# Horry County Schools: Blended Learning Overview

What is blended learning?

The answer to the question "What is blended learning?" often focuses exclusively on technology as part of daily classroom instruction. However, the definition is much more complex as defined below.

Blended learning leverages technology and data to create a learning environment where students have daily opportunities for individualized learning and teachers have the opportunities, resources and time to differentiate small group instruction in a classroom.
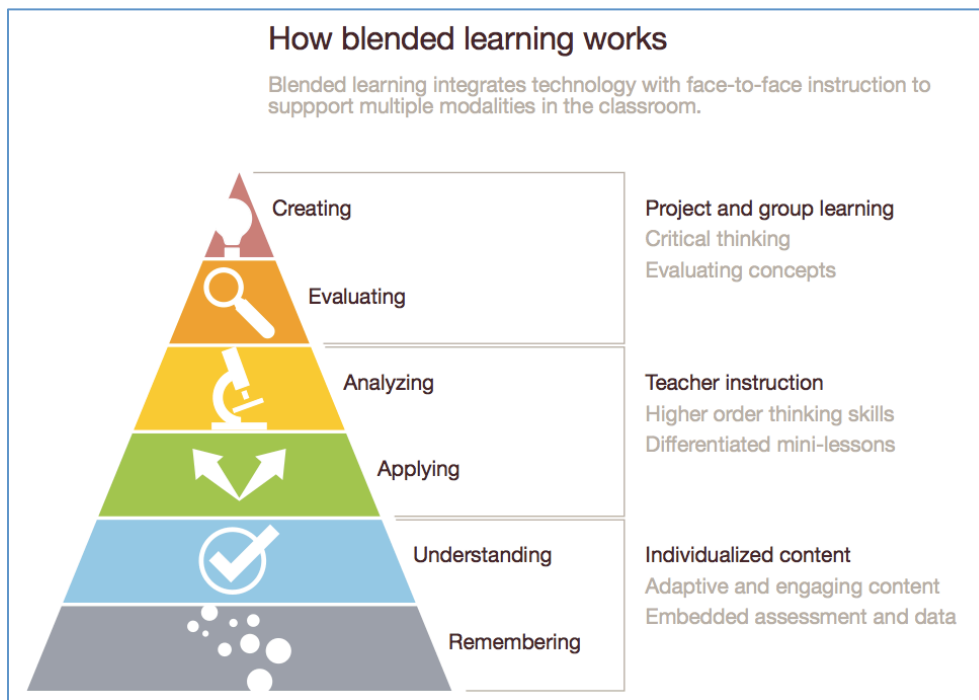
Even though students are using technology in the classroom, it doesn't necessarily mean a blended learning model is being implemented. What happens in a blended learning classroom looks very much like guided instruction in small groups, where some students are receiving differentiated small group instruction and some students are completing independent practice.

The difference is that in a blended learning classroom,

- independent practice may be done on a computer or tablet;
- direct instruction and introduction to new material can be provided through digital content;
- the teacher, with access to data, can provide more targeted direct instruction to small groups, facilitate cooperative learning, and/or align curriculum and learning experiences to match students' prior knowledge and current mastery levels.

What could blended learning models look like?

Blended learning takes many forms, from flex to flipped models, but many schools start with an in-class rotation model. A classroom rotation model may break students into 2 or 3 groups. Students may rotate between teacher-guided instruction and use of online content so that students have the opportunity to get both time with digital content providers **and time with the teacher**. In addition, students may rotate to a third group for project and group learning. **The key to this blended learning model is how data is used to inform weekly lesson plans and the weekly analysis of student groups to ensure differentiation.** From there, teachers can plan effective small group direct instruction, adjust online content, and/or plan project and group activities designed to address students' unique learning needs.

What are the essential elements of effective blended learning?

The four elements of effective blended learning classrooms are below:

Integrated Digital Content | Small Group Instruction | Data Driven Decisions | Student Reflection
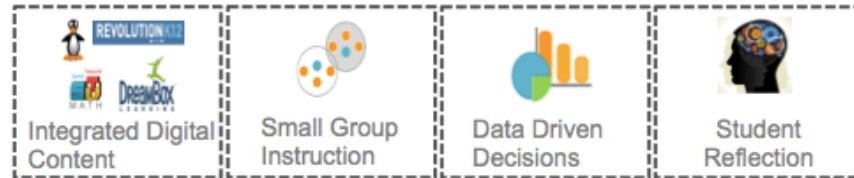
How is digital content used in blended learning classrooms?

Within many digital content providers, not only do students get immediate feedback and support, but they also get rewarded for progress, receive clear direction and next steps, and can move through concepts at a more self-directed pace. It would be impossible for a school to achieve this for each student without technology. By leveraging technology, teachers can create efficiencies in data collection and content deployment that positively impact student engagement and the planning of direct instruction.

Regardless of which digital content is used, if educators do not **plan lessons/instruction based on the data generated from using digital content and leveraging the power of daily assessments, the impact on student achievement is almost guaranteed to be minimal.**

Do blended classrooms completely eliminate direct instruction?

NO. Direct instruction remains an integral component of blended classrooms; the difference is that it is more responsive to students' learning levels and typically occurs in smaller groups rather than with an entire class.

Direct instruction remains one very effective pedagogical strategy during small group instruction. Pulling the appropriate group of students for a targeted lesson with a hook, guided practice, and independent practice can help address critical learning gaps or misconceptions that exist within a class.

Direct whole group instruction might be used more toward the beginning of a unit or once a week on a given day when introducing new material to the entire class. Once the unit/week progresses and students pick up on concepts at different paces, however, the teacher would begin shifting from whole group instruction toward working directly with specific student groups or facilitating structured project or cooperative group activities.

If there are critical concepts the entire class does not understand, the teacher still might pause for whole class direct instruction at any point in a unit. In this scenario, the teacher might have spotted poor performance on a concept from digital content data or assessments and provide instruction that addresses misunderstandings.
Digital content should serve to help teachers make better decisions about when and how to employ direct instruction, not eliminate it entirely from classroom practice.