



Barrington 220 Superintendent of Schools Dr. Brian Harris visits with students.

An Update on Blended Learning

BARRINGTON 220 EMBRACES A NEW TEACHING MODEL THAT IMPROVES INTERACTION BETWEEN STUDENTS AND THEIR TEACHERS.

BLENDED LEARNING IS A KEY COMPONENT of most post-secondary learning experiences, and is becoming more and more integrated into the K-12 environment. Barrington 220 has been studying different models of blended learning and how it might be incorporated in its schools.

The district is well-equipped to offer learning experiences that are delivered using a combination of face-to-face and online instruction for high school students. Every student is issued a MacBook Air laptop, and wireless internet is available for free for families in need through Project Horsepower. I asked Superintendent of Schools Dr. Brian Harris more about the blended learning classes being offered in the upcoming 2016-17 school year.

QB: *Blended learning is becoming more common at the high school level nationwide. Can you describe what the definition of blended learning is?*

BH: Blended learning is a formal education program in which a student learns at least partly through online learning, with some elements offer the students control of the time, place, path and/or pace of their work. Students

will spend time face-to-face with their teachers in a classroom setting, and also have the ability to complete some of their work outside of the classroom at their own pace. Blended learning gives students more choice and individualized instruction.

QB: *Why did Barrington High School decide to implement blended learning in the 2016-17 school year?*

BH: Creating optimal time for learning is part of the Board of Education's strategic plan. Blended learning provides students with the flexibility to make choices about their education that align with their individual needs and learning styles. In addition, blended learning will likely be part of most students' post-secondary experience. We want to be sure that they leave Barrington High School exposed to that.

QB: *How has Barrington 220 prepared to implement this program?*

BH: Our teachers and administrators have been studying what blended learning might look like in our schools for over a year. During the 2015-16 school year, several teachers at Barrington High School began teaching using blended learning instructional strategies as part of their regular



Olivia Bounady and Maddie Nedelcu work together on district-issued laptops during an Introduction to Business class.


classes. A small group of teachers who felt confident teaching in this style volunteered to lead a blended learning pilot program at Barrington High School in the fall. Select courses across most academic areas will be offered blended beginning in August. Each teacher has a different approach and methodology to how they will structure their class to ensure student success. A parent and student educational session will be held on Wednesday, Aug. 10 for those enrolled in a blended learning course this fall.

QB: *There are some common misconceptions about blended learning and what it means for students. Can you touch on some of the concerns that exist?*

BH: One of the most common misconceptions about blended learning is that it eliminates the need for a teacher, which is not the case. By definition, blended learning requires learning to be conducted in part by a teacher in a face-to-face classroom setting. Teachers will also be available to students even on days when student attendance is not required. Students who need in-person instruction will always have that option available to them.

Research shows that students taking a blended learning class actually receive more individualized attention from teachers than in a traditional class. This is because teachers are able to dedicate more time to students one-on-one as opposed to conducting large group instruction in a standard setting.

QB: *Will this be a big change for students?*

BH: In a recent survey of Barrington High School students, 34 percent felt they were already experiencing blended learning as part of their current classes. That speaks volumes for what our teachers are already doing in the classroom. Because students are equipped with laptop computers, learning in a virtual environment is already taking place the classroom. As the survey results show, implementing the formal blended learning program will not be a major shift in practice for students. 

Lisa Stamos is a resident of Barrington and the editor and publisher of Quintessential Barrington.