XXXXXX Elementary School

CAIU Regional Blended Learning Grant:
Planning Grant Application
March 11, 2016
Section I – Description

XXXXXX Elementary is part of a progressive, rural school district of 2,608 students. Our K-5 school is comprised of 408 students, which demographically includes 38% Economically Disadvantaged, 23% Special Education, and 6% minority students. There are 39 professional staff, consisting of 3 teachers per grade level, 6 special area teachers, 3 interventionists, 10 special education teachers, and a school counselor. Additionally, an instructional coach and educational technologist provide ongoing support for instruction and technology integration. Our PSSA proficiency levels were 63% in Math, 67% in English Language Arts, and 89% in Science. Although we experienced a decline in proficiency from previous years due to the new PA Core aligned test, our ranking among elementary schools in Pennsylvania rose dramatically (www.schooldigger.com, 2016).

With our economically disadvantaged population increasing, a gap in access to digital resources has been created and is growing. Nonetheless, our teachers are committed to providing optimal learning experiences for our students, inclusive of the 21st century learning skills needed to thrive in an ever-changing global society. Such learning experiences require opportunities for critical thinking, communication, creativity, and collaboration, both inside and outside classroom walls. Digital learning enhances these opportunities, while providing a platform for personalized learning. Our District is dedicated to innovative instructional practices, as we believe we have a moral imperative to ensure that students have equitable access to learn the skills necessary to engage in this technologically-driven culture and can do so in a safe learning space.

While our educational community recognizes the need to support these skills, data collected during a BrightBytes survey indicates that there is work to do in relation to developing teachers’ skillsets in digital learning and 21st century skills. BrightBytes data indicate both teachers and students have strong foundational technology skills, however weaknesses emerge in higher level technology skills such as use of multimedia and online tools. Additionally, teachers and students report minimal use of the 4Cs
(collaboration, critical thinking, communication, and creativity) in the classroom, which directly correlate with the technology-driven culture described previously.

Section II – Academic Model

Over the last five years, significant focus has been placed on redefining the academic model to encompass a multi-tiered system of support, including modifications to delivery of core instruction and research-based interventions. Facilitated by a balance of formative assessment and quality student engagement, the academic model for core instruction is based on the station rotation model. It capitalizes on modeling of grade level standards through whole group, differentiated small group instruction unique to individual learner needs, and personalized center-based instruction. To date, direct parallels have not been made between our academic model and the term “blended” learning, but the reality is that key elements of blended learning and station rotation are emerging. Most notably, personalized learning systems (i.e. Odyssey, Lexia, and Waggle), as well as significant usage of free applications identified through grade level collaboration are evident in daily practice.

Assessment and data analysis are critical components of our academic model. The Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) assessments are administered to students three times per year. These data sets not only inform staff regarding student growth and achievement, but also drive instructional grouping and planning. To help facilitate the analysis of this data, the District has embedded four scheduled student delays for staff to collaborate and analyze assessment data to drive student learning. Blended learning will enhance this by providing immediate and dynamic feedback for personalized learning. In total, this has created a culture of data informed instructional planning and delivery.

A final and significant component of our academic model is the structure of What I Need (WIN) time within the school day, targeted at both remediation and enrichment. During this 30 minute block, teachers leverage digital content for learning activities including academic interventions (i.e. Read Live,
Sumdog), literature circles (Voicethread, Newsela), problem based learning (i.e. BIE, EdLeader21), and additional practice on critical content through tools and practice-based applications (i.e. Odyssey, XtraMath, Lexia, Splash Math, ABCya). Moving forward, we anticipate teachers expanding this concept to personalize core instructional blocks.

The funding from the planning grant would support our staff with reflectively evaluating the current academic model, engaging in valuable professional learning around blended learning, collaboratively planning for revisions and enhancements, and integrating blended learning into the research-based instructional model that has been established. Planning grant funds would be targeted to observe exemplary classrooms with personalized instructional blocks utilizing learning pathways, learner profiles, and flexible learning environments. The ultimate goal would be expansion of our current station rotation model, while building teacher capacity to measure student learning at the micro level as a means of driving real time, data driven instruction. This interplay between assessment, data analysis, planning, and instructional delivery is one that, if adequately supported, can create tremendous potential for staff and student-centered learning.

In addition, this funding would allow for exploration and better definition of enhanced opportunities for accelerated learning through personalized pathways and digital citizenship in preparation for the 1:1 environment already in place at the secondary level. As a district that values high expectations, the blend of the skills and experiences provided will empower students to be in control of their learning.

Section III – Readiness

Led by a forward-thinking principal and instructional coach, a building culture of high expectations has been established that fully embraces professional learning, sharing of key instructional practices, and ongoing action research. Additionally, we have spent time in professional learning
communities (PLCs), faculty meetings, grade-level planning meetings, and other time exploring the use of technology for learning. This has included reading professional literature, exploring digital tools for learning, reflecting on implementation, and applauding successes. This exposure and commitment to creating technology-rich learning environments has primed our staff for the implementation of a blended learning environment.

As we move forward with creating this technology-rich environment to support digital learning, we continue to add resources to teachers’ instructional arsenal. This includes providing a Chromebook cart for each grade level in grades 3 – 5, with a plan to expand its elementary Chromebook implementation to a one-to-one (1:1) environment in these grade levels within the coming year.

In recent years, through distributed teacher leadership and professional learning communities, we have established technology integration as a building goal. In addition, with a third of the building population being economically disadvantaged, teachers see first-hand the impacts of poverty and digital access on learning. Significant time has been spent through teacher-driven professional learning communities researching, learning, and applying strategies around poverty and digital learning to support instruction. This professional learning structure has become an integral component of our learning culture, which would serve as a valuable tool for implementation of blended learning.

Section IV – Collaboration

The successful acquisition of this planning grant will allow our building leaders and district stakeholders to further develop and solidify our vision of blended learning by witnessing first hand schools from across the region and country delivering this type of instruction. The conclusion of this initial phase would lead the team of district stakeholders to enacting our action plan and implementing our vision. As our model becomes entrenched in the building’s culture, we would look to become a model school in blended learning throughout the district by delivering updates to the local school board.
and delivering professional development to staff throughout the district. Ultimately we would not only want to become a model for other schools within our district, but schools within our region and beyond.

Part of the strategic plan for implementation of blended learning would include recording our experiences and professional learning journey within Eduplanet. We envision this to be much more than a blog, but more of reflective inquiry for our leadership team that could support others in mentally framing an initiative like this in their schools. As a result, our team would be willing to work with the IU, partnering with them to share our model, the road to implementing our vision and helping other districts within the IU to create a model that works for their district. With our proximity in South Central Pennsylvania, our school is in an ideal location to be used as a showcase for districts and universities across the state allowing our visitors to solidify their vision and thus begin to implement their own model. Beyond our geographical proximity to other districts, our district shares in common challenges as many others including increasing poverty, decreasing funding, and greater demand for results. These common challenges, coupled with success in blended learning, can make our district a desirable partner for other districts with future plans for blended learning. Lastly, along with our participation in conferences at the IU and having an open door to others schools, we would be willing to attend and present at local and national conferences such as PETE & C and ISTE. We plan to utilize blended learning as the platform for deeper networking with local, regional, and national learning communities.

Section V – Other

As economic disparity increases within our district, the digital divide has created an opportunity gap for students due to limited device and wireless access. As outlined previously, our district is actively addressing a potential lack of devices for students through our 1:1 initiative. We are also exploring options for expanding wireless access into the community and on busses. The goal is to bridge this divide by ensuring access for all students, regardless of economic status.
The District is committed to providing professional development support to teachers in blended learning and will encourage teachers to share their professional learning with others. Over the last several years, the district has actively structured technology based professional learning as a critical component of the collective bargaining unit. Examples of this include flexible technology hours, specific technology trainings outside of the school day, and nine strategically scheduled professional development days throughout the school year, which serves to sustain momentum with our initiatives. In addition, face-to-face professional learning opportunities have been supplemented with self-paced online modules (i.e. Eduplanet) that can be done anytime, anywhere, as well as synchronous online offerings. These efforts will result in multi-modal professional learning experiences that create personalized learning pathways for staff, creating the learning environment we envision for students.

In terms of technology support, the District has recently contracted with a managed technology services vendor. The purpose of contracting with this vendor was not cost savings, but was in providing additional support for students and staff to leverage technology for learning. Additional supports include enhanced infrastructure development, efficiency, and maintenance, lesson planning with technology in mind, and in-classroom, job-embedded technology integration support. Considering the professional capacity of this organization, they will serve as an invaluable support to our vision.

Finally, the District is very fortunate to have the support of an active alumni organization. This group is committed to supporting classroom instruction through individual teacher grants. Often this money is used to support digital learning through the purchase of software (ex: Camtasia for flipped learning), devices (iPads), or subscription services (Quia). The annual total for classroom grants given by this organization ranges from $10,000 to $15,000, reaching nearly 50 classrooms per year, thus providing tremendous support for enhancements to blended learning.
### Section VI – Core Planning Team

The core planning team for this blended learning grant is balanced with multiple perspectives within the educational process. The planning team members are outlined in Table 1.

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<tr>
<th>Team Member Title</th>
<th>Characteristics to Support Blended Learning Initiative</th>
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| Principal         | • Balances support and accountability for utilizing technology for learning  
                   • Forward-focused leadership to leverage teacher strengths and maximize staff capacity  
                   • Strategic thinker with sound vision planning process  
                   • Empowers teacher leadership through collaboration and trust |
| Instructional Coach | • Effectively established collaborative relationships with staff  
                     • Highly proficient with technology  
                     • Highly proficient with the Before / During / After (BDA) model of coaching and has led significant instructional technology focused PLC’s. |
| Special Education Teacher / Elementary Special Education Chairperson | • Skilled with utilizing assessment to drive instruction  
                                                                          • Has a clear understanding of grade level expectations and curriculum requirements  
                                                                          • Expert with individualizing educational plans for students |
| Fifth Grade Teacher / Grade Level Coordinator | • Collaborative grade level leader  
                                                      • Openness to engaging in professional inquiry  
                                                      • Clear organization provides great opportunities for action research |
| Fourth Grade Teacher | • Highly proficient with technology  
                          • Utilizes technology to support independent and collaborative learning in her classroom  
                          • Self-directed pilots for digital resources (i.e. webquests, flipped classroom)  
                          • Led district-wide instructional technology sessions |
| Fourth Grade Teacher / Grade Level Coordinator | • Demonstrated success as a teacher leader  
                                                            • Strategically engages students to high levels of achievement  
                                                            • Always passionate and energetic for teacher and student learning  
                                                            • Led district-wide instructional technology sessions |
| Director of Educational Technology | • Vision minded with practical strategies to employ  
                                               • Committed to the betterment of every student  
                                               • Google certified educator  
                                               • Guided the implementation of secondary 1:1  
                                               • Graduate level instructor of emerging technology trends |
| Director of Curriculum and Instruction | • Strategic thinker  
                                               • Clear understanding of benchmarking for success  
                                               • Experienced with blended learning delivery of higher education  
                                               • Leader of district-wide flexible and personalized professional development |
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<th>Assistant Superintendent</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Visionary leader with an &quot;all-in&quot; mindset</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Strategic planner</td>
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<td>3. Experienced in deploying district resources to support strategic planning</td>
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<td>4. Served the district in a supervisory role of technology and values technology as a learning tool</td>
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<td>School Board Member</td>
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<td>---------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Instructional background - Science teacher</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Values technology</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Experienced practitioner of utilizing digital tools for learning</td>
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<td>4. Member of the managed services selection committee for the district</td>
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<td>Business Manager</td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Committed to instructional technology</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Strategically budgets to help district realize success with the strategic plan</td>
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<td>3. Prioritizes digital learning and infrastructure for the capital plan budgeting process</td>
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<td>4. Engages with grant processes to ensure coordination between funding streams</td>
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*Table 1 - Core Planning Team*

The building principal has strategically led the school to marked levels of achievement over the last six years. During her tenure, she has effectively united a team of committed professionals around a vision that fully embraces the philosophy that every student can and will learn. Her experiences both administratively and as a classroom teacher enable her to effectively lead this blended learning initiative as she has a demonstrated command of change theory and a strong understanding of effective instructional practices.

The instructional coach is completing his third year in the building. He tirelessly works to support teachers through his collaborative efforts around professional learning and strategic selection of resources to support instruction. His high levels of proficiency as an instructional coach have been realized through his experiences as a classroom teacher at the upper elementary level and his formal training as an instructional coach and elementary principal. Beyond his formal training and experiences, his approach is such that teachers welcome his input and involvement in their instructional planning. He subscribes to the coaching model of Before / During / After (BDA), which has led to quality pre-planning, co-teaching, and professional dialog after lessons. Again, this structure of coaching, along with the
staff’s positive experiences with instructional coaching, makes him a prime candidate for future instructional coaching around leveraging technology for learning.

The aforementioned team of teacher leaders has substantial interest and motivation in technology integration and personalized learning. This is clearly apparent as they often self-select instructional technology as their focus for their differentiated supervision plans. Their open engagement in professional learning communities resulted in a pilot of blended learning. Following their collective reflection and modifications of this piloted model, the teachers engaged in leadership through training of building staff and district staff. As model teachers, this group of professionals goes above and beyond as they routinely engage in self-directed professional inquiry, often serving as the forerunners for both the building and district. This speaks to their commitment and passion to their own professional growth and high expectations for learning. This team is already invested in this strategic planning process, as they recently attended the Mid Atlantic Conference on Personalized Learning. Ideas gathered from that conference, coupled with their inherent interest in blended learning, have led to many of the details of this grant application.

The remaining core team members fully support the philosophy of utilizing technology as a tool for learning. Demonstration of the commitment to this philosophy is evidenced through the District’s financial allocations to technology. Beyond the dedicated financial commitment to infrastructure over the last few years at ______, the Board of School Directors has also committed significant resources to devices. This technology-focused vision includes a commitment of about one device per every three students at the elementary level and 1:1 at the secondary level. District office staff help to cement this financial commitment through strategic planning for technology.
## Section VII – Spending Plan

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<tr>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
<th>ATTENDEES</th>
<th>EXPENSE</th>
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| Pennsylvania Excellence in eLearning Forum (PAEEF) – April 6-8  
  • Travel costs will be covered by the District and conference costs are covered by CAIU | Director of Educational Technology | $0 |
| CAIU School Visits (PA, NJ) - TBD  
  • Assuming two days and one night  
  • Hotel = 4 rooms at $150 / night ($600)  
  • Substitute costs = 2 days x 4 teachers x $100 / day ($800) | Building Team (6) | $1400 ($350 from grant) |
| School Visit – Detroit, MI - September  
  • Assuming three days and three nights  
  • Hotel = 4 rooms at $150 / night ($1800)  
  • Flight = $500 / person x 6 people ($3000)  
  • Meals = $25 / day x 6 people x 3 days ($450)  
  • Substitute costs = 3 days x 4 teachers x $100 / day ($1200) | Building Team (6) | $6450 |
| iNACOL Blended Learning Symposium - October  
  • Assuming four days and four nights  
  • Hotel = 4 rooms at $150 / night ($2400)  
  • Flight = $500 / person x 6 people ($3000)  
  • Meals = $25 / day x 6 people x 4 days ($600)  
  • Registration = $850 / person x 6 people ($5100)  
  • Substitute costs = 4 days x 4 teachers x $100 / day ($1600) | Building Team (6) | $12700 |
| Pilot Devices – Lenovo Yoga - July  
  • Set of 6 x $700/device ($4200) | N/A | $4200 ($2000 from grant) |
| Book Study - April  
  • *Blended: Using Disruptive Innovation to Improve Schools*  
  • $25 / book x 20 books | N/A | $500 |
| Strategic Planning for Implementation / Implementation Grant Development – April through November | Building Team (6) | $2400 ($0 from grant) |
| **TOTAL** | | **$27650** |

### Spending Plan Rationale

The spending plan was developed to help build capacity within the core leadership team, but also to facilitate the development of a critical mass of supporters for blended learning. While significant savings may have been realized by sending a smaller team to the site visits or iNACOL conference, benefits realized by engaging the full team far exceed the costs. The district has realized these benefits early as it assumed the cost of sending this leadership team to the Mid Atlantic Conference on
Personalized Learning. The collaborative spirit that was developed around blended learning again, was well worth the expense.

Attendance at the iNACOL conference will help engage and excite the team about blended learning and leveraging technology for personalized learning. To complement this professional learning, the east coast and Detroit, MI school site visits will give the team an opportunity to view blended learning first hand. Through previous experiences development other systems (MTSS, problem based learning, etc.) the District realizes the value of first hand observation of desired initiatives. In addition to this formal learning, the book Blended: Using Disruptive Innovation to Improve Schools was selected for team study. This specific title was selected given its structure on helping the reader to understand blended learning, creating common vocabulary for team dialog, and then outlining strategies for implementation of blended learning school wide. Devices were selected to pilot in the teachers’ classrooms that are part of this leadership team. While the teachers have access to other devices, learning from Mid Atlantic Conference on Personalized Learning helped the leadership team to value the capabilities of the aforementioned device, given its versatility and touch screen capabilities.

In an effort to cement all of this professional learning, six days have been established for the leadership team to craft the vision for the school, to include blended learning. This strategic planning will not only result in an implementation grant application for blended learning, but the same document will serve as the strategic plan for learning at this school. As is the case with attendance at other conferences and implementation of other initiatives, committing actions and ideas to a document can yield better action and results.

Finally, please note that the targeted budget was overextended by $7650. This additional expense will be funded by the school district. While this will only serve as part of the district’s commitment, it should serve as a testament to the value that is being placed in this initiative.
Assurances
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