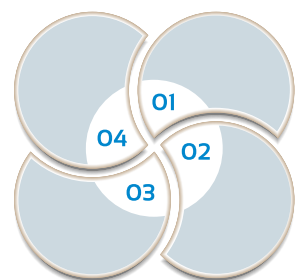




SCALING UP:

BUILDING A SUCCESSFUL BLENDED LEARNING PROGRAM WITH EXISTING FUNDS





THE ALVO INSTITUTE AND GRANT WOOD AREA EDUCATION AGENCY

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The quiet innovation among a group of school districts in Iowa is leading to unique, sustainable and transferable solutions for blended learning programs. With support from their Area Education Agency, these schools are dramatically changing the face of classroom education through blended learning, and are doing so without relying upon funding outside of their normal operating budgets.

The shift from teacher-driven to student-centered education is a focus not unique to Iowa: - these teachers and administrators share their goals for developing active, engaged learners with their peers from coast to coast. But even in its infancy, this program is charting the course for districts around the country that want to set sail in the direction of blended learning yet lack the structure or funding stream to get started.

In 2014 Grant Wood Area Education Agency (GWAEA) partnered with The Alvo Institute to launch an ambitious blended learning pilot. This partnership is proving:

- It is possible to grow-to-scale a blended learning project while supporting multiple classrooms in multiple schools;
- Districts can affect change for an investment of less than \$100K, a number that falls within the operating budgets of many school districts across the country;
- An education agency is uniquely positioned to successfully drive classroom implementation of multiple statewide initiatives.

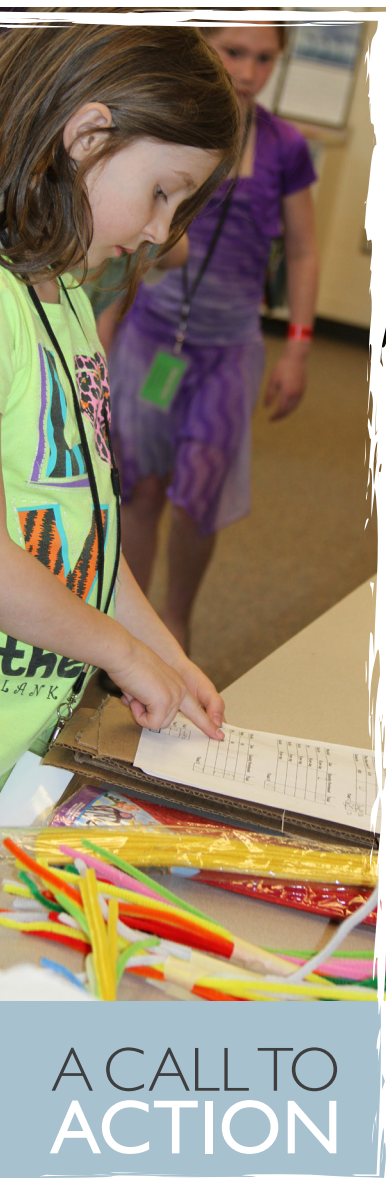
This pilot has huge implications for schools and districts that want to launch blended learning programs. By sharing some of the elements of the pilot and observations to date, we hope to spark similar momentum in other districts.

GRANT WOOD AEA'S PERSONALIZATION CHALLENGE

Trended data from years of Gallup Student Polls has shown a correlation between academic achievement and student self-reported levels of engagement, hope, and well-being. Most recently, Gallup's 2014 report revealed that a 1% increase of student engagement for a school correlated to a 6% increase in reading achievement and 8% increase in math achievement. But the percentage of students who rate themselves as engaged drops dramatically from kindergarten to high school. Discouragingly, the survey demonstrates a precipitous drop in engagement from 76% at the elementary level to 44% in high school with the fall continuing into the workplace where only 29% of U.S. workers are engaged. On average, the survey revealed that only 55% of students reported being engaged in the learning process, 28% reported being unengaged (i.e., mentally checked out) and a significant number - a full 17% - reported being actively disengaged, feeling negative about school and likely to spread that negativity. Students' perceptions of hope, well-being, etc mirror this downward slope.

What is it about the current school environment that seemingly systematically undermines feelings of hope, engagement and well-being? This question is one that led GWAEA to actively pursue blended as a method to personalize learning.

Gallup, Inc. ©2014



MTSS	
Universal Tier	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Is the Universal Tier sufficient? 2) If the Universal Tier is not sufficient, what are the needs that must be addressed? 3) How will Universal Tier needs be addressed? 4) How will the implementation of the Universal Tier actions be monitored over time?
Targeted Intensive Tier	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6) Which students need support in addition to the Universal Tier? 7) Which of the Targeted and/or Intensive Tier resources are needed to meet the needs of identified students? 8) How will the Targeted and/or Intensive Tier options be implemented? 9) How will the implementation of the Targeted and Intensive Tiers be monitored over time? 10) How will the effectiveness of the Targeted and Intensive Tiers be evaluated?

Mirrored in many states across the country, Iowa is initiating some fairly substantive changes in their k-12 public education system. Topping the list is the transition to the Iowa Core Standards scheduled to be implemented in full by the end of this school year (2014-15). The state is also implementing a framework for educating all children to high levels of proficiency through MTSS. MTSS, also known as Response to Intervention (RTI) is a process by which schools use data to identify the academic and behavioral supports each and every student needs to be successful in school and leave school ready for life. The process provides students with evidence-based instruction and interventions matched to their needs and monitors student progress to improve



their educational outcomes. In partnership with the Iowa's Department of Education, all of the Area Education Agencies are providing the professional development/training support for MTSS implementation.

Additionally Iowa is actively exploring **competency-based education (CBE)** and has formed a collaborative to engage in inquiry to investigate, develop and implement competency-based educational pathways for their students. The collaborative is also creating a framework to guide the statewide implementation of CBE to assist schools in developing student-centered, personalized learning systems and connect learning to student passions and interests promoting both student ownership and control of learning.

Competency based education....

- 1) Students advance upon proficiency
- 2) Competencies include explicit, measurable and transferable learning objectives that empower students.
- 3) Assessment is meaningful and a positive learning experience for students.
- 4) Students receive rapid, differentiated, support based on their individual learning needs.
- 5) Learning outcomes emphasize competencies that include application and creation of knowledge, along with the development of important skills and dispositions.

Personalized learning...

Learning is tailored to each student's strengths, needs and interests in order to provide flexibility and supports to ensure all students reach proficiency of the highest standards/competencies possible. Personalized learning enables student, voice and choice in what, how, when, and where they learn.

Attributes:

- Learner Profiles
- Personal Learning Paths
- Competency Based Progression
- Flexible Learning Environment

"We see blended learning as a method that supports the state initiatives around MTSS and Competency-based education because blended allows teachers to personalize instruction and interventions to best meet the needs of all students in the classroom," said Lisa Wilson, Programs and Services Administrator for GWAEA.

Recognizing the need to create a system that builds student agency, engages student passion and interests, and **personalizes learning** experiences to develop critical thinking, creativity, and the ability to solve difficult problems, GWAEA and a number of Superintendents within their service agency established the Innovation Collaborative for Personalized Learning. As the name implies, the Collaborative proactively supports efforts to bring

personalized learning to scale within their various districts. In addition to the well-documented benefits of the personalized learning model they saw the convergence of statewide and agency initiatives with instruction.


With the course set and galvanized into action in part by the results from The Gallup Student Poll, Grant Wood Area Education Agency created an aggressive goal to bring personalized learning to scale.


PARTNERSHIP WITH ALVO

In the summer of 2014, GWAEA partnered with The Alvo Institute to pilot the critical instructional and operational changes needed to personalize learning at the schools within the GWAEA service area. As districts transitioned from traditional practices to personalized learning, it was decided that an initial focus on blended learning was the best way to implement the state initiatives for the following reasons:

- Blended Learning is the engine to carry out at scale student-centered learning, which is personalized learning and CBE combined. (Michael Horn, 2014)
- Blended Learning naturally provides a multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) as the process provides real time data to monitor student progress and tailor instruction and interventions to student needs.

In other words, Blended Learning allows schools to implement a competency-based education system (CBE) utilizing a data decision making framework (MTSS) to provide personalized supports in a blended learning environment.

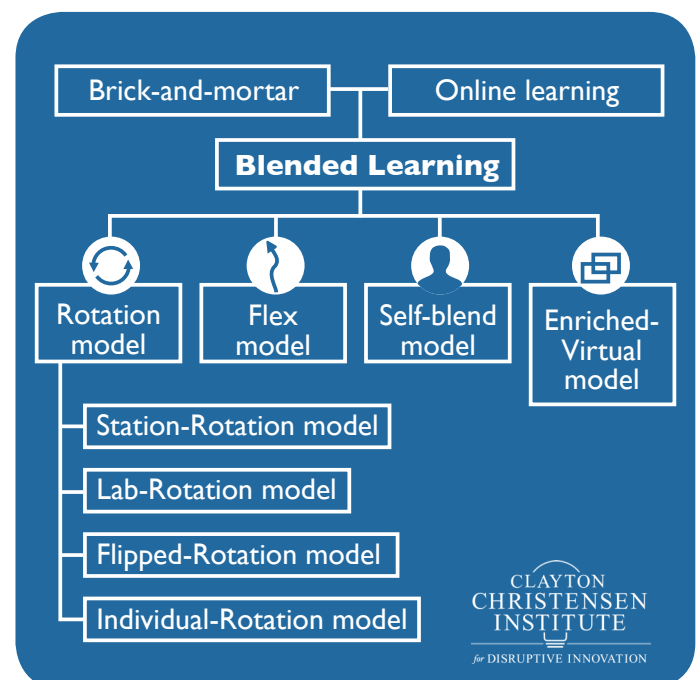

+


and

Blended learning is...
A formal education program in which a student learns at least in part through online delivery of content and instruction with some element of student control over time, place, path, and/or pace.

at least in part at a supervised brick-and-mortar location away from home.

CLAYTON
CHRISTENSEN
INSTITUTE
for DISRUPTIVE INNOVATION



The GWAEA and Alvo team launched a pilot blended learning program in 2014 which capitalized on the talent of some of the agency's most prepared district schools. By design, the pilot program allowed the agency and Alvo to test major assumptions, methods, technology and practices, gather feedback and observations, calibrate a coaching and performance management system, and refine the plan based on the results. The pilot was launched in Fall of 2014; this report features results up to March 2015 and includes the vision for expansion for the 2015-16 academic year.

PILOT GOALS

The blended learning pilot was created with three major goals:

- 1) To create and evaluate the most effective, scalable, and sustainable way to incorporate a blended learning model as a path to personalization.
- 2) To assist schools in learning how to leverage technology to significantly increase personalized instruction.
- 3) To determine how successfully an AEA could drive change with a modest investment.



PILOT DESIGN

The pilot design follows the Iowa Professional Development model and a typical continuous improvement cycle of (a) defining the problem, (b) diagnosing the problem, (c) developing a plan, (d) implementing the plan, and (e) evaluating the results of plan implementation. (see graphic) Educators engage in collaborative inquiry during their professional learning communities (PLCs) to discuss what students are expected to learn (goals/expectations), how they know the students are learning (assessment), how to respond when students don't learn (interventions) and how to respond if students already know it. This process helps educators think about their local needs within a data-based decision-making framework. In tandem, and over time, this practice can become second nature and begin to fuel a culture of innovation for an entire school community. The following 10-question framework is used to help schools engage in this process.



“It was critical to meet each teacher where they were in their practice and personalize the PD for each teacher in both the coaching and even in the all cohort meetings. Transitioning teacher practice is highly personal and does not lend itself well to traditional whole group PD.”

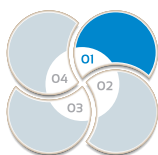
*-Rebecca Tomasini,
Founder and CEO of
The Alvo Institute.*

Universal Level

- 1) Is our Universal program sufficient?
- 2) If the Universal program is not sufficient, why isn't it sufficient?
- 3) How will needs identified in the Universal program be addressed?
- 4) How will the sufficiency and effectiveness of the Universal program be monitored over time?
- 5) Have improvements to the Universal program been effective?

Targeted and Intensive Levels

- 6) For which students is Universal instruction sufficient and not sufficient, and why?
- 7) What specific Targeted and Intensive Instruction is needed?
- 8) How will specific Targeted and Intensive Instruction be delivered?
- 9) How will the effectiveness of Targeted and Intensive instruction be monitored?
- 10) Which students need to move to a different level of instruction?



PILOT ELEMENT #1: SMALL TEAMS FROM MULTIPLE SCHOOLS AND DISTRICTS

PILOT PARTICIPANT SELECTION PROCESS

School districts in the GWAEA service area could apply to participate in the pilot in late spring of 2014. Because the pilot program was designed to specifically measure a given criteria, interested schools had to indicate a measure of aptitude to participate. District design proposals were submitted to Alvo for evaluation on clarity of mission, culture of innovation, readiness to manage a pilot implementation etc. All applying team members also took Alvo's Blended Instruction Competency Assessment® to determine individual readiness for blended instruction. The assessment resulted in a report for each teacher to use as a guide to personalized PD, support and teacher goals.

PILOT REQUIREMENTS

TECHNOLOGY AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Reliable access to technology is an essential requirement for blended programs, but it is not the sole need. Other critical technology components for districts include a user-friendly, flexible student data management system and online learning programs (OLPs) that align

with a given school's instructional framework, and student needs. Blended learning initiatives stagnate when teachers do not have ready access to individual student data. The quality and accessibility of online programs can undermine momentum as well.

For these reasons, and to incentivize participation, GWAEA negotiated site licenses with Illuminate Education, an online data and assessment management tool, and **Dreambox**, an online adaptive math program, for all teachers participating in the pilot. Teachers could add Dreambox to their current list of OLPs, implement it quickly, and assess its efficacy against other resources. Illuminate complements Dreambox and enables a wider scope for reviewing more in-depth data, providing teachers with many potential benefits, including:

- 1) Accelerated blended learning implementation through easy access to individual student data
- 2) Accelerated transition to competency-based grading by linking lesson plan objectives, assessments, observations and rubrics to Iowa Core Standards
- 3) Enabled the potential to capture and analyze pilot outcomes on student achievement

LEADERSHIP AND ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT

The technical requirements for applicants had to be coupled with support from both district and school site administration support. Transitioning to a blended program is not without challenges that can quickly turn into frustration without leadership involvement, and the numerous priorities that can clutter teachers' classrooms will, in turn, become significant obstacles to obtaining successful outcomes.

Additionally, participants were originally required to have the ability to benchmark assessment results throughout the pilot. While the initial premise was that this data would be helpful to pilot program administrators, the pilot program team instead placed a higher value on benchmarking testing results for pilot classrooms..

COSTS TO SCHOOLS

Participants in this pilot program had a minimal financial commitment. The only school-related costs for this initial pilot were the costs of substitutes for eight days over the course of the school year as schools released participants for professional development and collaborative discussions. GWAEA covered all other expenses associated with the pilot program including licenses for Dreambox and Illuminate, and the costs associated with the blended learning professional development provided by Alvo.

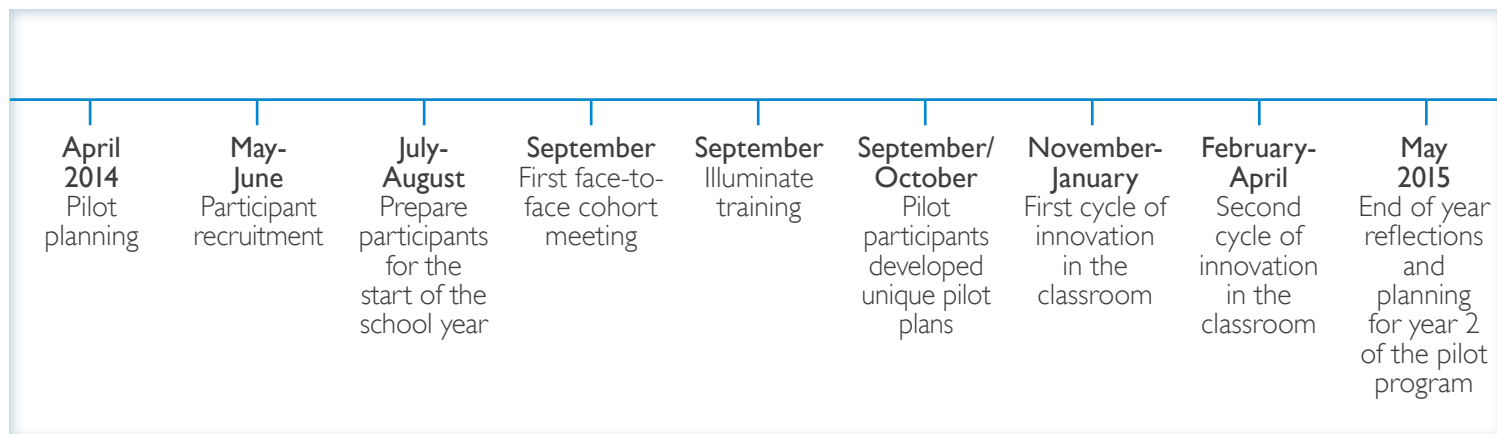
“ My students absolutely love working with DreamBox. There is complete silence when they are on the program! It is amazing how it adapts to the exact level each of my students need. Students can work on DreamBox individually at their own pace and level while I am working with small groups on our current content. It is truly filling in the missing gaps for some students and stretching others beyond what I can do in the classroom! It's almost as if there is another teacher providing individualized instruction! It's a fantastic program!”

Dani Kremer
- Blended Learning Pilot Teacher

“ My students love using Dreambox. They use it about 20 minutes a day. On average, my first grade class is working at a middle of second grade level.”

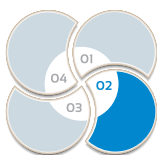
Laura Niec
-Blended Learning Pilot teacher

GWAEA PILOT TIMELINE



PILOT PARTICIPATION

The submissions for the pilot program were closely scrutinized since these first participants would become the torch-bearers for blended learning across the agency. In the end, five districts, ten school teams, fifty-four school site staff, and fourteen GWAEA staff were chosen. Representative of the GWAEA's service area, participants came from both urban and rural schools and reached nearly 1,000 students. Previous experience with blended or personalized learning varied considerably. For the most part, pilot participants were new to the approach.



PILOT ELEMENT #2: PERSONALIZED PD PATHS

PERSONALIZED INSTRUCTION COMPETENCY ASSESSMENT

As part of the Pilot application process, all interested participants completed The Alvo Institute's Personalized Instruction Competency Assessment©. This assessment surveys teachers' self-perception of skills, attitudes and classroom practices that make up effective blended learning. Based on survey responses, a report is created that rates readiness in four domains: Student Data, Instruction and Assessment, Classroom Culture and Engagement and Innovative Practice. The chart below shows the aggregated data for each of the districts that participated in the pilot. On average, most participants rate themselves as comfortable with the majority of blended competencies, prior to having experienced the pilot process.

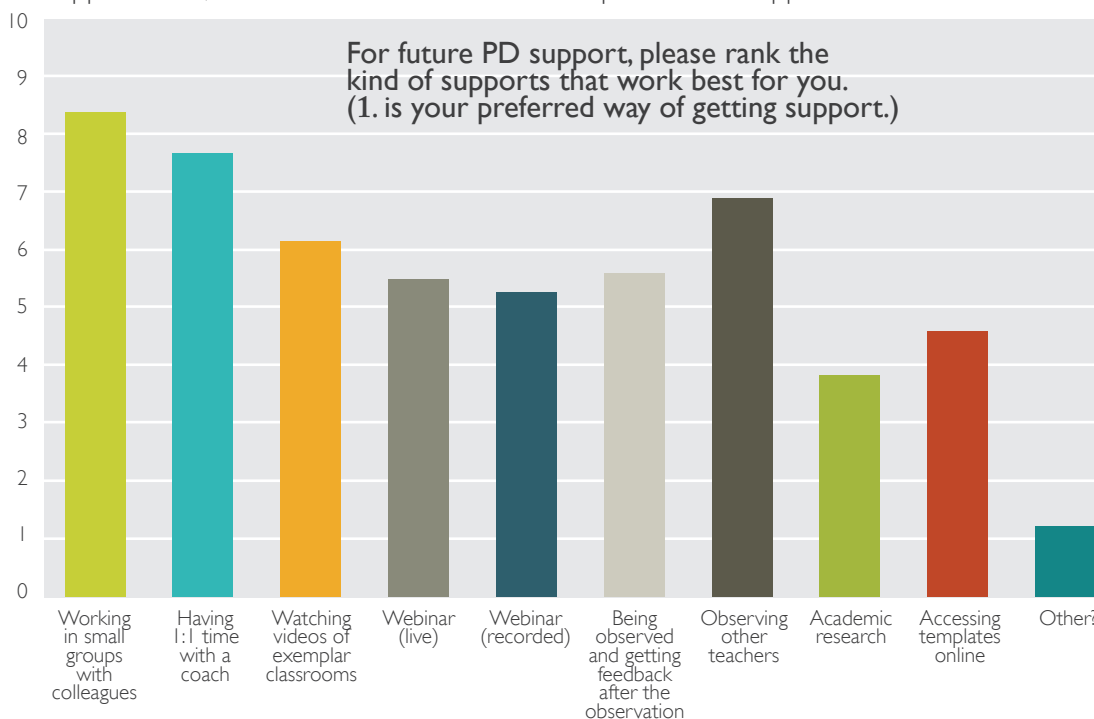
The data gleaned from the Personalized Instruction Competency Assessment© is then used by the Alvo team to determine what teacher supports are most needed, and to help teachers set individual goals for themselves. Providing this baseline to help target professional development support helped pilot program administrators increase efficiency and efficacy, thus further off-setting costs.

IN-PERSON PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

SUMMARY OF SELF RATINGS FOR FIVE PARTICIPATING DISTRICTS

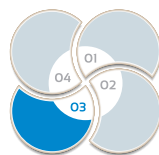
	Beginning	Emerging	Proficient	Exemplar
Student Data		5		
Instruction and Assessment		1	4	
Classroom Culture and Engagement			5	
Innovative Practices		1	4	

Between August '14 and March '15, Alvo made multiple trips to GWAEA, visiting all of the participating schools and observing each pilot teacher's classroom. Alvo spent almost 100 hours leading whole group PD, conducting individual observations, and providing strategic planning as a front-end investment for the pilot. This effort was in lock-step with the overall strategy of the pilot, and was key to managing costs: the pilot started with the classroom teacher and was designed out based on his or her needs to implement blended instruction. Following the first in-person PD session with the full cohort, Alvo asked participants to rank their PD experience. The data revealed that the teachers in this pilot valued in-person support most, and that this would need to be a piece of the support matrix for GWAEA.



For the in-person PD sessions, Alvo experimented with a blended learning approach, and found that hosting learning stations for participants to self-select based on their individual needs and interest helped provide them with more content in a constrained time span. As it does in the classroom, this format achieved many positive outcomes: it gave teachers the freedom to self-select content and maximize their time; it provided opportunities for 1:1 consultation; it allowed teams more collaboration time; and provided a sampling of the type of experience pilot teachers would be creating for their students.

PILOT ELEMENT #3: DISTRIBUTED COACHING



GWAEA assigned one or more staff members as a coach to each pilot school with the expectation that coaches observe pilot teachers approximately twice a month, capture their visits in notes and video, and provide timely feedback. Since many of the coaches involved in the pilot were highly skilled at delivering professional development and less accustomed to providing frequent on-site classroom observations and coaching they were initially less comfortable with the level of support needed for this type of whole-scale change. In tandem with GWAEA, The Alvo Institute developed common tools to support coaches with observations and feedback. Alvo team members also hosted three, one-hour virtual PDs with the coaches focused largely on conducting effective observations and providing quality feedback.

OBSERVATIONS

Most of the pilot classrooms have been visited by GWAEA staff more than once through this pilot program. During these visits the coaches have seen a wide variety of blended instruction and are beginning to amass a playbook of effective practices, and are documenting these conversations in their observation notes. Teachers continue to rate the observation and feedback cycle as one of the most valuable supports they receive, and have commented on the value of having time to collaborate among the coaches to share what they are seeing, discuss the resources they have identified as well as the resources they need. This they say is essential to advancing their practice.

REFLECTION AND COLLABORATION TIME

Perhaps one of the more under-valued components of effective professional development is building in time for purposeful reflection and collaboration. Asking participants to reflect on their efforts and providing the time and space for collaboration around mutually shared objectives, in this case developing curriculum and content for differentiated classrooms is a low cost, high return investment. This is especially true when asking teachers to fundamentally transform their practices.



A CLASSROOM GALLERY WALK

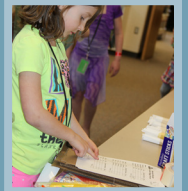
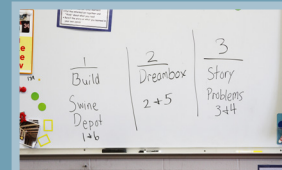
A LOOK AT THE BLENDED LEARNING PILOT



Teachers are no longer always at the front of the classroom. In the 1st grade classroom pictured above, students are engaged in Dreambox and working in small groups while the teacher (outside of the picture) facilitates a writing activity at the white board.



Walking into the classroom, it is getting harder to find the teacher - no, it's not the person standing in the yellow shirt. We are seeing more fully engaged students, as teachers create multiple, varied and student focused learning activities.



Teachers are creating their own curriculum as they develop multiple paths for students to engage in content and develop skills.



We are seeing students highly engaged in ongoing project based learning activities. Using collaboration and cooperation skills these students mutually plan and reach consensus in open-ended activities.



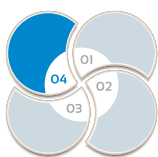
At the middle and high school levels, teachers allow students more choice in how they structure their classroom time. It is not unusual to walk into the pilot classrooms and see students dispersed throughout, working their way independently through various assignments. Not pictured here are the efforts to implement individual learning plans, to create competency-based, self-paced courses to engage students in creating content for other students and efforts to create highly collaborative classroom cultures.

SUCCESSES AND GROWTH OPPORTUNITIES

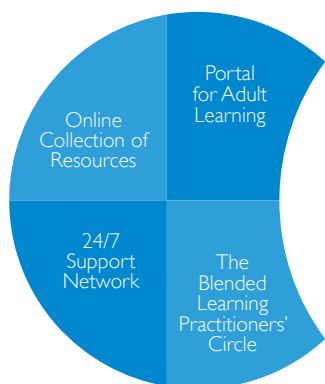
Perhaps the best evaluation of the pilot to date is provided by the students and participants themselves.



Go to this website or use the QR code on the left to watch a video...
<http://tinyurl.com/p5dz6rg>



PILOT ELEMENT #4: ONLINE PD EXTENDS IN-PERSON LESSONS AND SUPPORT



*Four components build
the fourth element of the
blended learning pilot.*

All participants in the pilot were given access to Alvo's **online collection of resources**, sample lessons, planning tools, and webinars that cover a wide range of blended instruction topics. This gave participants a place to go when they needed help with a specific topic, like classroom procedures for small groups or strategies, to keep kids progressing during independent work. Alvo's **online portal** provided another modality for adult learning and guaranteed a **24/7 support network** for teachers trying to find time outside of working hours. Finally, a segment of the participants took an online course called **The Blended Learning Practitioners' Circle**, in which they deepened their knowledge of blended instructional theory with a group of peers. These online features allow teachers to move at their pace and dramatically cut down PD support costs for schools.*

Alvo invested in a Moodlerooms platform to host its online professional development modules as well as classroom focused tools and resources. With a simple, very basic interface, Moodle provides a cost-effective way to provide a standard online course setting with opportunities to host forums, seed online discussions and build a virtual community of learners. As users grow accustomed to the platform, the entire pilot program used this platform to share their reactions, feedback and insights with each other.

Online collaboration is a great thing to have but a hard thing to get. Too often online discussions, forums, etc become vast wastelands littered with occasional questions and even rarer responses. How does one break the mold, get folks actively sharing so that online learning becomes a valuable professional development tool? Running a focused, eight-week

virtual course where participants attended weekly live webinars and then shared their thoughts, observations in online discussion forums generated a significant increase in online collaboration. The course followed a book club like format and focused on translating theory presented in the reading material into classroom practices. The topics became more complex as the course moved on beginning with the basics of blended instruction then investigated successful implementations from around the country, and ended with a guided discovery-driven planning process for participants to begin blended programs in their schools or classrooms. In the end of course surveys, one participant summed up a shared sentiment among the 77 GWAEA participants, "This class has been challenging. It has taken me out of my comfort zone. The sharing of ideas, sites, and strategies has strengthened my professional skills and commitment to the optimal learning opportunities that blended learning can provide."

BLENDING LEARNING SUPPORT DESIGNED FOR CLASSROOM TEACHERS

The key to Grant Wood AEA and The Alvo Institute's success is the teacher-centered approach to implementing change.

Rather than forcing an initiative upon uninvested teachers, Grant Wood AEA found bright stars within their talent pools who wished to push themselves professionally. Then, in partnership with Alvo, they built a cost-effective, bottom-up, and comprehensive change management plan to ensure those teachers would be successful.

Now, they have the momentum and the vetted blueprints to help entire schools make the instructional shifts to personalize learning.

*Any efforts to scale will need a strong online component both to serve as a hub for resources and asynchronous collaboration. While online participation rarely meets initial expectations, as we have found with this pilot, over the course of the year, online presence becomes more valuable.

HOW HAVE YOU PROGRESSED SINCE THE START OF THE PILOT?

TESTIMONIALS FROM TEACHERS AND ADMINISTRATORS

“For years I had my desk in nice little rows, now students are in groups and move more freely around the room from station to station. I still like structure in my room but students have more say in what they are working on each day within reason.”

“As a support person for a team practicing blended learning I think they have come a long way in personalizing learning for students. In September we were using OLPs as a way to engage students when not with the teacher however now I feel OLPs are being used to target and individualize instruction for students.”

“Since September, the idea of truly understanding gradual release for me has become clearer. When a school shifts to allowing students to make more decisions, the learning becomes deeper for the students. It requires teachers to allow students the opportunity to make independent decisions, and this can be hard for teachers. The biggest ‘aha’ for me, is seeing teachers who have allowed students the opportunity in their classroom. The students are more engaged and focused during class time. Students act and appear more confident when they have the teachers’ trust.”

“When we began this process last September we didn’t really know how we were going to work together through the process. Since then we have created team planning times which have proven to be invaluable in dealing with lack of time. By doing this, we have found many more resources than I think we would have and have found time to improve on these innovations. I can’t believe what we have done so far.”

“I have come more and more to the realization that blended learning is really just good instructional practice.”



DELIVERING ON STATEWIDE INITIATIVES

GWAEA is beginning to amass “proof points” illustrating the potential of this blended learning approach to deliver on the state’s primary initiatives. As schools become more familiar with student data management systems such as Illuminate and teachers gain greater access to student data, we anticipate the distinction between general instruction and MTSS will become more blurred and progress towards competency based grading, accelerated. All this to say, educators now have a roadmap to personalize learning. Rather than becoming yet another initiative among many, blended learning could be a primary means for unifying these initiatives in singular purpose of student progress.

While pilot teachers are blazing the trail, school principals and district superintendents will need to get out in front to clear the way for the way for the rest of their faculty. This and other efforts to bring these results to scale will be a focus of the 15-16 school year.

Teachers are changing their practice in spite of, or more likely in part because of the adjustments detailed above, we are seeing things that have surpassed our expectations. At an in-person training in February, The Alvo Institute surveyed teachers on how they had progressed in their blended learning knowledge and instruction since the inception of the pilot in September. The responses came from teachers and coaches with varying years of experience and from all grade levels and contexts. Yet, clear trends emerged that helped to shape the plan going forward. Nearly all responses were very positive about the impacts of blended learning and all seemed happy with the rate of their own development. In fact, not only were teachers excited about the changes in their own classrooms, but many were optimistic about the impact on their entire schools.

KEY SURVEY FINDINGS:

- One of the most commonly cited benefits of blending was increased student engagement and how well students have responded to increased control and independence.- A common theme was that teachers’ initial impressions about blended learning were quite limited – that it was a “technology initiative” or just “stations” – and that working with Alvo and GWAEA has helped to form far more nuanced thoughts about the approach.
- Almost 100% of questions, wonderings, and requests had to do with the “how” of blended learning. Teachers feel confident about what blended learning is and why it is good for kids.

Perhaps the most obvious realization surfaced through the pilot program is the challenge of scheduling classroom observations across numerous schools in a two- or three-day time frame. Varying schedules, special events, student emergencies, last minute field trips, etc. conspire against the best-laid plans. Classroom observations are invaluable, especially at the beginning of a pilot but paying for consultant time to get into all classrooms is too expensive, and cost has always been a major metric of success for the pilot. Executing this program as a pilot allowed the program administrators to nimbly address this issue: the Alvo team allotted more consultant time for training GWAEA staff on conducting observations, and will expand the train-the-trainer model to school sites for Round Two of the pilot. Alvo also will continue to experiment with remote, virtual PD opportunities that limit costs as well.



OPPORTUNITIES FOR FUTURE GROWTH

While the pilot has been an exciting success, there were some assumptions in the planning phase that were quickly proven wrong and needed to be adjusted.

INITIAL PLAN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Alvo Institute assumed participants would be active online learners and that much of the introductory and foundational information could be accessed individually on one's own time. This would help to accelerate in-person meetings, very similar to a flip classroom model. • Due to a tight budget, the team attempted to support teachers' growth in blended practices through monthly meetings, periodic observations and online resource support. • Alvo and GWAEA attempted to leverage existing PD structures to provide school site support in blended learning. • With site licenses paid and training arranged by GWAEA, the team hoped that schools would jump right into using Illuminate, the student data management system. The data was to be used, in part, to help measure the pilots impact/efficacy
REALITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With the many competing priorities facing teachers, access to the online content was insufficient. The initial in-person professional development needed to be adjusted to cover the introductory information, which resulted in a scaled back timeline. • Without more regular, in-person opportunities for feedback, teachers got stuck. Many were new to the approach and feared they were not "doing it right" which triggered some paralysis. • Blended learning is complex and a new approach to many. This, coupled with the fact that traditional PD usually does not include direct classroom observation, made GWAEA PD professionals (Coaches) uncomfortable assuming the role of coach and mentor. • Uploading all the student level data, providing time for guided experimentation and concern about the districts covering future costs of the data system led to a slow implementation.
ADJUSTMENTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assuming teachers are ready and willing to take advantage of online resources without explicitly addressing expectations, scaffolding the activities/requirements and ensuring content is consumable cost time. Alvo and GWAEA have since begun to design a more gradual release into self-directed/online work; more time will be spent building participants knowledge base on being online adult learners. • It became abundantly clear that every participating pilot school needed at least one "blended coach" to be available onsite, conduct observations and provide feedback. As consultants, Alvo shifted their time from direct classroom observations to providing PD for coaches with the intent of allowing schools to 'grow their own' coaches • As mentioned above, Alvo will stop conducting classroom observations and will ramp up PD staff on blended learning supports so that they, in turn, can directly support teachers. • More time and training with Illuminate will help to address this ongoing need for a robust data system.

REFINING AND SCALING IN 2015-2016

The Alvo Institute and GWAEA are incorporating lessons learned from the pilot as they craft an expansion plan for the 2015-16 school year. With an eye toward economic impact and future scalability, this plan increases the number of teachers receiving blended learning support while simultaneously deepening the support for teachers who were pilot participants this year.

KEY ELEMENTS OF YEAR TWO FOR GRANT WOOD AREA EDUCATION AGENCY

DEMONSTRATION SITES. This year's cohort produced a small group of teachers who have created exemplar blended learning programs within their classrooms. These teachers will serve as in-house exemplars for GWAEA and their classrooms will serve as demonstration sites for other schools and districts in the area. Teachers new to blended learning will be able to visit, study their materials, and watch videos of these classrooms in action. GWAEA and Alvo will support the exemplar teachers through on-site coaching and virtual support.

BLENDED LEARNING COACHES. Ten school teams have established readiness for blended learning programs by undertaking the pilot this year. School administrators and Cohort I teachers will receive in-person training from GWAEA and Alvo on how to coach their colleagues as they begin blending their classrooms. Teachers who are new to blended learning will have access to all virtual PD and all coaching will be done in-house by GWAEA staff.

CLASSROOM PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT. Next year's pilot will expand to a second cohort including additional schools which had previously not been receiving support. This iteration will include more on-site coaching early on, mandatory inclusion in the Practitioners' Circle (online PD), and an overhaul to streamline the classroom observation and coaching system.

NEW & INTERESTED. A final element of the 2015-2016 plan will include a pathway for teachers who are not ready to commit to the full pilot but would like to learn more about blended and personalized learning. This pathway will be comprised of virtual/online PD and occasional in-person PD during the second half of the school year. Additionally, GWAEA will coach school-site leaders on supporting new and interested teachers in their instructional shifts.



ONWARD!

More summative results will surface after the pilot's completion this year, but a replicable framework for incremental, yet steady transformation of instructional practices has already emerged from this pilot program. GWAEA is proving that organizations committed to disrupting how classrooms work can bring about meaningful change in a short period of time.

GWAEA and Alvo will expand this pilot program into its second year. Schools need to know how best to incentivize teacher and administrator participation/adoption, and we hope to demonstrate that blended learning supports both MTSS and Competency-based Learning. Together, all educators will learn more about how technology and digital resources can improve core instruction and provide intensive and targeted supports to students.

It is astonishing how much teacher practice has moved towards the personalization methods that we know will lead to high student achievement. GWAEA's blended pilot schools have moved closer to the practice of personalization in the last 6 months than they have moved since the personalization initiatives were first discussed. Why? Because the relentless pursuit of GWAEA and their superintendents to innovate around a shared vision for change uncovered a practice that can bring personalized learning to scale within their various districts while realizing Iowa's vision for Iowa Core, MTSS, and Competency-based education. The GWAEA blended pilot is proving that real change happens one teacher at a time. GWAEA and Alvo are proving that this high touch work can be brought to scale with quality and depth all within the agency's and schools' existing operating budgets.

ABOUT GWAEA



Grant Wood Area Education Agency (GWAEA) is the second largest of nine Iowa Area Education Agencies (AEAs) that were created in 1974 by the Iowa legislature to ensure equal educational opportunities for all children from birth through age 21.

As a regional service agency, GWAEA provides special education and school improvement services for students, families, teachers, administrators, and their communities. GWAEA works as a partner with public and accredited, non-public schools to help students, school staff, parents and communities meet educational challenges.

With nearly 500 staff members, GWAEA provides hundreds of services each day for the students, teachers, administrators and families in East Central Iowa schools.

ABOUT ALVO



The Alvo Institute provides practical design, implementation and professional development services to help schools, districts and educational agencies design, implement and sustainably operate innovative, 21st century classrooms. Alvo was also one of the first firms in the country supporting implementation of blended learning as a path to personalization. We

believe teachers are the final mile of any blended implementation. We meet teachers where they are in their practice and guide them through the transition from wherever they are into blended learning. Unlike many firms doing this work, we are all former classroom educators and school and educational organization leaders.

Founded in 2008, and based out of Oakland, CA, Alvo was the first technology agnostic firm in the country to help schools and districts design and implement blended learning. Alvo serves a wide range of clients from new schools to multi-district educational agencies. Some of our current and past clients include Grant Wood Area Educational Agency, which is the largest educational agency in Iowa, urban districts, including Los Angeles Unified and Oakland Unified, award winning charter schools including Summit Public Schools, KIPP Courage Houston, Alpha Public Schools and Thrive Public Schools, rural school districts in Oregon and Illinois, and independent schools in New York and Cleveland.

We offer online and in-person design and exploration workshops, critically acclaimed online courses to introduce teams to blended and ongoing coaching and professional development services to help schools and districts bring blended to scale.

Learn more about Alvo at www.thealvoinstitute.com or call 626.862.5341.