. Every student is working on a skill that is needed in my 4th-grade math class, but not moving onto the next skill level before mastering the skill they are currently on.

My goal is to only have a short five- to ten-minute whole group instruction time with my students where we go over a new skill or review a previous learned skill all together. The rest of my class time would be dedicated to student-centered learning. I want the students to be in control of their own learning. I learned that implementing learning pledges for each individual student helps create ownership and accountability of learning. I want to instill a joy and desire to learn and in order to do that, students want and need to feel in control. Now I am still in charge of the content presented and what kinds of activities and products are incorporated throughout my class time, but they get to choose which ones they want to do. I am more of a guide on the side rather than a sage on a stage. I give them the tools and choices to reach mastery of each skill within my class.

One of my favorite things that I hear from my students is, “That was so fun, Mrs. Montgomery! It makes learning fun!” Now, I do not hear that every day or even every week but hearing it once has spurred my blended learning forward. I love that my students are having so much fun in my classroom they do not even realize that they are learning a skill that is actually really difficult to comprehend outside of that blended learning environment. When I was in school our access to technology was very limited, so any content that I needed to learn was rather difficult and not enjoyable. Blended learning makes teaching so much more fun and learning even more so. I am glad my students have access to such great technology and technological tools to aide their education. What a blessing.

**Tara Aguilar, High School Math Teacher, Harlingen High School, Harlingen CISD, Texas**

*Tara Aguilar, a high school math teacher from Harlingen Consolidated Independent School District, aptly describes what many teachers have been considering as they move past virtual learning and think about how to best preserve and continue the growth that they themselves experienced as educators during pandemic-style instruction. Having completed the UTeach Foundations of Blended Learning Course during the summer of 2021, Tara has more confidence to integrate tech purposefully, guide student self-pacing with checklists and formative assessments, and connect with students often, using “Aguilar-time” or regular teacher check-ins during class time. She’s particularly excited to have data points throughout the unit to be able to redirect individual students or groups of students, rather than receiving the bulk of assessment information from a summative exam. Tara leaves this course with an expanded perspective, excited to take on a primary role as a facilitator in her math classrooms, rather than her past go-to role as a “stand and deliver” instructor.*

My name is Tara Aguilar. I am a high school math teacher at Harlingen High School in HCISD. I teach leadership, geometry, and algebra 2 with mixed grade levels, including sophomores, juniors, and seniors. As the 20-21 school year went on, a huge question kept popping up in my thoughts: “What is next year going to look like?” I knew I couldn’t go back to being the teacher I was the year before, as my students were not going to come back as the students they were before. There had to be a balance between the teachers we were before and the teachers we became after being thrown into virtual learning. At the end of last school year, we received an email about a blended learning course that seemed to fit that exact balance I was looking for.

Throughout this course I have asked myself, “What is this going to look like in my classroom?” After going through this course there is a lot that I hope to establish in my classroom this coming school year. I don’t want to overwhelm myself, so I am going to start small and build as the school year goes on. My initial plan is to establish video podcast lessons for students to watch, take notes on, and hopefully re-watch at their own pace. I am also planning on using the checklist system so that students can work through a unit at their own pace. Something I really liked about checklists was the built in “Aguilar Time.” The built-in teacher time is designed so that after students go through certain videos/activities they come see me to show that they understand the concept presented. I can correct any misconceptions they have during this time. One thing I really appreciated about this course is that it really stressed the importance of checking for student understanding at the individual level throughout the lesson. I also like the idea of station rotations for reviews prior to formal assessments. This will give me time to work with small groups and check student understanding before assessing them as well as give students to work collaboratively.

There are going to have to be many changes in my classroom to help to foster this environment. I must be comfortable with releasing control in my classroom, changing my role as a teacher to more of a facilitator. One thing I plan on doing is having the students do most of the

talking. I have a tendency as a teacher to talk . . . A LOT! Students talking, working together, learning from each other—this is the environment I want to have in my classroom. This is all going to happen by building a culture of understanding and respect among the class. I am going to have to effectively use technology and work to figure out what is the best approach to teaching different lessons. I used a lot of different forms of technology last year, but I don't think I used them as effectively as they could have been used. This year I plan on really asking, what is the best approach for this specific topic.

These changes are going to help to foster a more collaborative environment, an environment that may not be quiet but will have students actively learning and engaged in the activity at hand. Really planning out how lessons will flow is going to help me become a more organized and purposeful teacher. It is also going to help my students be more proactive participants in their own learning.

I loved the concepts presented throughout this class. Transitioning from a stand and deliver teacher to a facilitator in the classroom. Transitioning students from just receiving information to actively participating in their learning. Using technology to support students at the individual level! This class gave me an idea of what my classroom can and hopefully will look like in the upcoming years. Thank you for the opportunity!

**Edwin Everett, Advanced Placement (AP) Literature Instructor, Harlingen High School South, Harlingen CISD, Texas**

*Edwin Everett, an AP Literature teacher, entered the UTeach Foundations of Blended Learning course with many years of experience in using technology to streamline student work and reduce paper in his classroom. After completing these course explorations, he now recognizes a few key areas where he may transform his current approach to a more engaging and targeted setting. Edwin's primary focus will be in increasing student engagement with the introduction of choice, self-pacing, and multimodal ways for students to express themselves, while still targeting AP course objectives. He will move away from a strictly whole group approach as an opener and introduce stations as a way to accommodate various types and tiers of learner. We are excited for Edwin and for his students as they experience new ways to explore and share learning, while still building fundamental skills to achieve success on the AP exam.*

This is probably my 10th or 11th year attempting to create a blended learning environment for my students. After collecting 30 Chromebooks over the years, I've managed to pull things together on the technology side, primarily to streamline the workflow management process with students. Upon reflection, however, there are a number of changes that I need to make to create an ideal learning environment for my students this year, things I (admittedly) haven't done in my

endeavors to go paperless. This UTeach course has been a real eye-opener for me in that regard. Over the last month, I've had to undergo a mindset shift to properly complete the assignments for the UTeach course. For me, blended learning was mostly about taking away the headaches of paper collection and giving students some interesting things to do. I'm finding out that the paradigms apparent in a truly blended learning classroom are much more involved, so I need to make some changes.

What I'm trying to accomplish in my classroom has changed as a result of taking this course. I want students to be excited about coming into my classroom. I've learned that this requires giving students choices and meaningful activities—meaningful to them, not just to me. I've got to build in a greater variety of tasks that don't merely involve answering AP Literature prompts. Much can be accomplished without every prompt requiring an elaborate paragraph or a full essay. I need to instead tie lesson activities into authentic tasks that point to things that matter in the students' worldview—while still meeting College Board objectives. So, essentially, while I feel like I'm strong on requiring accountability, I see that I'm lacking in promoting student engagement.

One way I plan to engage students more thoroughly involves breaking down all those teacher-centered, no-choice lessons I've made over the years into interesting, thought-provoking activities that students can complete in any order and within a more manageable timeframe—and they won't have to do them all. They'll be able to choose three of five activities, for instance, in a single lesson. That's new to me, but I like it. Instead of requiring assignments to be due the night they were introduced, why not give them a few days? Instead of requiring that every part of a choice grid involve writing, why not let them create brief videos to capture their ideas or design their own versions of narrative texts to show that they understand the big concepts? In a nutshell, this is where I'm going with designing lessons in my new and improved blended learning classroom—making the content more accessible, interesting, engaging, and relevant for students.

However, there's a second focus that needs to be addressed in my blended learning classroom if I'm going to start doing things more intentionally with a greater focus on student success. It involves structuring my sessions in a way that targets the varying modes of learning that accommodate multiple learning styles and student tiers. Sure, it would be an improvement to create choice boards and use other innovative strategies to improve my lessons, but if they're only doing them individually after whole-class discussions (usually led by me with little feedback from students), I'm not hitting the full potential of what my courses can become or what my students can accomplish. Until now, I've relied mostly on whole-group discussions followed by individual practice, but students need more authentic collaboration experiences to better learn and process the concepts I'm trying to teach. This will be my biggest challenge as I'm the type of teacher that

doesn't easily relinquish control to students, probably due to some deep-seeded fear of getting bad evaluations if things get out of hand. Exploring the rotation station models has given me a clearer understanding that this wouldn't be the case.

In essence, I have a lot of work ahead of me in order to be ready for students and a school year complete with courses that challenge students without killing their motivation to learn, but it's a fun kind of work, and I'm really looking forward to it. Thanks, UTeach!

**Leo Garcia, Choirs, Advanced Placement (AP), Music Theory, Music Appreciation, Seguin High School, Seguin ISD, Texas**

*Leo Garcia lends his rather unique perspective as a high school music teacher navigating the challenges of a transition to blended learning for his three diverse preps. What stands out most in Leo's reflections are his open mindset and developing use of technology to guide student-centered explorations after years of leading generally traditional and teacher-led lessons. Leo and his students were able to overcome the challenges of pandemic-style learning using music software programs, online platforms which encouraged communication and feedback, and small group interactions that not only allowed students to better interact with all of the TEKS beyond performance-based objectives, but also focused on collaborative group learning with student leaders emerging in these small groups. Leo is excited to extend his in-person approach to include these innovative strategies and incorporate interactive elements using both face-to-face and online interactions.*

As a high school music teacher who teaches three diverse subjects in 3 choir classes, 3 Dual Credit Music Appreciation courses, and AP Music Theory, the thought of blended learning was never appealing to me. This was especially true in directing choirs. Music classes, and especially ensembles, have traditionally been teacher-centered, even more so than nearly every other course: a director will stand in front of the group, the group rehearses their music, and the director offers immediate feedback. While immediate feedback to the group is valued, too many aspects of this are completely teacher-driven. One of my hopes was to find ways to move away from that modality. The pandemic, of course, altered the ways in which music classes conducted instruction. Technology has not been a foreign concept to the choral group. Pre-pandemic, students would submit recordings of themselves singing portions of their music to Google Classroom. Practice tracks, with a professional singer demonstrating what their vocal part should sound like, were also available for their use at all times in Google Classroom. This offered opportunities for students to receive feedback on their singing as individuals (classroom feedback has always been geared to the entire group at large or to sections, almost never for individuals). This also offers opportunities for the teacher to gauge which spots in the music need more attention. With students becoming remote/virtual, our reliance on these modes of rehearsal and instruction has become significantly greater. These changes have also opened my eyes to the needs of more beneficial and relevant uses

of technology. Also, so much of what we do in choir class is geared toward rehearsing for the next concert or performance. Many of the TEKS get little attention, or sadly, all but ignored. Since the science of singing in a pandemic has limited how long we can sing, it has forced us to re-examine elements of music that get ignored as well. More time is being spent on music theory, history, literature, interpretation, cultural relevance, etc. The emphasis on this has allowed us to utilize music software programs that focus on music theory, and fun games on music literacy that can be played on the student's devices. The great news is both face-to-face and remote learners can participate in these games simultaneously. It has also allowed students to become more creative, as we have delved into projects including musical compositions, creating themed choir concert programs, and researching musicians that interest the students. These are projects that we hope to continue when we resume to something close to normalcy.

A variation of station rotation has always been used in the choir rehearsal, but I have learned how this can be expanded. In the past, this has meant "sectionals" during the class period led by student leaders and directors. I've learned how this can be expanded and how we can break up into a variety of groupings depending on the skill level and strength of individual students. Some students are very advanced in their musical skills and can either lead and/or help students who need more attention or work independently on more advanced literature. I certainly plan to incorporate these ideas into my choral rehearsal, as I think it would be more beneficial to my students.

Creating more rubrics and checklists for students and data trackers for me as a teacher is one way that we can determine improvement. This course has given me some good ideas as to how this can be accomplished. Relying more on student surveys and modes of student feedback on Google Classroom, Flipgrid, and Jamboard, can help me and my students in determining what concepts need further review and explanation, as well as a way for them to offer more input on their learning (as in what they want to learn, how they want to learn it, etc.).

**Marissa Norsworthy, Art I and Drawing II, III, IV and Department Chair, Tascosa High School, Amarillo ISD, Texas**

*In her reflections, Marissa Norsworthy, an Art teacher and Department Chair from Tascosa High School in Amarillo ISD, shares her excitement for making a transition to blended learning and also her confidence that this approach will be a manageable one to plan and implement for her diverse learners. Marissa considers her favorite blended framework to be a playlist, a relatively low-prep way to differentiate and offer choices for her students, while also making space for her to have more one-on-one time with the students who need more support. Google Classroom and associated Google Suite resources are also key elements in Marissa's blended learning toolkit, as she streamlines planning*

*of multimodal stations and looks for ways to encourage guided autonomy with both timely and thoughtful teacher feedback. Marissa began the UTeach Foundations of Blended Learning course experience with a strong foundation in guiding student-centered instruction and leaves with a more defined perspective on how she will integrate technology to give students more of an active role in their learning, preparing them for future secondary-level explorations and beyond.*

I have learned many useful tools, techniques, and skills to help me better incorporate blended learning into my classroom. After taking the blended learning course, I am excited to continue to incorporate and use the knowledge I have gained. Using my knowledge will ensure that I am giving every student the opportunity to be successful and gain as much knowledge as possible while in my class. They will continue to use the skills gained to further their learning in all areas of life. The knowledge gained through this course put some excitement in my teacher heart and made my creative wheels turn, which is a welcome thing mid school year. When I first began the course, I will admit that I was a little overwhelmed and not sure that this would be information that I could utilize in my art classroom. After diving in and beginning to create and adapt the skills and knowledge provided, I am excited to continue to adjust the tools for my classroom.

After completing this course, I am excited to continue to grow and adapt my classroom into a blended learning classroom. I was surprised to see that much of my learning and lesson planning was already incorporating aspects of a blended classroom and that, with simple adjustments and additions, blended learning could be accomplished easily. Incorporating the technology and using what was already available to my students was a challenge because of monitoring their usage and being mindful of directing them to use the tools for the project or lesson on hand, rather than for entertainment. I loved all the different internet tools and apps that were highlighted and I look forward to utilizing them in future lessons. Incorporating as much technology as possible in my classroom will benefit my students now and in the future while they continue their learning at higher learning institutes.

Using playlists and checklists for the students is one of the most valuable things I am taking away from this blended learning course. I have already used it in my classes, and I love that students are able to track their success and know what the end goal is. I have shared this tool with peer teachers, and we are excited to use these playlists to align curriculum in our department. The playlists are also great because they can be altered or adjusted for all learners. Modifying them is a great way to shorten the lesson for slower learners. I feel as a teacher that the playlist also gives me extra time to do one-on-one teaching as needed. I am able to pull students because all students have objectives and can continue to work while I meet with students who have questions or are struggling with certain aspects of the lesson. Incorporating playlists also allowed me to line things out and prepare ahead of students so that all activities are ready to go.

I really focused on using a tool that I know most students are comfortable with and have access to, Google Classroom. I developed my first assessment using Google Quiz and used different links to apps that aided my students in learning the objective highlighted on the first playlist I incorporated in my classes. I believe that students will be expected to use technology more and more in their daily lives. Incorporating it in my classroom will help them in many aspects of their future. Google Classroom has also been a great tool for students who are absent and miss important information presented in class.

I plan to incorporate more station work in my classes, but I have a few kinks that need to be worked out for smoother transitions to minimize the chaos with large classes. I would also like to work on alternative seating options for my classroom, but I haven't figured out what that looks like in my art classroom. Students seem to be more engaged with the addition of blended learning in my classroom. I feel confident as a teacher that these additions are benefiting every learner in my classroom. My purpose and drive for blended learning are to reach every student and allow them the opportunity to learn at a speed and in a way that is comfortable and challenging to them all at the same time. I am excited to continue to use and learn ways to incorporate blended learning in my classroom.

#### **Karol Gillum, Professional Development Facilitator, Spring ISD, Texas**

*As a district leader, Karol Gillum leaves the Foundations of Blended Learning Course experience with an expanded view of what blended learning will look like in the various classrooms across Spring ISD. Karol's primary focus will be in training teachers to navigate this transition and in providing both visual examples of student-centered frameworks and access to foundational platforms and targeted technologies to streamline planning and implementation. Karol will focus on helping teachers establishing workable station rotation models, modeling these approaches in professional development interactions, and following up with systems to guide progress monitoring that will ultimately help teachers develop more personalized learning experiences for students in classrooms throughout the district. Karol and her team, who have also completed this course exploration, will develop a collaborative long-term vision, with measured steps and benchmarks, to support teachers who are making this shift, both in mindset and also in their pedagogical approach to leading today's 21st-century students.*

My name is Karol Gillum. I am a Professional Development Facilitator in Spring ISD. I work with my entire district, supporting campus leaders, coaches, and teachers in the implementation of district initiatives, instructional development, and student achievement. This 3-month course has been a huge experience for me because of all the knowledge I was able to attain. I have been studying intently the blended learning instructional modal since the summer of 2020 to be able to

better support our district in this area. The knowledge gained around the blended learning model as a whole, technology and tools, strategies, data, and management have been invaluable.

I, along with many others, know the definition given in the area of blended learning by the Christensen Institute which says, “Blended learning is any formal education program in which a student learns at least in part through online learning, with some element of student control over time, place, path, and/or pace in a supervised brick-and-mortar location away from home and the modalities along each students’ learning path within a course or subject are connected to provide an integrated learning experience.” But what does this really mean and even more how do I implement it in districts, campuses, and classrooms to drive student achievement? This course broke all of this down for me. I want teachers in my district to understand that blended learning can look different from one class to the next, but key foundational skills are always evident that allow us to personalize the learning for students. I think choosing a model to focus on and then fleshing that model out step-by-step will help teachers once you have the basic foundational course stuff established, like your LMS, your available technology, your course setup, etc. The model I plan to focus on in my district is the Rotational Model for blended learning. I want to roll this out step-by-step. The station rotation model is where we will start but we will also look at the Flipped Classroom model, the Individual Rotation model, the lab rotation model. This will allow teachers to create a more personalized learning environment for all kids.

After we are clear on the model, how to set it up and how to design it; I want to help teachers understand what are the best data tools to start with adding to their tool belts. Next, we will take a look at data and how to analyze the effectiveness of our model and how to adjust. We will dive into strategies and personalization next and end with management.

To ensure this continues to grow across our district I know we have to all get on one page as to what we want blended learning to look like at the district level, what supports we will offer, and what resources we will commit to providing. This needs to be a plan that is rolled out over a three to five-year period and then revisited, revised, and continued.

I have done a lot of work around sharing this knowledge and getting the information to as many people in the district that I can. Now I want to be more strategic and intentional about who we train, what we are training them on 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup>, how we are monitoring it, how we know it’s effective, and the steps that we will take if it’s not.

Blended learning is a big-ticket item for education. We must know that, with the implementation of this instructional model in a strategic way, we have the power to transform the lives of students. Not simply because we implemented the model, but because we did so in a manner that allowed for the educational environment of students to be transformed, more

personalized and more accessible to all. With all of the plans that I have created, I plan to share them with my professional development team that went through this course with me and come up with a district proposal to look at how we are really rolling out the blended learning model what we are doing well and what areas of opportunity do we have. From there, we will start making a strategic plan in this area that will begin to transform our district, campuses, and classrooms for the better. This is an experience that I will never forget and will be referring to and implementing in the lives I have the privilege to touch for years to come.

### **Cindy Marez, Districtwide Elementary Math Specialist, Galena Park ISD, Texas**

*Cindy Marez, an elementary math specialist from Galena Park ISD, leaves the UTeach Foundations of Blended Learning course experience with an expanded view of how she will guide a blended transition throughout elementary math classrooms in her district. She takes a realistic approach to supporting teachers, not overwhelming them as they make this shift and making time and space for teachers to develop norms, procedures, and classroom culture in alignment with a blended learning setting. Cindy's vision goes beyond data tracking and tech integration, to pursue personalized pathways for students using frameworks like choice boards and checklists, encouraging students to take higher ownership for their learning as they enjoy more choice and voice. Cindy will support teachers with beneficial visits and observations, establishing checklists to help teachers plan their blended units, and reflect on their own blended lessons, and those of their colleagues. We're excited that Cindy's takeaways from this this coursework have resulted in her extending her initial goals of blending two elementary grade levels, to all elementary math classrooms in Galena Park ISD.*

When I started this journey, the main goal was to gain knowledge to help support 2 grade levels across 3 campuses that are part of a Math Blended Learning pilot program. By the end of this course, it has become a districtwide initiative for the upcoming school year. So, now with the knowledge that I have gained though this course, I am going to be supporting K-5 teachers in implementing Blended Learning. I am trying to accomplish getting elementary math teachers to take first steps towards Blended Learning. I want to show them that blended learning is not just another thing they have to do. That it is taking what they are already doing and enhancing or tweaking it just a little to get better student results. I want to be there to support our teachers as they start their blended learning journey. The deeper understanding of Blended Learning gained in this course will help me be a stronger leader as our district continues to develop Blended Learning over 3 phases of implementation.

We have made several changes to our district elementary math curriculum. One thing we have added is SAMR activities into the technology integration section of our curriculum maps. These activities will give teachers options to add technology at the Substitution, Augmentation, Modification, and Redefinition levels. We will also be continuing with what we started last year by

providing digital resources. These are included for every unit in grades 1-5. The plan is to use the choice boards and lesson plans we created in this course as samples for the teachers as we introduce different aspects of Blended Learning. This year we have shifted our curriculum down by 7 days. The purpose is so that teachers had the opportunity to build a classroom environment conducive to Blended Learning. So they had time to establish routines, management, and a classroom environment where collaboration, learning, and growth mindset are established. We have updated our Instructional Expectations to include the elements of Blended Learning. Next year, there will be Learning Labs where 1st year teachers, either new to profession or new to content, will meet 3 times a year for half a day. We will be intentional in incorporating elements of blended learning as we guide the new teachers throughout the year. Data tracking has always been a focus in our district. Next year the focus is going to be on not just the teachers tracking data but also students taking ownership of their learning and being involved in the process.

Last year, the pandemic took a toll on education across the world. One thing that was positive was that teachers were thrust into the world of technology. Teachers that were previously hesitant to use technology suddenly had no choice. Now that there has been exposure to the possibilities of technology, I don't feel like it should just be put away. Using what we learned, it will be important for us as educators to leverage technology use to enhance student learning. This upcoming year it will be very important to focus on individualized learning pathways. The past year and a half has left some students with gaps in learning. But not all students. After a year of seeing some students and teachers completely disengaged in both virtual and in-person learning, giving students voice and choice would be a way to re-engage in learning. I think that by giving teachers general look fors in our Instructional Rounds checklist, it would also give teachers voice and choice of how and what Blended Learning will look in their own classroom. With the autonomy to find what works for them, hopefully there will be a new life breathed into their classrooms. Utilizing both traditional classroom instruction along with Blended classroom elements will be a way to grow all students from where they are. We will use the checklist and our observations from the classroom visits to determine improvement. As a math department, I would like to utilize a checklist similar to the one used in this course as we do our informal classroom visits. My counterpart is also in this course, and I would like to get together with our director to develop a checklist that we will all use when visiting classrooms. We could take some time each month to discuss what we saw and if there are any overarching areas that we can address as a department, or if an area of improvement is at the campus level. This course has given us many tools to use as we support our district.

**Donna Rice, Principal, Atlanta Primary School, Atlanta ISD, Texas**

*Donna Rice, a principal and blended learning leader in Atlanta ISD, shares her reflections and major takeaways after completing the UTeach Foundations of Blended Learning coursework. Atlanta ISD is tech-rich, enjoying one-to-one devices and coming off a successful year using technology to connect with students both in the classroom and virtually. Donna’s main takeaway from this PD experience is that blended learning is much more about establishing a balance between technology and traditional elements, than about simply integrating technology in a purposeful way. Her developing perspective sees teachers taking on new roles in the classroom, more as facilitators than as deliverers of information, and students taking on more active roles in their own learning pathways. Donna’s reflections and her district’s developing approach to leading a transition to blended learning are student-focused and learner-centered, supporting teachers with examples, trainings, technology, and useful observations and feedback to guide their progress towards reaching the goal of a blended transformation. She appreciates the content, visual examples, and frameworks from the UTeach Foundations of Blended Learning course and sees it as a valuable experience for both teachers and administrators.*

Atlanta ISD made the decision to move to a blended learning model last year. Because of the pandemic, there were tremendous obstacles and barriers to fully implementing blended learning and teachers were simply trying to survive the impact of remote learning. The district used this past year to strategically plan by providing professional development, training, consultation, and collaboration to jump start projected implementation for the 2021-22 school year. The decision to seek out every opportunity to better equip the district in this educational “shift” prompted enrollment in the UTeach PD program. As a school administrator, this experience has proven to be an invaluable resource for not only our teachers but for other administrators who will benefit as instructional leaders of the initiative. Every piece of research, articles, project-based learning, feedback, and collaboration offered through this project will have an immeasurable impact on the success of full implementation.

Atlanta ISD is technology rich. We are a one-to-one district and teachers have the latest technology at their fingertips. The biggest change (because of this PD) that we will make in order to foster our new blended learning environment is realizing that technology is not the ultimate goal. While technology is an integral part of the blended learning process, we will achieve results by focusing on learner-centered goals, by providing opportunities that will enhance learning and making learning more relevant, by combining traditional learning with online learning (the best of both worlds) and by becoming student focused and student driven. In other words, we will shift paradigms in our school district—we will educate students for work and life in the 21st century, not just add technology to the instructional process. Our teachers are developing a facilitator role as opposed to a deliverer role. The “sit and get”—straight rows of desk configurations, the teacher at

the “front of the room” mentality and students completing worksheet activities will be antiquated strategies!

Another valuable resource provided by this training is the unlimited amount of tools, apps and strategies that are available to educators for successful implementation. This PD provided literally hundreds of apps that will meet every challenge that an educator will face—evaluations tools, tracking apps, feedback and communication software, and organizational and research tools are just a few of the MANY available to teachers.

Our district is so invested in this initiative that they are hiring a district-level administrator to serve as the Director of Blended Learning for all campuses. This training provided the exact roadmap that our district needed to understand HOW to implement, maintain, and assess progress of our blended learning program. Because this will be our first year of implementation, we will utilize observation, classroom visits, student surveys, and teacher feedback to monitor our program to determine improvement. This training helped us to understand ways that our district will need to design systems to collect, analyze, visualize, and communicate data to monitor and continuously improve. We now have a better plan to build capacity in our teachers to help them become experts in blended learning design and implementation. The videos embedded in this PD of actual blended learning classrooms are excellent and will prove to teachers that blended learning will change the way they deliver instruction and will literally change their life and the lives of their students!

This opportunity was one of the best that I have ever experienced. It will change the trajectory of the mission of Atlanta ISD. We will move into an instructional mode unlike any that has ever been experienced in our school. More than anything, our students will be given the opportunity to exceed far beyond their potential!

**For more information and to discuss your professional development needs, please contact:**

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