

The Blended Chronicle™

The Quarterly Newsletter dedicated to raising awareness of the Blended Educational Movement in Rhode Island.

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2
ISSUE

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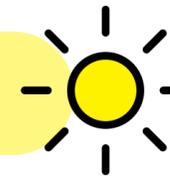
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Editor's Notes

1 By: Robert Pilkington, Ed.D.

Summer is here, and in the blended world it's a **Never Ending School Year!**

At a blended learning school, summer approached just like anywhere else. The itch for summer vacation and “battery recharging” is as acute at a blended school as it is in a traditional school. The difference is that there is no finality approaching. If a student is not where they should be with regard to percentage of the curriculum completed then the school year continues. If a student has already completed the curriculum of a subject in their grade, then they have moved on in their program of study. And for every day of hard work in what remains in the current school year, or summer, they will accelerate themselves towards quicker completion of the next grade or level. The month of June is highly relevant time of year because everyone is still in the game and their work still needs to get done!

The vexing issue is not the absence of finality but the logistical. If a student needs more time in a subject, and still can't master content given summer opportunities, then what grade are they in and how is the anticipated year of graduation changed or re-calculated? In September, when they start their “next year” the remaining percentage left for course completion is job one. But, are they already behind in the next course? Can they complete both courses within that year? Can time be compressed? Years roll into each other unevenly and begin to blend. Some students will finish early and others will take more time. But grade levels are how kids, families and our industry define progress. Blended learning models at the secondary level challenge all of us to think about mastery and proficiency in palpable ways because they, not the strictness of time or a cumulative grading system, are the gatekeepers of finality and student self-image.

“Blended learning models at the secondary level challenge all of us to think about mastery and proficiency in palpable ways because they, not the strictness of time or a cumulative grading system, are the gatekeepers of finality and student self-image.”

Complicating logistics is that seldom are students behind in all their courses and in fact they are often ahead in some while behind in others. It is natural to play to one's strengths and in an ideal setting the number of students accelerating is equal to the number of students behind pace so things institutionally can remain on track. But time can be a variable and not a constant and blended learning creates for us the opportunity to bend time to our liking on a student by student basis ... but will the confines of an agrarian calendar, and all the comfort it brings, fetter our ability to grapple with the unknown or unsure? Blended learning has morphed our high school sector into a multi-year continuum of three to five years and not a four year universally designed experience. However, for all of this pedantic introspection the “end of the year” with all its pressure and meaning remains the same. It's a hectic time of getting things wrapped up so our wistful anticipation for the 180th day remains resplendent.

In this edition of the Blended Chronicle, which is ironically our “End of the School Year and Hello to Summer Edition,” you'll find reports on Personalized Learning by special education administrator Carolyn Taylor, adaptive courseware and its advantages by Laura Jackson of the Highlander Institute, Part two of Kevin Cordeiro's musings on advancing blended learning into an M-learning world and we look at three very valuable resources which have emerged “this year.” Two are guides for helping to make informed decisions for both

districts and teacher applicants who are hiring (or hoping to be hired) for blended environments and the third is a guide recently published by the Highlander Institute intended for districts gearing up for making the most of their technology deployment and integration in emerging blended models. Sheri McCue leads us off with a report from Chariho and our friends at OSHEAN have a report on innovative connections being made in Westerly. Holly Walsh of the RI Department of Education has prepared for us entries on the Innovation Powered by Technology 2015 Conference to be held in October, the Digital Learning Champions program and the Google Summer Institute 2015 sponsored by the RI Society of Technology Educators.

Lastly, this edition of the Blended Chronicle wishes Deborah Gist well in her future endeavors and recognizes that without her ambitious goal setting for RI (especially surrounding technology in schools and growing blended learning models) that we simply would not be as advanced as we are as a state-wide community of blended learners and schools. RI should be really proud that we are striving to change the fundamental work of students and adults in schools in order to gear up for a future which is now. We have all read the books and heard the sound bites ... education today is built on the DNA of last century and as an industry fundamentally not much has changed. We are moving in a new direction and it's because Deborah Gist pointed us there.

Blended Learning? If Students CAN ACCESS technology, learning CAN Happen!



By Sheri McCue, M.Ed
Special Ed. teacher, Richmond Elem. School
Chariho School District

Blended Learning? What exactly does blended learning look like in a classroom with elementary students who have significant developmental and physical disabilities? Is computer access even relevant for the population I teach? What does my blended classroom look like? Do I really have anything to share that would inspire others?" All these questions and thoughts swirled around in my head as I contemplated the content I would share in this Blended Chronicle Newsletter. As each question ascended in my thoughts, I automatically answered every question with a YES. Absolutely, every student can benefit from technology in the classroom, provided, every student can access the technology available to them.

A little background about my classroom. I am a special education teacher of elementary students who have significant cognitive and physical disabilities. Due to the diverse nature of my classroom it is essential for me to constantly think "outside the box." Countless hours are spent adapting materials so all my students can access curriculum using their individual mode of communication.

Since receiving a Smart board and four iPads into my classroom three years ago, technology has opened an abundance of rich and exciting opportunities for my students with developmental disabilities. To learn best my students require a multimodal learning environment. What does multimodal mean? Multimodal means, in a nutshell the more different ways you learn something, the more you will remember it (Lazear, 2008). To effectively learn students with developmental disabilities need to be exposed to a variety of hands on, interactive, learning experiences. Technologies in the form of Smart boards, iPad, and touchscreen have given my students this opportunity at the touch of a mouse click.

Blended learning in my classroom has also opened up many communication benefits for my students with developmental and speech disabilities over the past few years. Long past are the expensive, awkward, and difficult to use voice output systems students with communication needs previously relied on. These awkward bulky devices have been replaced by augmentative communication applications purchased directly

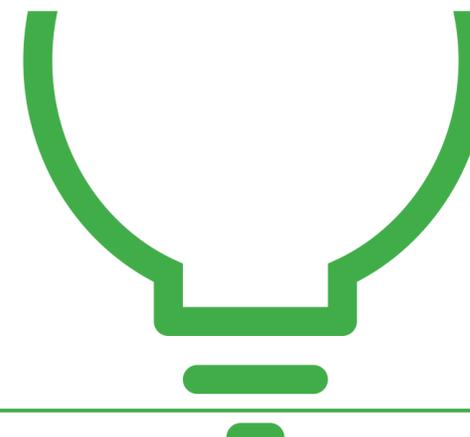
from iTunes and downloaded onto the iPad or tablet for a fraction of the cost. [This is exciting!](#)

One truth remains constant for all students regardless of ability when discussing the use of technology as a learning tool in the classroom and that is "technology can only be celebrated if it can be accessed!" Accessibility to students who have significant special needs remains one of the biggest challenges for most every special education teacher. The first, most important way to accomplish this is to insure the students can actually access the technology available to them. Some ways accomplish this in my classroom are by using adaptive stairs to help my students physically reach the [Smart board](#).

Another way I ensure my students can access the technology available to them in my classroom is by the use of capability switches and adaptive keyboards. Adaptive keyboards such as a [Kinder board](#) help my students with visual needs see the large one inch keys. This type of adaptive keyboard also allows students with challenges in hand eye coordination more space when typing.

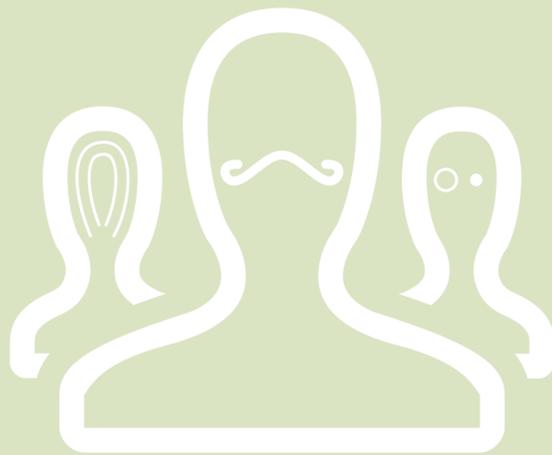
Capability switches are switches which allow the student who has physical challenges the ability to activate devices such as an [iPad or desktop computer by the tap of a switch](#). Most students with significant needs have difficulty with motor planning; making it difficult to operate a standard computer mouse, therefore my classroom uses a variety of capability switches to ensure all students have access to the technology available to them. [IPad mounting systems](#) allows iPads to be mounted and adjusted onto the arm of a wheelchair or tabletop.

Before developing an effective blended classroom it is imperative students are able to access the technology available to them. It is my responsibility to make certain this happens.



The Power of Personalization

Carolyn Taylor, M.Ed. CAGS



As a special educator, I am trained to assess and remediate skill deficits. I am happy to report that using blended learning has made my job much more efficient and effective. The following is a brief vignette about my recent work at the Urban Collaborative as well as at Village Green Virtual. I was reevaluating a student who has a learning disability using a standardized test. Using software that compliments the assessment, I was able to pinpoint areas of strengths and weakness. One clear area of need was in math, identified as “Instruction should focus on building the student’s understanding of rational numbers - any number that can be written as a fraction or ratio, including integers, mixed numbers, and

decimals.” Instead of writing a goal with detailed objectives in her IEP, hoping that teachers would follow the plan and the student would comply, I did a little research.

With one click of the button I was able to see what standards are being addressed in the 9th grade course the student was taking. Not surprisingly, there was no direct instruction on rational numbers at this grade level. I then looked at the 7th grade course and found exactly what I was looking for - a unit on rational numbers! I immediately spoke to the Director of Academic Planning and Logistics and asked him if he could put this unit into her math class. He said “No problem, I’ll do it now.” With another few clicks my special needs student was being instructed in her identified area of weakness.

The amount of satisfaction that I received from knowing that this student is getting what she needs in the same manner as everyone else, which is at her own pace with teacher support, is very rewarding. Being able to work in this manner has reinvigorated me as a special educator and gives me hope that we can meet the needs of all students. Blended learning is a tool that we as professionals need to use more of to gain the power of personalization.

Westerly Public Schools

Empower Student Tech Leaders through Internship Program

Reprinted with permission of OSHEAN

As a member of the OSHEAN network, the team at Westerly Public Schools is well aware of the impact technology can have in improving outcomes. From internet speed to research capabilities, being connected to the OSHEAN network allows the school to give students the tools they need to achieve great things. It’s fitting, then, that the district had the vision to develop an internship program for students interested in a career in technology – one that is already paying dividends in both college and real-world opportunities.

As the Director of Technology for Westerly Public Schools, Mark Lamson saw opportunity in the sea of broken laptops and projectors that fell into disrepair after heavy use by students. Knowing there were talented kids in their midst who wanted to explore technology led Lamson and Westerly High School principal Steven Ruscito to create an internship program that helped students understand how to manage and perform in the role of a help desk supervisor, a position that is a frequent staple of IT departments in business and higher education settings. With over 2,000 computers

in the district, there was plenty of work to be done.

“We’ve had the internship program in place for approximately three years to provide an outlet for Westerly High School students interested in technology,” said Lamson. “In effect, we’re putting students in an environment with highly-trained mentors while helping them to use practical solutions to solve real-world problems.”

While the students are well-versed in bringing a dead laptop back to life or unsticking a jammed printer, they’re also taking on projects in their spare time to further showcase their technical expertise. One student, Isaac Kaufman, is using a VMWare ESXI hypervisor to host virtualized environments and created his own virtual server as a side-project. “I never would have known about ESXI technology without this internship,” he said. He’s gotten into the nitty-gritty of virtual systems infrastructure by load-balancing available resources and building it to the standards of an enterprise-grade application.

Fellow intern Connor Greene is working on something a bit more bite-sized – literally. After Lamson purchased several credit card-sized single-board computers known as the Raspberry Pi, Connor got to work building an operating system that could be stored on an SD card to host a version of the popular Minecraft video game. “This program is helping kids like me learn and apply transferable skills,” said Connor.

The program has done just that for several recent graduates of Westerly High School. Former student interns Jeff Michalak and Corey Cabral are enrolled at the New England Institute of Technology and URI, respectively. For Roy Seitsinger, Westerly Public Schools superintendent, technology is the bridge that will connect students to each other now and to careers in the not-too-distant future.

“The internship program is providing them with a set of experiences they can draw upon for the rest of their lives,” said Seitsinger. “They’re developing real-world experiences with direct applications for going confidently into those first job interviews.”

iNACOL and TNTP Reports:

Teacher Competencies in **Blended Environments**

Editorial entry

The International Association for K-12 Online Learning and the New Teacher Project publish timely guides reflecting on teacher competencies in blended environments

iNACOL and TNTP have both published illuminating reports on the demands of teaching in a digital context. As schools and districts gear up to hire teachers to either work in or establish blended learning environments these papers are more than informative, they are instructional and destined to make blended programs stronger, but only if the cautionary words are listened to. Because blended learning requires intense teacher buy-in, both the applicant and the hiring district should know exactly what

lay in store. Both the iNACOL and TNTP guides offer straight language and simple talk on the skills, attitudes and dispositions best suited to excel in the blended environment. The blended teacher needs to morph from the sole deliverer of content to a data analyst and skill gap interventionist.

The Framework for Blended Teaching Competencies has four major domains. iNACOL sets the conversation by creating competencies within the domains of Mindset, Qualities, Adaptive

Skills and Technical Skills. Each competency is farmed within a series of accompanying standards. An exceptional and compelling argument is made for the implementation of these standards by posturing them as being a continuation and built on a foundation of great traditional instruction. In the real spirit of blended learning the model is not seen and a replacement of age old pedagogy but rather as an evolution of it.

TNTP's Reimaging Teaching in a Blended Classroom is a qualitative survey of current practice and a reflection on how those schools have thought and re-thought what makes an ideal candidate and teacher in their environments. Highlighted are Musheng Alishahi, science teacher at VGV, Jason Appel, math teacher at Barrington High School and Jay Sawin of the Met. TNTP looks at teaching in the blended environment to be a game changer in the way fundamental work is done. Teachers are Research

and Developers, Integrators and Guides. TNTP urges awareness that blended learning is a transformative model and that within it is the potential to radically change the very nature of the teaching profession.

Both iNACOL and TNTP have given great advice and guidance to those involved in hiring teachers for blended learning environments and for teachers who are desirous to join a blended learning school. Taken together they join to make mandatory reading before interviews start. From iNACOL you'll get the reality check of why "grit" is the first competency in personal qualities and from TNTP you'll learn inside lessons from the field on how new behaviors and mindsets will make the difference for teachers and students alike.

 [TNTP Blended Learning Working Paper 2014.pdf](#)

 [inacol blended learning teacher competency framework/](#)

Innovation Empowered by Technology Conference 2015

Accelerating Personalization

October 17, 2015

RI Convention Center
8:00 AM to 4:00 PM



More info:
<http://ride.ri.gov/TechnologyConference>



- Connect with fellow educators and school leaders in systemic planning around the effective use of technology and digital learning!

- Collaborate with and be inspired by educators and students across the state!

- Immerse yourself in ideas, strategies, and resources!

- Meet face-to-face with well-respected professionals in your field!

Adaptive Software: **Friend, Not Foe**

By Laura Jackson, Highlander Institute

In my work supporting blended learning in Rhode Island and the surrounding region, one of the push-backs I occasionally hear is, “Why would teachers embrace technology that’s going to make them obsolete?” When I am faced with this question, I feel a mix of anxiety and assurance. Anxiety because I know that if blended learning is seen in this light, my work will be much more difficult; assurance because I feel confident that I can dispel this misunderstanding.

Let me start by saying that I would never hang my hat on tools or models designed to make teachers obsolete. Rich interactions between students and passionate, intelligent, 3-dimensional teachers are central to my vision of the classroom of the future. The key word here is rich. In my vision for the future, teachers’ precious time and attention is spent coaching and providing feedback to students, not drilling math facts and scoring quizzes.

Adaptive software, like DreamBox, is not and will never be a teacher. It will never really know the students who use it, and it will certainly never care for them like their teachers do. But it is an incredibly powerful tool that can take low-hanging fruit off teachers’ plates, freeing them up to do the more complex and intellectually-rewarding work of teaching. And this, I believe, not only makes teachers’ jobs easier, but it can make them more effective.

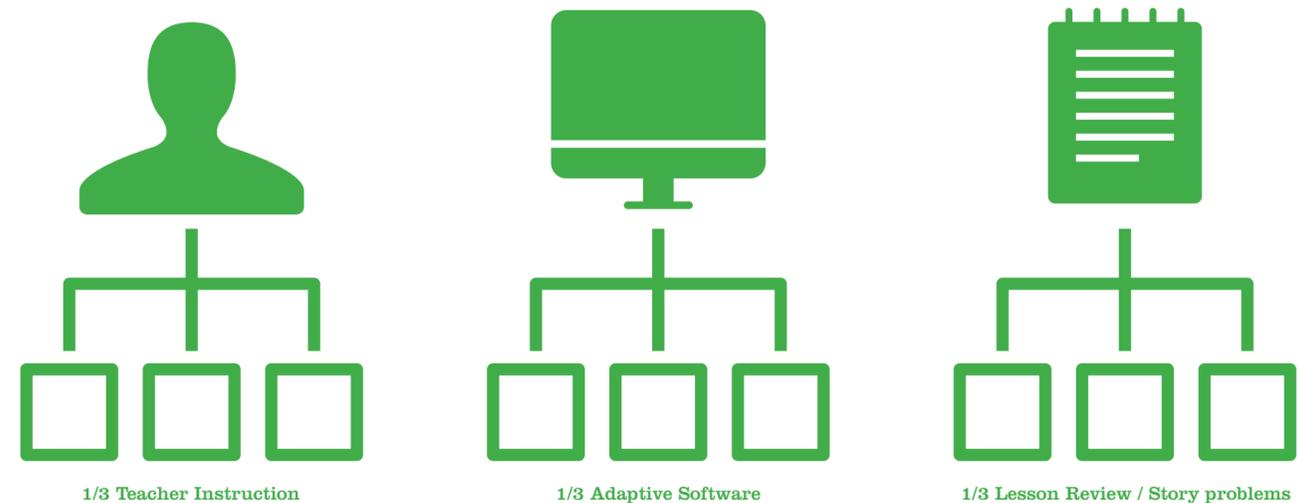
These claims are based on observations I’ve made this year supporting the implementation of DreamBox in kindergarten and first grade classrooms in Providence Public Schools. In

Providence’s model, teachers use DreamBox as one of three stations in a standard station rotation model. Most students find the gamified math software extremely engaging, often pumping their little fists and whispering “yessssss!” when it’s their turn to slip on their headphones at the DreamBox station.

While a third of the class works silently at their computer station, the teacher is able to work with another third on a differentiated mini lesson. Teachers typically group students homogeneously for the rotation, so the group of 8 or 9 students the teacher is working with could be below, on, or above grade level. As a result, the teacher is more easily able to adjust the pace and depth of her instruction. And, because it is a smaller group, she is better able to check-in with each student and get a sense for their understanding.

A third group of students works on a previously-taught concept, either through a game, application activity, or story problems. This work can be done in partners or in small groups and provides an opportunity for students to talk about and apply their mathematical knowledge.

All the while, the software is generating data--far more than even the most meticulous and data-savvy teacher could possibly track. It is recording not only whether a student answered the question correctly or incorrectly, but also how long it took him to answer, whether his strategy was the most efficient, and what his mistakes reveal about his conceptual understanding. While the software will use this data to make adjustments to the lessons it offers up to students, that is only the tip of the iceberg with regard to how this information can be used.



Using the Classroom Usage Report, teachers can determine if students’ are working productively while on the devices. Forget eyes in the back of their heads; these students’ teachers have eyes in the back of the computer! They can also monitor students’ progress in the software, comparing a student to the class average and looking at specific standards they’ve mastered, in order to identify who may need more support (or more of a push) in small group instruction.

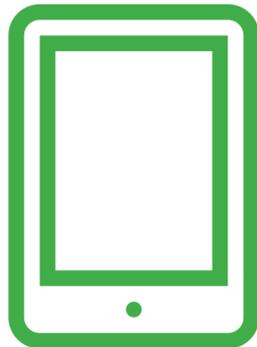
Once teachers have developed a familiarity with this level of data analysis, they can go deeper and start using it to create even more targeted groupings and make more nuanced instructional decisions. For example, if a teacher is planning to introduce a new concept the following week, he can go into DreamBox and look at the Student Groups by Proficiency Report to see if his students have been working on that skill. With the click of a button, the

teacher can see which students have already demonstrated mastery, which are currently working on that standard, and which have not yet started. Using this information, he can regroup his students for the week so that his small group instruction can reflect students’ prior knowledge.

When I was in the classroom, this kind of differentiation and targeted instruction was more of an aspiration than a reality. But through the use of this type of software, teachers are actually able to work with small groups of students on a daily basis and use short-cycle data to make informed instructional decisions. This is the new normal in these classrooms. And it is why I feel strongly that this technology doesn’t threaten the role of the teacher, but elevates it.

Mobile learning & the 4-D Classroom

Kevin Cordeiro
SIT Co-chairperson, Village Green Virtual



As a young teacher I am often struck by the rhythmic repetition of Ed theory textbooks; they stress rigor, high and clear expectations, and the critical importance of a well-crafted classroom consciousness. The classroom as something more than the three-dimensional structure of a room within a building has been discussed and dissected

for some time now. However, it seems that most of the discourse centers on the formation of a classroom consciousness in a pre-digital setting. It is time we start a discourse around the creation of a four-dimensional classroom. The four-dimensional classroom combines the classroom behaviors of the physical space and extends it into the digital dimension. This means classroom consciousness can become transient. It can be tapped into in settings that mirror the expectations of lifelong learning and bring specific comforts of the classroom into the wider world.

I recently experimented with this through the blended curriculum at Village Green Virtual. Students covered the narratives of immigrants' experiences at the turn of the century through the virtual curriculum. This narrative was used as prior knowledge to contextualize a more analytical discussion of ethnic immigrant groups in Rhode Island in a workshop setting. Students

connected Ravenstein's laws of immigration to the experiences of ethnic migrants to the state over the past century and a half. From there the students and I traveled to Fox Point and explored the ethnic and immigrant history of the community through a mobile scavenger hunt. Students used their mobile devices to communicate as a group as well as between groups, to access notes and search for information, and document experiences. We then spent the next few workshops organizing the collected notes, pictures, and experiences into a focused narrative. That narrative, written by the students with citations for additional resources, was used to generate a QR code. This permanent artifact can now serve as an easily redistributed authentic learning and didactic piece. My aim was to create an experience that created a four-dimensional classroom experience, one in which the expectations and consciousness of the classroom fluidly transitioned between the virtual curriculum environment, the workshop, and our nearby community.

These early experiments can serve as starting points to opening an active discourse that sees the digital learning environment running parallel to our increasingly mobile real world. The dialectical environment of a physical classroom transplanted into new spaces, spaces where our students might feel like comfortable natives or uncertain strangers. The importance of the developing four-dimensional classrooms is in the possibility of creating new ranges of comfort for our students and thus new theaters for experiences that stretch their capacities.

Highlander Institute's White Paper: District guide to implementation of blended learning

Editorial entry



School District 2.0: Redesigning Districts to Support Blended Learning is now available

In a recently published white paper the Highlander Institute unveiled a series of recommendations and guiding principles, culled from three years of immersion in blended learning environments, for districts embarking on blended learning initiatives. Authors Shawn Rubin, Cathy Sanford and Laura Jackson, with supporting contributions by Dana Borelli-Murray, Beth Rabbitt, Julia Freeland and design by Stephanie Castilla, have put together a thoughtful and well-ordered road map of key findings into a "how to" manual for districts serious in changing pedagogical models. The white paper starts by offering clear definitions of blended learning's essential elements and then leads

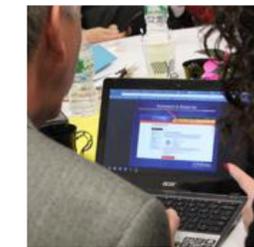
readers through a discussion of district level competencies (with a very valuable survey tool), strategies for shifting mindsets and supporting implementation throughout the district. This cogent document can assist educators no matter where they are on the scale of implementing personalized and blended learning because its content is derived from Highlander's experience across the landscape. Important to highlight is that the white is equally relevant to both autonomous schools with district-like decision making capacity as well as larger districts with multiple schools.



<http://www.highlanderinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Redesigning-Districts-to-Support-Blended-Learning.pdf>

Future Ready Regional Summit

Holly Walsh
E-Learning and Instructional Technology Specialist RIDE.



The United States Department of Education's Office of Educational Technology, in partnership with the Alliance for Excellent Education and with support from the Leading Education by Advancing Digital (LEAD) Commission and a coalition of more than 36 content partners, is hosting a series of [Future Ready Regional Summits](#) to help school district leaders improve teaching and student learning outcomes through the effective use of technology.

The summits follow a Connected to the Future convening hosted by President Obama at the White House that involved 115 local superintendents from across the country. The summits offer district leaders expert support to create a digital learning plan that aligns with instructional best practices, is implemented by highly trained teachers, and leads to personalized learning experiences for all students, particularly those from traditionally under-served communities. The New England summit was held in West Warwick, Rhode Island on April 21 and 22.

The summit was open to district leadership teams on a first-come, first-served basis from districts where the superintendent signed the [Future Ready District Pledge](#). Superintendents and leadership teams from 35 school districts across the Northeast gathered at West Warwick High School for the two-day Future Ready Leadership Summit.

The summits are an important step to realizing the goals of the [ConnectED initiative](#) announced by the President in 2013 to connect 99% of students to high-speed Internet and empower teachers with the technology they need to truly transform teaching and learning.

Thirteen Rhode Island district teams attended the summit held in West Warwick. Three Rhode Island superintendents, Karen Tarasevich, West Warwick, Victor Mercurio, East Greenwich, and Jim Erinakes, Exeter-West Greenwich, were part of the speaking program. Acting Commissioner, Dave Abbott, brought greetings on behalf of RIDE. Michael Horn, Co-Founder and Executive Director of the Christensen Institute and author of Blended and Richard Culatta, Director of the Office of Educational Technology at the US Dept. of Education gave keynote addresses to the leadership teams.

Ideas, strategies and tools enabling the digital transition were shared by all. Teams were excited to dive into the Future Ready dashboard, a free interactive planning tool which provides ongoing support to district and leadership teams who take the Future Ready Pledge. The dashboard is available at <http://dashboard.future-readyschools.org/>

It was an honor that this regional conference took place in Rhode Island, in recognition of our commitment to digital learning through such initiatives as or Innovation Powered by Technology Model School Grant, the Wireless Classroom Initiative, and our virtual learning charter public schools.



Digital Learning Champions

www.ride.ri.gov/DLchampion

RI educators work hard all year long to engage and inspire students by using technology to personalize learning. These educators champion high-quality digital learning opportunities in their schools and communities by:

- finding innovative and resourceful ways to leverage digital tools in classrooms and youth programs;
- advocating for students to have better access to technology that can help support deeper learning outcomes;
- inspiring, mentoring, and coaching other educators; and
- using digital tools to make learning relevant and meaningful for students who are traditionally underserved.



Sheri McCue
Special Education teacher
Richmond Elementary, Charlestown



Rachel Salvatore & Hilary Lundgren
5th Grade Teachers
West Broadway Middle, Providence



Mrs. Rothberg
Library Media Specialist
Cpt. Isaac Paine, Foster



Bill Black
Principal
West Broadway Middle, Providence



Fourth Grade Students in Deb Ramm's Class
Sarah Dyer Barnes School,
Johnston



First Grade Students in Tracy Mollock and Amy Dolan classes
Warwick Neck Elementary,
Warwick

Nominate a RI Digital Champion Today!

With a short, creative video clip and 250 characters or less, tell us why your Digital Learning Champion inspires you! You will receive a copy of **Blended: Using Disruptive Innovation to Improve Schools**, by Michael Horn and Heather Staker, if your video and champion are featured on the RIDE web site.

Goto Top

Leaders, teachers, coaches **Google Institute** in RI **JULY 26 - 31, 2015.**

<http://googleapps.ri-iste.org>



It's a hands-on, minds-on learning experience unlike any other! This event is the premiere professional development program for K-12 and college educators, librarians and media professionals.

Overview.

This six-day institute focuses on how literacy is changing as a result of emerging media and technologies. We'll consider the implications of this cultural and technological shift for teaching and learning. Join us in exploring innovative approaches now being used by K-12 educators, librarians, and college and university faculty. You will learn how to conduct project-based inquiry using a variety of digital texts, tools and technologies, which will help create challenging and engaging learning opportunities for you and your students.