



# Statewide Blended Learning Implementation Gains Speed

BetterLesson & TN DOE



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—Adriana Harrington, Tennessee Department of Education

# STATEWIDE BLENDED LEARNING IMPLEMENTATION GAINS SPEED WITH BETTERLESSON COACHING

*By 2020, the Tennessee Department of Education (TNDOE) wants the state's education system to be ranked within the top 25 in the nation. To achieve this goal, state officials deployed a strategic plan with key priorities around early literacy, post-secondary completion, educator support, district empowerment and individualized support for all students. While math objectives were not explicitly named, district officials saw an opportunity to address multiple priorities with a pilot designed to help secondary math teachers implement personalized learning strategies in their classrooms.*

## A New Directive for Tennessee Schools

In 2015, the Tennessee Department of Education launched a new chapter for the state's public education system. Their charge: "Districts and schools in Tennessee will exemplify excellence and equity such that all students are equipped with the knowledge and skills to successfully embark upon their chosen path in life." The goal of the campaign is to see TN rank in the top half of states on the NAEP report card, increase 3rd grade reading proficiency to over 75%, improve ACT composite scores and see the majority of graduates earn some sort of post-secondary certificate or diploma. To meet these goals, TNDOE is focused on five priority areas: early foundations and literacy; high school and bridge to postsecondary; all means all; educator support; district empowerment and school improvement.

*"My coach has been an absolute joy to work with. He has helped push me to think bigger and challenge myself to try things in my classroom that I would have never thought of before. I can see how my students' grades have improved over the course of the year. "*

Jeran Tenpenny, Teacher  
Cannon County High School

## Secondary Math Emerges as Priority

A year into the plan, TNDOE officials saw the investments in literacy increasing student test scores across the state but math scores still lagging. For the 2016 - 2017 school year, TNDOE officials wanted to try a different approach. Instead of more textbooks, state leaders wanted to see if adopting blended learning strategies would increase differentiation in classrooms and improve learning outcomes for students. They began looking for partner organizations who could help them test their hypothesis around blended learning in algebra and integrated math classrooms. Potential partners needed to have a solution that helped support teachers to push through the challenges of shifting towards a blended classroom and develop a growth mindset around their practice

## Support for a New Personalized Learning Pilot

BetterLesson emerged as a front-runner after conversations determined a clear alignment in vision and implementation developed. TNDOE saw the partnership as an opportunity to provide teachers with the professional support needed to shift toward a student-centered classroom. The coaching support would provide teachers with the structure and tools to try blended learning strategies, measure student growth and reflect on the impact.

“One of the driving goals for the department’s work is supporting districts and schools to meet the unique needs of each and every Tennessee student,” Deputy Education Commissioner Kathleen Airhart said in a statement. “This pilot is an opportunity for Tennessee teachers to explore tools that can help them individualize their instruction, something that is particularly challenging in high school.”

**94%**

OF TEACHERS

said **BetterLesson Coaching** had a positive impact on student outcomes

**3.14x**

GROWTH

seen by teachers in student ability to demonstrate a key skill

**100%**

OF TEACHERS

said they would return for another year of coaching

## Building Capacity From 18 to 37 Teachers

At the end of the 2016 - '17 school year, teachers reported the coaching had positively impacted student outcomes in their classroom and allowed them to strengthen their practice as educators. “I feel that if I did not have this PD I would not have reached as many students that I have this year,” said Justin Lee of Morristown Hamblen High School East.

Lynnette Cottrell of Heritage High School felt the support from her coach made her a better teacher. “My students became more reflective. They started to learn how to evaluate themselves and their peers. The students learned how to work together in groups so the work would be productive. They learned to be more respectful of each other’s opinions,” she said.

Administrators could see distinct changes in teacher practice, specifically an increase in the use of technology to differentiate instruction for students. Department officials noted the pilot provided “evidence that technology can support teachers in delivering personalized instruction by leveraging data and quickly diagnosing student needs.”

“Teachers feel supported in trying new things that they wouldn’t have tried without BetterLesson’s support. Teachers are more thoughtful due to the reflection built into the cycle. And, our veteran teachers really appreciate it as they are often the ones who give support to others,” said one state official.

The positive results from the first year, lead to the DOE including the initiative in their ESSA plan submitted to the U.S. Department of Education. The program serves as one of four areas focused on piloting personalized learning in the state. For the 2017-18 school year TN DOE doubling the number of participants who expected to impact 10,000 Tennessee students.