



JANUS

# Innovating for Excellence:

HOW DENVER PUBLIC SCHOOLS  
AND JANUS ARE TRANSFORMING  
EDUCATION IN DENVER



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# Introduction

The vision of Denver Public Schools is clear: Every Child Succeeds. Every student will graduate prepared for college and career. As DPS confronts the urgent need to aggressively accelerate achievement for all students, it recognizes the importance of embracing innovation in pursuit of a new vision for what public schools can and should be in the 21st century. Indeed, DPS believes that innovation is one critical element to realize its vision.

While DPS does not believe in “silver bullets” that will propel every student to success, we do believe that one innovation – technology-enabled, data-driven, personalized learning – holds tremendous potential to drive dramatic gains in student learning. We have seen the difference technology can make in many other sectors of our economy. And recent advances in personalized-learning software have great potential for targeting instruction for each student, increasing learning opportunities, and extending learning time. Technology will never replace teachers; it will only help make them better.

Our challenge is to pilot some of these new blended classroom and instructional models, see what works best, and see how some of these new learning software approaches integrate best into our schools. Using technology to accelerate and deepen learning is complex, requires careful planning and implementation, and necessitates tight and coordinated collaboration across many stakeholder communities, each contributing their unique perspectives and expertise. With Janus as a committed, long-term partner, I look forward to exploring the issues we face as we help advance learning for all students.

## **TOM BOASBERG**

Superintendent, Denver Public Schools

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The Denver Public Schools Foundation is honored to partner with our district and the community to give all children in Denver the education they deserve. By working together we make our community a better place to live, today and long into the future. As DPS identifies strategic and innovative initiatives such as blended learning that will help every child succeed in DPS, the DPS Foundation works to ensure that DPS has the resources to drive these strategic efforts forward. Community partners, who not only support our district financially but also step up by encouraging employee engagement with our schools and students through our School Partners Program, are critical to help accelerate positive outcomes for children in Denver.

In order to truly transform outcomes for children, we must provide the space for new ideas to be tested, proven and scaled. Private support, like the incredibly generous support received from Janus, enables DPS to identify, incubate, evaluate and ultimately replicate the highest-performing and most exciting strategies to help children achieve their full potential. The DPS Foundation is uniquely poised to leverage private resources



from businesses, foundations and individuals alike to create exponential impact for DPS' 88,000 students and our community as a whole. These public-private partnerships help us create a better Denver, ensure every child succeeds, and change the way we are educating our kids. With Janus's help we are creating positive, sustainable change in our schools and significantly impacting the successful outcome of our next generation of citizens and leaders here in Denver, the U.S. and worldwide.

### **KRISTIN COLON**

President & CEO, Denver Public Schools Foundation

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At Janus, we invest in companies all over the globe and a common theme we see among the most competitive and successful enterprises is great talent. It's our belief that great education produces great talent, which, in turn, produces successful companies and competitive economies. When we think about how our company should engage in the community, it's natural for us to turn to the local school system as we, and other businesses, have a vested interest in advancing public education.

Our partnership with Denver Public Schools is centered around ways in which the district can pilot and implement innovative programs to improve teacher effectiveness, student proficiency scores, and student engagement. For example, in 2008, Janus partnered with DPS to create the Denver Teacher Residency (DTR) – a program designed to advance the acquisition and retention of quality teachers because they are the heartbeat of student achievement. The DTR proved to be a success across the board by increasing teacher diversity, retention and student outcomes, and is now a self-sustaining program after just five years. The natural progression of our partnership with DPS is to now turn our attention from teacher to technology, and find ways to put tools like blended learning in the hands of quality teachers, tools that will continue to advance learning innovations and cost efficiencies that can truly accelerate closing the achievement gap in America. Blended learning is not meant to replace teachers, but rather provide teachers access to better technology so they can assess students' skills and improve outcomes.

In our business the only way to be successful is through an educated workforce. An educated workforce is the key to economic success, and Janus is committed to working closely with DPS now and in the future to continually seek innovative solutions to achieve DPS' view that every student succeeds and will graduate prepared for college and career.

### **RICHARD WEIL**

Chief Executive Office, Janus Capital Group

## Pioneering a Blended Learning Solution

In the summer of 2012 Denver Public Schools, the Denver Public Schools Foundation, and the Janus Foundation, funded by Denver-based Janus Capital Group partnered to launch the Janus Blended Learning Grant program. Driven by a shared goal to further innovation in education, the three organizations set out to radically improve students' learning outcomes through a three-year, multi-million dollar grant to develop a district-wide blended learning implementation. This unique collaboration reflects Janus' commitment to supporting education reform and DPS' commitment to modeling innovation while improving educational outcomes, especially for at-risk students. Much has been learned during the first year of the program; this white paper will present an overview of those lessons as well as program progress.

The goals of this collaboration include creating a replicable and sustainable model for introducing blended learning into DPS classrooms; improving learning outcomes for participating students through individualized learning opportunities; freeing up teachers to work one-on-one with students at the point of need or opportunity; and furthering the DPS reputation for education innovation.

The blended learning instructional model as implemented by a select group of pilot schools and the DPS blended learning team incorporates direct instruction, computer-based instructions, and self-study on a rotational basis. Blending these three components allows teachers to personalize the learning experience while students delve deeper into more individualized content knowledge and skills development. An approach that provides teachers extended time with a smaller

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number of students and incorporates technology into daily instruction, the main driver of success for blended learning will be that it offers a differentiated learning experience for every student.

Essentially, blended learning combines the best of teacher-delivered instruction with the proven advantages of online or computer-based self-directed, self-paced learning. Those advantages include:

- ▶ the ability to tailor lessons directly to the requirements of individual students;
- ▶ the ability to provide an interactive, self-paced learning progression geared to each student's lesson proficiency; and
- ▶ the ability to scale the impact of each teacher well beyond his or her individual reach (especially important in a time of growing diversity of student need).



## Project Background

Strong collaboration has been a critical hallmark of the relationship between Janus, the DPS Foundation, and the district. The Janus Foundation President Casey Cortese recalled how Janus initially reached out to DPS by asking them what would make a difference, what their highest priorities as a district were, and where they thought a good corporate partnership could support some of the DPS initiatives. That conversation resulted in a three-year grant in 2008 to establish the Denver Teacher Residency program to help recruit and retain outstanding teachers to DPS, as well as to support other teacher effectiveness strategies.

With a similar focus on education reform and improving education opportunities for at-risk children, the Blended Learning Initiative also developed out of conversations and collaboration among key stakeholders, including DPS leadership, the DPS Foundation, education leaders throughout the country, and business leaders.

The result, according to Janus' Cortese, was that "when we did some research on what blended learning was and what the opportunity set seemed to be, we knew right away that it would align with our values as a firm. We also felt like it had the greatest opportunity to make a big impact on kids in Denver while allowing us to not just act locally but influence nationally."

As a consequence of those explorations, The Janus Foundation committed funds over the course of three years to introduce blended learning into a variety of classrooms in the district, to study and evaluate successes and opportunities, and ultimately to create a scalable model that will allow any school throughout the district to have the tools and support needed to implement blended learning effectively in the classroom.

The first and most essential piece of the grant work was to identify and hire a professional learning team whose expertise is critical to the success of the program. Providing the grant program's leadership, the blended learning team is responsible for setting strategy, creating professional development courses for teachers, managing the change management process for schools, collaborating with school leadership on blended learning implementation, and providing ongoing coaching, advice, and support throughout the initiative. Ultimately, the blended learning team drives the integration of blended learning and personalized learning throughout the district.

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The 2012-2013 school year served as a foundation year, during which blended learning was introduced into classrooms at two Janus Blended Learning Lab Sites: West Generation Academy (WGA) at the beginning of the year, and Grant Beacon Middle School (GBMS) a bit later in the year. This first year focused on establishing and identifying the necessary school infrastructure, including technology resources and integration, school leader and teacher readiness, and new instructional practices. Beginning in May 2012, teachers received training in blended learning instruction, including intensive online training over the summer for WGA teachers through a "Summer Institute" that enabled them to both develop expertise and experience in online learning, and additional training in August and September prior to the start of the school year. The training continued once the school year began with the DPS blended learning team providing both on-site and online professional development and 1:1 coaching, as well as best-practice forums to support ongoing improvement of implementation and student outcomes.

This professional development approach was part of a three-step process that involved 1) school visioning and goal setting; 2) individual practitioner visioning and goal setting (aligned to school vision and goals); and 3) creation of individualized professional development and coaching plans aligned to goals. Once teachers had established goals and had plans in place to help them reach those goals, DPS made available the appropriate resources to meet their needs. This included, but was not limited to, professional development for blended learning through education technologies, peer-to-peer coaching and practice management, and blended learning coaching. Some teachers also attended seminars, webinars, workshops, massive online open courses (MOOCs), and conferences; in addition, they received information from professional learning networks online depending on their needs.

Based on each teacher's goals, DPS also created Professional Learning Communities where teachers could learn together, share what they were learning, and collaboratively solve



The traditional teaching instruction model has been enhanced with a variety of cutting-edge technology tools

problems. One of the most important lessons regarding professional development was (and continues to be) that each school's circumstances are different, and consequently each school needs different types and amount of support.

Specifically, in terms of on-boarding the lab site schools, the DPS blended learning team 1) considered the school's lab site application; 2) measured the level of readiness both among the teachers and the school's leadership; and 3) did a needs assessment, looking at what the school's particular learning needs were going to be. Then the team embedded itself into the school so that they were on-site and available on a regular schedule.

Since March 2013, a blended learning instructional coach has provided teachers with ongoing in-depth training to fine tune their practice and prepare for the second year of the initiative. All teachers completed at least two full coaching cycles (Pre-Observation, Conversation, Observation, and Debrief) by the end of the year. The instructional coach also worked closely with an instructional lead identified at the school, to build capacity through a "train the trainer" gradual release model.

## The Pilot Schools

The two schools chosen as Janus Lab Sites to pilot the Blended Learning Initiative provided an excellent test basis for the effectiveness of blended learning, especially for at-risk students: West Generation Academy and Beacon Grant Middle School.

West Generation Academy was selected as the first Janus Blended Learning Lab Site for several reasons. WGA was opening as a new school in 2012-2013, and strong leadership, a young and motivated teaching corps, and the support of an innovative time design from its operations partner, Generation Schools Network (GSN), presented a compelling opportunity for blended learning in DPS.

Already in an innovative operations structure, WGA was led by Principal Bob Villareal and partnered with nonprofit GSN for curriculum, operational, and professional development support.

The WGA implementation was unique in both technology and curriculum. Classrooms were configured with thin client computing (main frame machines with student stations), and students received foundational blocks, were assigned advisory periods, and rotated by grades with career intensives, which took students

into various industry experiences. Teachers used both reading and math adaptive curriculum to supplement student learning, coupled with direct, small-group, and whole-group instruction, largely based on the rotational blended learning model.

Grant Beacon Middle School, where the Blended Learning Grant program started after the 2012-2013 school year began, was in the midst of totally rethinking its approach to educating its students. Principal Alex Magaña recalled that “we are a very diverse school and we weren’t meeting the growth percentiles or making the gains that we wanted to make, so the school had been undergoing a ‘redesign’ process. We were exploring the possibilities of blended learning when the Janus Blended Learning Grant Program became available.” During the 2012-2013 pilot year at GBMS, blended learning was emphasized in reading and math classrooms, although instructors from additional subject areas began to integrate blended learning as the year progressed (and word about the program got out).

## Innovating For Impact

The success of any innovative undertaking needs commitment from all stakeholders. In the case of the Blended Learning Program, this commitment included not only the DPS Foundation, The Janus Foundation, and the DPS blended learning team, but also the principals, school teams and teachers they supported. All participants agreed that it was time to improve the learning experience by bringing blended learning to the classroom through a combination of technology, training, professional development support, and creative solutions shared among stakeholders.

As noted by Janus’ Cortese, the asset manager is known for being an innovative and differentiated thinker in the financial services world, so this type of potentially high-impact innovation was a natural way of engaging in the community. At the same time, DPS Superintendent Tom Boasberg wanted to continue to work toward the district’s goal of becoming a nationally-recognized leader in educational reform and innovation. And the principals, administrators, and teachers



In this literature class, students have the opportunity to control the pace of their learning

at these two schools were passionately committed to testing and perfecting a learning approach that would raise the outcomes for every student - outcomes that included not just proficiency scores but also enhanced engagement among students in their own learning.

### Engaging Students with Individualized Learning

Even with stakeholders “all in,” the process for implementing blended learning in the classroom was one universally familiar to innovators: trial, error, lessons learned, lessons applied, share, collaborate, try again. In describing the challenges associated with the early days of the program, DPS Blended Learning Director Christine DeLeon recalled, “we didn’t know what we didn’t know. We couldn’t anticipate all that this work would entail, as it was at the cutting edge of what schools were doing, particularly in Denver, but even across the nation. Therefore, it was hard to know what exactly we would need to do to support schools.” As a result, the blended learning team worked hard to continually listen to and adapt to its schools’ needs, and adjust the team and supports accordingly. Another challenge inherent in pioneering instructional models is the limited number of teachers from and with whom to learn.

As even the most enthusiastic advocates of blended learning discovered, redesigning their classroom methodology wasn’t by any means a “quick fix.” In fact, GBMS eighth grade social studies teacher Mark Horowitz admitted that “if I hadn’t seen the results I saw in blended learning and technology I wouldn’t be a huge fan of it - it was harder in a lot of ways.” In fact, creating the learning materials can be a time-intensive undertaking initially, given the number of elements involved. This became clear as Horowitz described his classroom blended learning process and learning elements:

Students would start off with an activity that I created in Moodle [a learning management software platform], and after doing a reading, taking notes, and watching a video that I created, they would have to answer questions. If their answers indicated that they were proficient, it would bump them ahead to another activity. If they weren’t proficient, it would send them to get the help they needed online. And if someone was truly missing the whole thing, I could see that in the results and be able to say to that student, “Hey, I noticed you missed all of this, let’s you and I conference” so I could give him that direct, one-on-one teacher instruction he needed.

**W**hen students started having more variety, more choices where they could actually pause and rewind, and actually start teaching themselves, I think that was when we started seeing real student buy-in.

Creating those videos, online tests with branching options, and data capture (to show student progress) was a time-consuming process, but according to every teacher interviewed, immensely worth the effort. Kevin Croghan, who was a teacher and instruction coach for the first year of the GBMS blended learning pilot, turned into the go-to blended learning technology expert at his middle school. Now a blended learning field manager for DPS, Croghan said of his experience with students’ personalization of blended learning:

For the kids, everyone was excited at first. Then the students who saw that they could start to move ahead would begin to see the real potential in what was happening; these were the ones, in particular, who started to almost immediately see the value in what we were doing. I think my middle-of-the-road and lower-performing students came along a little bit later once they started seeing that there were different ways to present their mastery. What made the student a lower-performing student? Might it be that they weren’t good writers but they could actually do a heck of a presentation? So when students started having more variety, more choices where they could actually pause and rewind, and actually start teaching themselves, I think that was when we started seeing real student buy-in.

## Expanding Teachers' Reach, Impact, and Engagement

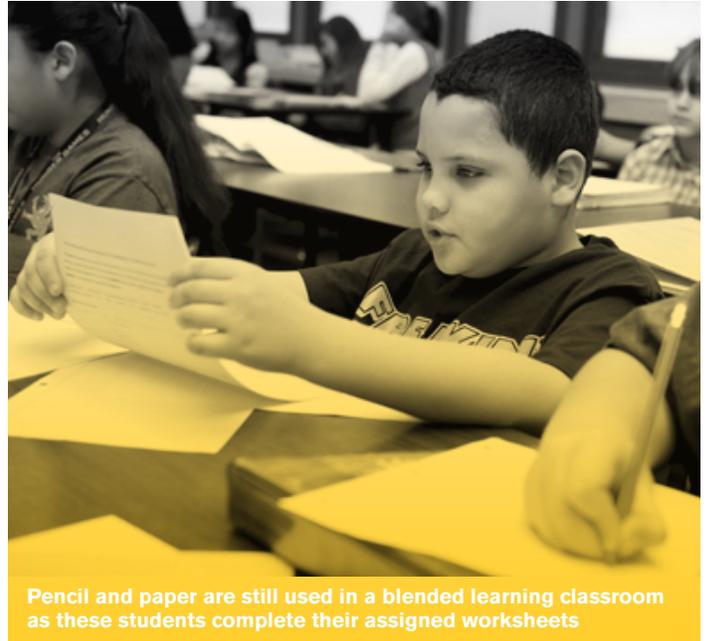
Teachers in the WGA and GBMS lab site schools had undertaken a substantial challenge even though they knew what they wanted to achieve and believed in the ability of blended learning to greatly improve learning outcomes and individual engagement among their students. Despite their commitment, they were still pioneering processes, identifying needed resources, learning new technologies, all while managing student learning every day.

But participating teachers all agreed that the learning curve was worth the effort because it enabled them to achieve two important goals: providing the one-on-one attention that was usually possible only with very small classrooms, and tailoring lessons and learning to individual students' subject proficiency. In effect, the self-directed learning paths offered by blended learning enabled teachers to respond to students at the point of need, either virtually through the computer-based lessons they'd created or directly in the classroom setting.

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The immediacy of receiving real-time data indicating whether or not their students were reaching proficiency in a given lesson was one of the aspects that most excited teachers. This improved feedback loop enabled them to intervene "in the moment" if the data showed that students were falling behind. Instead of the traditional model of assignment-assessment-correction playing out over the course of multiple class sessions, teachers now had a tool that allowed students to receive assessment and correction in the same class period in which they completed the assignment.

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In addition to the benefit of immediate feedback provided via the student proficiency data, teachers were also surprised and encouraged by the level of self-management and creativity found among their blended learning students. For example, GBMS' Horowitz recalled that:

... after seeing what other teachers were doing, working with the DPS blended learning coaches, working with the Moodle platform and having new opportunities through that, I began working with students to create projects where the students would be guiding their own learning, coming up with their own questions, creating their own rubrics - very different from me just giving them a bunch of information and then having them put together a project for me. Instead, they were guiding their own learning trajectory and getting modifications if needed and extensions when they were ready to take their learning to the next level.

Horowitz's comments were echoed by Enakai Robles Hails, a sixth grade student at GBMS during the 2012-13 school year. According to Robles Hails, the self-direction and self-pacing afforded to students in blended learning classrooms provided a significant benefit; students now possessed the ability to drive the pace of their learning instead of the traditional "teach to the middle" model where the pace was driven by the majority of students.

"What I liked most was that we could travel at our own pace - we didn't have to keep referring back to the teacher to tell us where we were," said Robles Hails. "It made [learning] easier for us."

Similarly, WGA humanities teacher Amanda Kudron recounted that she was initially concerned that her students, many if not most of whom were inexperienced with computers, would have a difficult time mastering the technology without substantial training and ongoing assistance.

In recalling those early classes, she stated that "the one concern I had was my students' lack of knowledge on computer set-ups. I knew that my students were really good at using cell phones,

but I also knew that a lot of my students did not have access to computers at home." She was surprised and gratified to find that "they learned so quickly, especially about using technology." Once shown how to log in to their personal accounts, the Internet, and the classroom "skillware," they were quickly off and running.

Equally exciting to Kudron was the opportunity to actually interact with students in small groups or on a one-on-one basis, which was a key benefit of the rotationally-based Blended Learning Program. She noted that "if some students were working on the computer on individualized lessons, then I had the time to work with a smaller collaborative group, which was awesome."

Essentially, this personalized learning was the exact opposite of how classroom teaching had been done for the past 200 years, that is, "teaching to the middle." The personalized, self-directed learning present in a blended learning classroom has the ability to create true learning opportunities that simply aren't available to students when teachers follow the status quo. And for teachers, always eager to help each of their students succeed, the ability to provide individual attention is rewarding both personally and professionally.

## Collaboration throughout the Learning Community

When you're undertaking an innovative approach to learning that involves new processes, new technology, and new pedagogy, communication and strong collaboration skills are a must. Implementing blended learning represents a substantial change-management challenge: i.e., moving a large, bureaucratic organization away from processes and methodologies followed for centuries toward a new teaching approach. Specifically, an approach that represents not only a real opportunity for education reform but also a way to begin changing the outcomes for students previously falling through the cracks of the antiquated approach to education.

To ensure that all teachers and school administrators are supported in their efforts to continually improve their knowledge of the blended learning approach and how to best implement it, the blended learning



Casey Cortese of Janus talks to students in a DPS Classroom

team provides ongoing professional development programs, in the form of online forums, learning modules, shared results, best practices, new ways of using tools, and similar types of supports. The goal is to create and test not only new knowledge, but also a process for sharing that knowledge so others could emulate its success.

In addition to the blended learning professional development support provided by the district, school leaders and teachers also have begun creating additional ways to share peer-to-peer insights. They started special-topic discussion forums to share technology and pedagogy questions and answers within their discipline teams, schools, and among other participating schools. As a further step, DPS hired several blended learning field managers who regularly work with individual teachers as well as administrators to ensure that the necessary technology and learning support is in place. Additionally, school leaders actively participate in affinity groups to discuss promising practices emerging from Janus Lab Sites and other district strategies.

As noted, the goal was and is to ensure that experts, advocates, and internal champions have the ability to connect with, support, and collaborate with their less-experienced peers. The sooner knowledge is shared, the sooner blended learning's benefits will gain traction and acceptance among schools, teachers and leaders.

### **Building an Infrastructure for Success**

Successfully launching a blended learning program in a school (or a school district) is built on communication and collaboration processes, but it also takes resources, the right skill sets, the right mindsets, and the right partners to assist with funding and expertise.

The \$2.1 million investment by Janus in the DPS district will support the full range of key areas critical to a successful blended learning pilot program, including software, hardware, change management, professional development, and program staffing. During the project's initial year, this included a learning management system, tablets for students, change management training, professional development

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around blended-learning skills training, and administrative support. Going into the program's second year, the program infrastructure is anticipated to include a project team staffed with co-directors, a project manager, and two field managers. This is to support second-year programs for GBMS and WGA and first-year programs for four new Janus lab-site schools (of 25 applicants).

Support from private companies can and should reach beyond simple funding, as private sector partners may also be able to supply the necessary expertise to support a high-quality and outcomes-based public private partnership. In the case of the blended learning grant work, this support includes financial advice, leadership training, technology and IT skills. The monetary commitment from Janus is only a portion of the resources the company pledged to its partnership with DPS. According to Janus' Cortese, the company provides support via its internal expertise, including help developing financial models, leadership training, and assisting with various aspects of decision-making in areas that were unfamiliar to its education partners.

"It's really exciting for Janus to be able to see how a company can actually make a big impact in a large, bureaucratic organization and to know how the money we're investing, when coupled with our intellectual support and our people support, can really be very

powerful in helping to move education forward," said Cortese. "The needs are endless, and it's important and rewarding to invest business expertise and resources back into the community."

Pointing to another critical element of building a sustaining infrastructure, GBMS' Magaña emphasized the key value of collaboratively-developed mission and vision statements to keep people on track during moments of frustration. All participants mentioned the importance of commitment to and leadership of the Blended Learning Initiative by the school's principal and administration. Transitioning to a blended learning approach takes time, patience, a willingness to try, fail, learn, then try again as learnings come to light and individual best practices are developed and refined. The importance of a supportive and encouraging school leadership team is critical to keeping teachers engaged and committed to doing the work necessary for success.

And of course, parental support and engagement is a critical factor in any infrastructure for learning success. When students become excited in school, they carry that excitement home with them. If those kids' successes are met with enthusiasm and interest, then the last link in the infrastructure for success has been joined.



**Grant Beacon Middle School principal Alex Magaña works with one of the students**

## Delivering on the Blended-Learning Promise: Outcomes and Lessons Learned

There were many positive outcomes and many lessons learned during the first year of the Blended Learning Initiative.

For example, initial difficulties with technology access at WGA reinforced the fact that the degree to which teachers had access to network and tech support, and students could quickly and efficiently log on to machines and accounts, directly correlated to teacher and student efficacy and engagement with technology as a learning tool. Additionally, leadership and teaching corps readiness had a substantial impact on the success of implementation. (DPS incorporated readiness indicators in site recruiting and selection as a direct result of lessons learned with WGA and Grant Beacon.)

Operational factors also impacted the success of the blended learning implementation. For example, Generation Schools Network CEO Wendy Piersee recalled that WGA experienced several key leadership changes mid-year, at the school, district, and GSN levels, which also impacted both timeline and level of implementation with fidelity to the proposed model. As a first-year school, WGA encountered problems associated with opening any new school, including a new leader, new teachers (new to teaching and new to WGA), establishing culture and identity, with an added complication of opening in a single building that houses three separate schools.

"While these were known entities at the beginning of the year, it wasn't clear to what extent these conditions would play until midway through implementation," said Piersee. "This illuminated the importance of a full-scale change management process involving students, teachers, parents, and community, for a blended learning implementation to be wholly successful."

Another discovery was that although the rotation of direct instruction, computer-based instructions, and self-study was originally programmed in 75-minute segments, teachers soon found that 90-minute segments were more effective, and were able to quickly implement that change.

In terms of outcomes, the Janus Blended Learning Initiative has already seen positive learning outcomes although still in its early stages.

One of many learning measurements used across the state of Colorado is the Transitional Colorado Assessment Program (TCAP), which annually assesses the level at which students meet state

standards in reading, writing, math, and science. The TCAP was one of the areas evaluated to determine the impact of the Janus Blended Learning Grant program. Two elements were assessed: TCAP Status and TCAP Growth (median growth percentiles/MGPs).

In terms of TCAP Status, the percentage of GBMS students scoring proficient or advanced increased in reading (9 percent) and in math (14 percent) in one school year. Likewise, the percent scoring unsatisfactory decreased in reading (12 percent) and in math (4 percent). During this first year of the blended learning program, the year of growth exceeded that of a matched control group of students.

In terms of TCAP Median Growth Percentiles, continuously enrolled students at GBMS with at least 90 percent attendance earned a reading MGP of 57 and a math MGP of 72. Growth exceeded both the target of 50 and also students' 2012 MGPs.

At WGA, the percent of students scoring proficient or advanced on TCAP Math decreased substantially, while the percent scoring unsatisfactory increased. Also, students' math MGPs did not reach 50 and were lower than in 2012. In terms of TCAP MGPs, however, WGA was recognized as a high growth high school in ninth grade reading and writing. These data are limited, and could also be loosely connected to the infrastructure and technology challenges in implementing the program.

Additionally, other assessments common to DPS schools demonstrated more positive outcomes for WGA. For example, the STAR Reading & Math formative assessment showed that on average, WGA students grew two grade levels in math and nearly one in literacy. In terms of reading,

- ▶ 80 percent of WGA students began the school year more than five years behind in reading fluency and comprehension; WGA cut that percentage in half to 40 percent by year end; and
- ▶ at the beginning of the year only 1 percent of WGA students were within two years of grade level proficiency and by June 2013, 19 percent of these students were within two years of proficiency.

Although these test results don't offset the TCAP numbers, it does provide an indication that progress is being made.

Overall, the partnership between DPS and Janus made substantial progress toward meeting the goals for the initiative, including the creation of a replicable and sustainable model for introducing blended learning into DPS classrooms; improving learning outcomes for participating students through individualized

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learning opportunities; freeing up teachers to work one-on-one with students at the point of need or opportunity; and increasing the demand within DPS for education innovation.

In addition, Janus wants to ensure that this three-year initiative furthers its commitment of supporting innovative solutions over the long-term to solve education issues for at-risk students. When working with underserved youth, it's important to be thinking about the whole child and the implications of education for kids that don't have the same opportunities as some of their counterparts, such as a stable home or financial wherewithal, said Janus' Cortese. Education is the key to a future filled with opportunities, and fostering an environment where all children, regardless of background or economic standing, can benefit from an improved education model is critical to close the achievement gap.

"Blended learning technology enables teachers to do what they do best, and that's not standing up and lecturing in front of a group of 30 kids and trying to teach to the middle," said Cortese. "It's being able to utilize their skills to coach and mentor and facilitate the educational process for their students in a way that's relevant to each individual student."

As Janus CEO Richard Weil has noted, the company's investment experience has consistently found that the best companies have the best people. But beyond that, he points out, investing in stronger, more effective public schools is simply the right thing to do in a country that prides itself on equality of opportunity.

"Blended learning connects students, teachers, and content in ways that weren't available to previous generations, and research has shown that this method in the hands of talented teachers



Grant Beacon Middle School shows their pride in being a Janus Blended Learning Lab Site

can improve student outcomes," said Weil. "Our partnership with DPS has positioned the district to define a national model of excellence in blended learning, and offers promise to our next generation of teachers, business leaders, and our community. More importantly, it also offers promise of opportunity to children whose lives might otherwise have held little."



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