WDLC CASE STUDY

Program Initiatives and Interventions

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Introduction

As the field of K–12 online and blended learning continues to evolve, programs around the world work together to discover what fits and what doesn't when it comes to the intricate pieces of the puzzle that make up a school or program. No stranger to this evolution, the Wisconsin Digital Learning Collaborative — consisting of the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, Wisconsin Virtual School, and the Wisconsin eSchool Network — is working on a collection of topic-based case study reports¹ to share a variety of approaches the programs in their network take to put the puzzle together. The reports are not prescriptive, but intend to stimulate leaders to be purposeful and thoughtful about solutions which will differ based on program structure, student demographics, staff vision, and stakeholder needs. Each report presents associated key questions; taken together, these questions may provide a framework for thinking through these topics and making similar programmatic improvements in processes and services.

The current report is focused on national-level program initiatives and interventions. Many program initiatives and interventions are introduced each year at the national level and then implemented in varying ways from one school program to the next across the United States. This report shares the experiences of implementing five specific program initiatives in the state of Wisconsin:

- 1. College & Career Readiness, also known as Academic & Career Planning (ACP)
- 2. Student-Centered Learning
- 3. Math and Reading
- 4. Future Ready
- 5. Equity

The rest of the report is divided into three sections: the first section is a general discussion of these initiatives. Following the general discussion is a focus on these initiatives specifically as they pertain to education in Wisconsin. The remainder of the report presents critical conversations that are happening across the state as the initiatives are being implemented within digital learning environments, including online and blended school programs.

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* This report was written through a partnership with Michigan Virtual Learning Research Institute, the research arm of Michigan Virtual.

1 https://www.wiwdlc.org/case-studies/

Program Initiatives Overview — "Wisconsinized"

College and Career Readiness/ACP

A Wisconsin law passed in 2018 requires ACP for grades 6 through 12. The main goal of this law, and its implementation within school programs, is to provide students exposure to pathway courses and expanded opportunities, especially as a response to rural equity issues. This law also increases access to Career and Technical Education (CTE) courses for technical schools who are partnering with university systems to support local districts' students. Some of these courses and opportunities are offered through online learning platforms.

Because some WDLC members are not schools, they offer supplemental courses and do not issue transcripts. Instead, the programs partner with school districts that would like to provide their students single instances of courses. Sometimes the district is looking for a half schedule and other times a full schedule, and with these additional courses, there is a need to put together an intentional plan for students to be college and career ready. The universities, school districts, and WDLC members are working together to find the best possible ACP experience for their students using this cross-sharing approach.

What drives the decision for what provider or partner a program, school, or district will choose? Do those involved in your local ACP process understand how online course offerings may contribute to and/or compliment a student's ACP? How will you know which option is meeting your students' needs? Does your local leadership have the awareness needed to value the role online learning can play in supporting College and Career Readiness/ACP?

Student-Centered Learning/Personalized Learning

Supported by the Institute for Personalized Learning, which is housed in CESA (Cooperative Educational Service Agency) 1, Wisconsin has a guidepost for the common language used for the implementation of student-centered/personalized learning across the state. The Wisconsin DPI takes an intentional approach to instruction in that everything that is designed is done with the focus on students at the center. As Mertes emphasized, "We ask what opportunities are we bringing? Where is the student voice? How are we empowering the student? What does a student need at various points in their journey, and where is their voice in their demonstration of their knowledge and their work?"

The WDLC sees digital learning as a way to facilitate student-centered learning and works to align their materials for the districts in order to create opportunities for students. Across the WDLC network, digital learning provides support structures and highly collaborative interactive environments for students. Personalized learning is not just academic; it can also meet other needs, such as support structures for social-emotional learning, flexibility for extracurricular activities, and unique opportunities for professional learning.

It is important to understand that student centered and personalized learning are broader terms that incorporate multiple modalities of instruction, learning, and development to the individual student. However, online and blended learning are very specific modalities that compliment and support the efforts to personalize and/or drive student-centered offerings.

KEY ?? QUESTIONS

Personalized learning is a hallmark of blended and online learning options. How does a program accommodate pacing issues students may have when established timeframes for completing coursework or assessment must be adjusted — made faster, slower, or longer to do what is best for individual students? Does your strategy of personalized or student centered learning include online and blended learning strategies that account for individual learner needs?

Math & Reading

Schools invest so much in the core topics of math and reading because they are tied directly to accountability. For the Math & Reading initiative, Wisconsin's main focus is providing a course catalog that offers digital content for districts and schools to use in a quality and consistent way across the state. Digital content provides varying opportunities for math and reading initiatives at the district level, supporting the personalization of learning pathways at scale. Some of these strategies may include:

- · Remediation
- Enrichment
- Curriculum support resources
- · Course replacement
- Course choice

In each of the above, the use of space and time relative to online learning presents significant value to the strategies. Specifically, as aligned with the Future Ready Framework, online learning in the context of elevating reading and math strategies allows for anytime and anywhere learning, new pedagogy and learning environments for personalizing learning, competency based learning, and extended time for projects, collaboration, and supplementing learning outcomes.

In addition to the digital course catalogs and online learning models allowing for increased flexibility in the use of space and time, some statewide online programs offer value added services such as online tutoring, which provides just-in-time support for students when they need it. These safe, no-fail opportunities are helpful to students, especially in the online environment. Online mentors and instructors also provide varying levels of support by way of drop-in sessions featuring virtual drawboards for working through problems and dissecting sentence structures. All stakeholders involved in the process continue to leverage digital learning tools to elevate the proficiency in reading and math standards to support the growth of each student's progression in these areas.

The following is one example of how a large district in Wisconsin has used its online learning eSchool to help compliment Math and Reading initiatives. This district established four district SMART (specific, measurable, realistic, and timely) goals after realizing online learning could be leveraged to better personalized learning for students who were advanced. The goals and results are as follows:

GOAL 1: Increase the number of identified gifted and talented students achieving an advanced score on the ACT in grade 11.

RESULTS

- 2017 analysis of English ACT: A total of 56 students had a score of 28 or higher in English, and 32% of the 5th graders from a single school gifted and talented program had a score of 28 or higher in English on the ACT in 11th grade.
- 2017 analysis of Math ACT: A total of 67 students had a score of 28 or higher in Math, and 24% of the 5th graders from a single school gifted and talented program had a score of 28 or higher in Math on the ACT in 11th grade.

GOAL 2: Increase the number of identified gifted and talented students completing four years of honors, AP, and/or Youth Options Math and English courses with a grade of "B" or higher.

RESULTS

• The 2018 cohort group had 25 students, and 36% of these students had a grade of B or Higher in English and Math in honors, AP, or youth options in 11th grade.

GOAL 3: Increase the number of juniors participating in AP Calculus.

RESULTS

• Over a three-year period, juniors' enrollment in AP Calculus increased from five enrollments to 24 enrollments.

GOAL 4: Increase the number of identified gifted and talented students achieving an advanced score on the Wisconsin Forward Exam in Grade 6 English and Math

RESULTS

- There were 32 current blended learning students with 4th grade Wisconsin Forward Exam English scores, and 29 (91%) of these students were advanced.
- There were 32 current blended learning students with 5th grade Wisconsin Forward Exam English scores, and 24 (75%) of these students were advanced.
- There were 29 current blended learning students with 4th grade Wisconsin Forward Exam Math scores, and 23 (77%) of these students were advanced.
- There were 30 current blended learning students with 5th grade Wisconsin Forward Exam Math scores, and 21 (70%) of these students were advanced.

Online and blended learning efforts continue to support district level goals in many ways across Wisconsin. Originally, many used digital learning for credit recovery and remediation, but we continue to see growth where online learning is supporting learners at all levels from credit recover in alternative programs to now enrichment as part of gifted and talented programs and everything in between. Digital learning allows for scaling the ability to meet student centered needs.

KEY 6? QUESTIONS

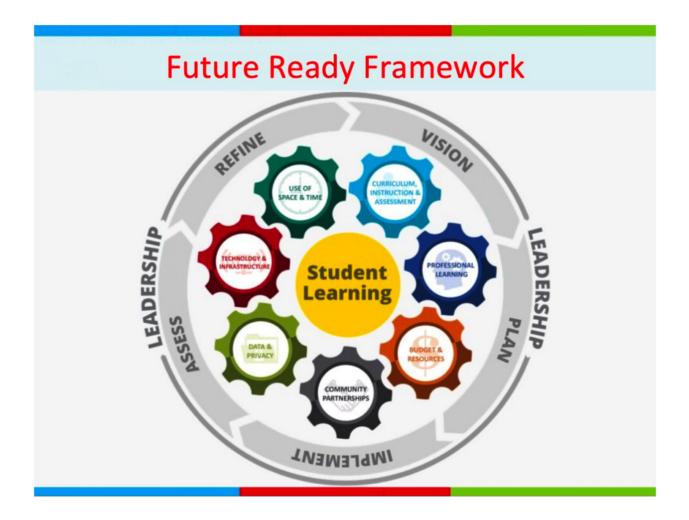
What beneficial aspects of this initiative could be applied to other subjects? What areas could online and blended learning support math and reading targets within your district not limited to credit recovery? What areas could online and blended learning support math and reading targets within your district not limited to credit recovery? Are there elements of the Online Tutor program that could be used by face-to-face learning guides, coaches, mentors, or parents to supplement that support?

Future Ready

The <u>Wisconsin Digital Learning Plan</u> is built on elements of <u>Future Ready Schools</u>, which stems from the Alliance for Education based in Washington, DC. Future Ready Schools is built on a framework that focuses on the following topics:

- 6. Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment
- 7. Personalized Professional Learning
- 8. Robust Infrastructure
- 9. Budget and Resources
- 10. Community Partnerships
- 11. Data and Privacy
- 12. Use of Space and Time
- 13. Collaborative Leadership

All of these components work together to create the overall system, which in turn contributes to student learning, as shown in the Future Ready Schools framework graphic below.



A strong partner of the WDLC since 2014, Future Ready Schools has provided educators the guidance and structure for Wisconsin's innovation journey towards a student-centered, goal-directed approach to bring opportunities that cater to students' needs. To further their focus on Future Ready Schools, WDLC hosts summits around opportunity gaps where training and support is centered on the "why" and is provided to all stakeholders.

Online and blended learning should at minimum be included in much of this conversation. Below you will find five key questions to review, reflect upon, and analyze as part of each gear found in the Future Ready Framework.

Curriculum and Instruction

- 1. How will you define quality online and blended curriculum and instruction?
- 2. What role does the educator play in instructional design and delivery?
- 3. How do educators assess student learning now and in future models?
- 4. What latitude do educators have to modify curriculum? Under what circumstances?
- 5. How can you elevate the role of instructors, and are you ready to redesign expectations?

Personalized Professional Learning

- 1. How do you ensure educators are prepared to succeed in your model?
- 2. How will you model flexible use of space, time, and place?
- 3. How will you model professional learning choice aligned with educator needs and interests?
- 4. How will you model and provide a rich online and blended learning experience for your educators?
- 5. How and who is evaluating and, more importantly, coaching educators who shift to online and blended?

Robust Infrastructure

- 1. How does your tech plan support online and blended learning?
- 2. Is technology a subordinate to the district strategic plan?
- 3. How do your systems and structures support learners who are remote (proctored exams, support services)?
- 4. How do you monitor effective accessibility practices?
- 5. How do educators ensure their technology, instructional materials, and assessments are appropriately rigorous and aligned to standards?

Budget and Resources

- 1. Do resources (human, time, and financial) reflect your strategic initiatives?
- 2. Are you willing to allocate resources to invest (Research & Development) in new learning models?
- 3. How do finances and quality interact (what gives)?
- 4. Do you hire for the job to be done? (literally and figuratively)
- 5. Have you discussed creative ways to leverage online and blended creatively?

Community Partnerships

- 1. How are you communicating the new model with the community?
- 2. Do you have champions who can communicate your "elevator pitch"?
- 3. Does online learning elevate career pathway partnership opportunities in the community?
- 4. Does the district purposely expand global "community" through a digital strategy?
- 5. What partnerships exist with local government agencies, civic groups, libraries, nonprofit organizations, businesses, and institutions of higher education to extend student learning into the community?

Data and Privacy

- 1. What expectations do you have of vendors (boilerplate language) to manage your data well?
- 2. Are you familiar with standards that impact data and tool management (IMS Global, EdFi, etc)?
- 3. How will data change practices for educators?
- 4. Is the district investing analytics to impact more than assessment results?
- 5. What strategies are in your Tech Plan to move data effectively across learning systems, tools, and platforms?

Use of Space and Time

- 1. Is the district aligning student learning environments with a change in use of space and time?
- 2. How are you purposefully using existing space and furniture to support your desired learning models?
- 3. Are models that address an increased flexibility in space and time equitable to all students?
- 4. What strategy is in place to purposefully rework schedules elevating the use of space and time?
- 5. Do you have any online and blended learning policy (graduation class rank, scheduling, grading scales, access, transcripts, attendance, instructional minutes, seat time, teacher contracts, etc.)?

Collaborative Leadership

- 1. Does the district leverage collaborative partnerships in the digital and online learning space in WI to enable innovation, build capacity, and empower new models of learning?
- 2. Does the district elevate staff and leadership with online experience in the district?
- 3. Does the district purposefully bring an online and blended learning voice to the table for key strategy and decision-making conversations?
- 4. Does the district have a shared vision that goes beyond a single leader incorporating digital, online, and blended learning?
- 5. Does the district proactively plan, value, and commit to research based digital learning strategies with continuous improvement cycles to allow for innovation, implementation, and quality assurance?
- 6. Is your program/school/district using checklists for self-reflection to plan, review, evaluate, and adjust?

The Future Ready framework is a planning framework around the effective use of technology and digital learning to achieve the goal of "career and college readiness" for all students. While the seven Gears provide a roadmap toward digital learning, success within a district is dependent on innovative leadership at all levels. Ensure that you aren't forgetting to include learning modalities as part of your conversation, as technology in of itself is not the solution but should support the desired learning outcomes and experiences you believe to be important for your local stakeholders.



As we look at higher education and the workforce, data is clear they need students with digital learning experiences, what are you doing to ensure students are prepared? What are the district goals for their blended and online experiences and offerings? What do graduates have to say about their experience and preparation?

Equity

Equity strategies come in many different shapes and sizes across the state of Wisconsin. Because of the many perspectives and opinions surrounding equity we look at the varying locales across Wisconsin and acknowledge Wisconsin is a very rural state which presents significant opportunities to address equity through the use of digital learning. However, equity through the lens of digital learning applies to all locales: rural, town, suburban, and city. WDLC can categorize our areas of emphasis with these three priorities:

- 1. **Student Access** Are all students presented with equitable options to support their college and career readiness post high school?
- 2. **Teacher Capacity** Do you leverage online learning to help counter teacher shortages and ensure you have high qualified teachers providing instruction as part of your online offerings?
- 3. Expanded Course Catalog In our competitive landscape, technology is opening doors to many avenues of learning and access we historically haven't had. As a district are you leveraging online learning course options to expand your local course catalog to best meet the needs of your students and community?

WDLC additionally looks at equity from the standpoint of student choice and voice when focusing on the type of learning that students want to pursue. Because of school choice, students are opting to go to full-time virtual schools, and with them goes their funding; so for some districts, this financial drive has prompted a more critical look at how equitable their offerings are. With equity in online learning comes the students' access to a dedicated computer and reliable broadband.

When districts make a decision to provide digital learning opportunities to students, they have to do a self assessment to determine whether or not they can equitably support this type of learning for their students, whether they are rural or urban or somewhere in between. Not only is it important for students to have equitable access to learning opportunities, it is also imperative for teachers to have access to the professional development they need to be able to support students in these new learning environments.

Another equity issue that Wisconsin is addressing is their racial achievement gap, which is the largest in the nation. Racial achievement is one of the drivers used for accountability when looking at their enrollment. Data-driven leadership is critical to supporting students, especially at the time that they need it the most, namely when a student is behind on credits and trying to recover them. For this purpose, Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is incorporated for design of instruction to make sure that students' needs are being met where they are.

KEY CONS

What is working with the mostsuccessful online and blended programs (rural and urban)? What do you think are the most important considerations for planning and pursuing what your stakeholders have identified as priorities?

What can you learn

from other districts

been down the online

learning road? What

root causes of the racial

achievement gap can

your program/school/

district influence?

who have already

racial achievement gap can your program/school/ district influence?

What root causes of the

What have been the propellants?

How are you gathering feedback from diverse populations about what is working for their students and what isn't? What are the stakeholders who represent the minorities in your community advising? What are the stakeholders who represent the minorities in your community advising?

How is your program/ school/district progressing in meeting the benchmarks for equity that you have set? What have been the roadblocks?

Continuing the Conversation about Digital Learning

Fidelity is a word that comes up often in conversation with Mertes about the context and substance of the successful collaborative work among the Wisconsin DPI, WDLC, and local districts. Mertes defines fidelity (for this discussion) as trust, being good stewards of public money, working strategically with districts to plan and implement programs, listening to students' needs at all times, and providing a support structure for school districts. The WDLC has built a level of trust across the state, in part because the level of cost-effective support and resources offered to the district, school, and educators is all-encompassing.

The WDLC works hard to honor local autonomy, elevate collaboration, commit to continuous quality improvement, and provide varying pathways allowing districts choice. Consequently, districts are eager to collaborate as partners in one of two ways. First, to engage in the collaborative commit to quality efforts. The WDLC is committed to bringing professional learning and networking opportunities, along with the happenings of the field, to all districts in Wisconsin. Second is the ability to team up with one of the WDLC partners. Districts may choose to work with Wisconsin Virtual School as the Wisconsin State Supplemental provider. Or districts may choose to work directly with the Wisconsin eSchool Network (or one of its partners) to take on more local control and scale to build a program specific to the district's vision and objectives. In all cases, working together offers educators the best opportunity to commit to quality practices and provide learning experiences to meet the needs of local students. As part of the collective effort, state funds are used to drive down costs on behalf of all districts in Wisconsin as part of the WDLC, an effort made available by the Wisconsin DPI, which ensures a high-quality, transparent, fair, and equitable situation marked by fidelity as described above.

Additionally, the state supports districts in understanding the level of management and accountability that resides at the local level to support students in these new learning environments, which includes teacher training, mentor preparation, and other educator support structures. These trainings and structures of support are offered to districts without charge because the state sees these efforts positively affecting the design of learning to address teacher and school needs. The focus on quality and fidelity leads to districts and staff keeping up with market trends, understanding new ways to engage students, incorporating the latest in course design ideas, as well as providing the the best structures for student support.

The need for fidelity and transparency is not confined to leadership but is also discussed across programs in the WDLC. As with all discussions of this type, these critical conversations lead to opportunities for improvement. The focus is always on how the programs can provide high-quality offerings and services for the students they serve.

A Common Language and Standards

As digital learning continues to grow, there is a constant need for the WDLC partners to reflect on what is working and what calls for improvement. One of the strategies that has been pivotal to their effectiveness is aligning the language they use specific to WDLC program initiatives and interventions to contribute most effectively and efficiently to development of a common language among partners and to support the strategic planning occurring at the districts they work with. The common language is shared with the Wisconsin DPI also because they, too, as mentioned above, are part of the WDLC.

No matter which stakeholders they are working with, the WDLC's main focus is on meeting their needs, and the districts appreciate the individualized implementation support. More than just service providers, WDLC members act as strategic partners working through new logistics with and for schools learning to operate in new ways. This includes developing a familiarity and comfort with new language, strategies, resources, and of course, technology as they change the culture of the traditional face-to-face classroom with the addition of online and blended learning options. As part of the WDLC we are committed to a number of resources that continue lead in the national landscape that can be found at www.wiwdlc.org. Additionally, there are a number of resources listed below, including the National Standards for Quality Online Courses, Teaching, and Programs, as well as a WDLC guide dedicated to *Reflecting for continuous Improvement: Planning for Quality 2.0.* And for those who are new to the field, there is also the definitions project, which was spearheaded by the Virtual Learning Leadership Alliance.

National Standards for Quality Online Teaching

National Standards for Quality Online Programs

National Standards for Quality Online Courses ** To be published in 2019.

Wisconsin Digital Learning Collaborative and the Digital Learning Collaborative. (2019). Reflecting for continuous improvement: Planning for quality 2.0. Retrieved from https://www.wiwdlc.org/case-studies.

Virtual Learning Leadership Alliance's Online learning key terms and definitions

Another Strategy: Continuously Engage in Critical Conversations

To support and encourage this cultural shift, the WDLC fosters, promotes, and continuously engages in critical conversations about digital learning to encourage districts to reimagine their strategies and solutions and think creatively about how to meet the needs of their students more meaningfully and completely. For WDLC, the outcomes of their efforts encompass the initiatives and interventions described in this report, as well as staying current with trends, keeping the students at the center of decisions, and, most importantly, remaining focused on providing equitable access to learning opportunities for all students. The initiatives and interventions mentioned here can easily be combined in such a way to inform and help mitigate the common issues and challenges that districts and educators face in today's exciting and evolving educational environments. The WDLC's <u>Reflecting for Continuous</u> Improvement: Planning for Quality 2.0 guide mentioned above is another great place to start.

CRITICAL CONVERSATION

Planning

In Wisconsin, the third-party providers cannot be owned by entities or businesses; instead, these providers have to be attached to a school district. The WDLC offers a free service, district-level, high-quality planning review to understand whether the level of readiness for that district is for a pilot or full implementation or something in between. Special care is taken during this process to understand what is needed, including staffing support, student support systems, and financial structuring. Many critical conversations are sparked as a natural part of these planning reviews.

CRITICAL CONVERSATION *Motivations*

Another critical conversation must take place during the planning review. Mertes stresses that districts need to know their motivation for offering online options and their level of commitment from year one to year three. Districts' motivations, as described in their goals, are very different — from recapturing students that are leaving due to open enrollment, individualized student needs, a desire to accelerate their learning, traveling athletes, remediation, bullying, other trauma, illness, and homeschooling. This whole spectrum of individual needs is handled in a very caring and respectful way for districts, and they know that the WDLC partners will take those needs into consideration and help a district with that individual care plan for a student and parent or guardian.

Critical conversations also revolve around the WDLC's four cornerstones: policy, research, funding, and practice. Each of the partners creates a yearly summary report that focuses on what their program structure looks like, what it means for their state partners, and how they are meeting their stakeholders' needs. Despite the resource support and the fidelity guidelines that are in place, sometimes districts learn by mistake. Sometimes they are asking the wrong questions, choosing programs that will not meet their specific needs, lacking offerings and/or support services for students, or offering courses and/or support structures that are not working for their students. This leads to more critical, problem-solving conversations.

CRITICAL CONVERSATION *Motivations, Research*

Understanding why students are leaving a district, whether it is because their district or school lacks the resources, the family desires a home-based religion curriculum, or the family is dissatisfied with support services, etc., is difficult but important for districts to investigate. Ongoing, transparent critical conversations are the means to coming to a shared understanding about what motivates their potential students to go elsewhere so that districts and schools can make more informed decisions to meet the needs of their population.

Because the WDLC is a nonprofit based in a CESA, districts have further reason to be comfortable with and trust the WDLC: it is a place where programs and districts can receive the tried and true support they need from colleagues as they tackle evolving initiatives and interventions, as well as the everyday demands of blended and online options. Management from state level support systems contributes further to the high-quality programs, exhibiting the fidelity of the best practices WDLC promotes and conducts. Wisconsin sets a different standard with a centralized provider whose focus is on Wisconsin and its students, and who understands, for example, the driving needs of state and local priorities like equity and student support services; WDLC encourages and sustains a good faith effort by local providers who talk about fidelity, trust, and contextualized, high-quality avenues for schools to pursue in the development and identification of successful online strategies and practices. Critical conversations in this context yield even more trust and program/school/district-driven solutions.

Another key challenge surrounding digital learning is helping students understand what is necessary for them to be most successful in a new learning environment while having a clear understanding about how educators can mentor and support those students, especially if either is new to online learning. As mentioned previously, critical conversation around the issue of why a student is not being successful in a program reflects commitment to transparency — and equity. When thinking about equity, the ideas of voice, choice, and place emerge, not only for students but also for their parents.

CRITICAL CONVERSATION *Goals, Capacity*

Mertes explains that options are sometimes summarized as belonging to three categories: voice, choice, and place. Stakeholder voices include parents and students, and the WDLC sets an example for how stakeholders can engage with partners in information gathering and problem-solving that can be used by districts and schools. Among the motivating factors for a school or district to begin offering online options are interest in remediation, accelerated learning, personalization, competency-based materials, homeschooling, athletics, year-round learning, and flexible scheduling. Parents and students want to know what their options are, but districts have to investigate not only what their stakeholders want but also what is possible for them to take on successfully. They need to decide what it is they need in order to do what they want to do.

As digital learning has grown across the state, WDLC has expanded the definition of digital from online only to include blended, personalized, and highly digitally-enabled learning, with a focus on professional learning. The guidelines are written into the State Superintendent Digital Learning Plan and implemented by the state's strategic partners within the WDLC. There's a necessity to provide students with learning opportunities that are equitable, personalized, and engaging. The standard for the WDLC partners is to engage in high-quality, experienced planning and to provide assistance throughout — including targeted teacher training and informed resource selection.

Across Wisconsin, interest in online learning covers the spectrum from student opportunity to district motivation to recouping student dollars for open enrollment out of the district. The meaning of blended learning is evolving, also, and the use of online and blended options in summer school classes has increased due to a reimbursement opportunity for secondary courses. Additionally, partners are seeing that the strategic use of online learning has contributed to an increase in helping to mitigate teacher shortage and limited course catalog issues. Many districts are trying to think strategically about how they can sustain themselves when faced with these issues. Critical conversations provide the means of working through the challenges and solutions together.

More Critical Conversations Aligned with the Foundation of Initiatives and Interventions

Critical conversations by their nature are explorations of known and unknown territory. They reveal an endless variety of challenges, practices, and ideas and uncover biases, misunderstandings, and misconceptions. They can be confined to a very specific topic or encompass a broad subject. The following critical conversations are pertinent to the five initiatives and interventions described in this report.

CRITICAL CONVERSATION Data, Funding	In Wisconsin, virtual learning programs are held by districts, and that puts the responsibility for the data back on the districts. Mertes says, "If you're going to do this, you're responsible for the data. A decision to take students through open enrollment may be successful for some situations and individuals, but are not as likely to lead to success under other circumstances. While districts may benefit economically, they may not see the impact of the academic data."
CRITICAL	
CRITICAL CONVERSATION <i>Teacher</i> preparation & support	For teachers and students, online and blended teaching and learning are a different type of interaction and a different level of technical responsibility. Consider what it means to learn online, what it looks like. Mentoring students is a new role, as is working through the range of technology issues presented by online and blended learning. Blended offers a foundation of innovation for teachers; it is a great opportunity to learn online teaching skills and still have the safety net of seeing those students face-to-face.
	Monitoring students, adjusting assignments, record keeping — all of those classroom responsibilities take on a different shape because how you interact with whole groups of students is different from communicating with students separately.

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