



## CASE STUDY

# BELLWOOD SCHOOL DISTRICT 88

*How one district is using micro-credentials to help teachers build the essential skills needed to be successful during COVID.*

**“With all the trauma brought on by the pandemic, we really needed to make sure our teachers knew how to intentionally build relationships to help students feel safe, secure, and ready to learn in a remote or hybrid environment.”**

**- Suzy Dees  
Director of Professional Learning  
West40 Intermediate Service Center**

## ADJUSTING TO A NEW WAY OF INSTRUCTION

When the pandemic began in March 2020, Bellwood School District 88 knew that their first priority needed to be student learning. With schools closed for an unknown period of time, it was imperative that students could get online every day and that teachers felt comfortable using technology tools and resources to effectively conduct instruction.

In late spring, as remote instruction continued, the district surveyed teachers and met with them to figure out what they needed to feel supported and successful given the logistical challenges they faced.

It was through this information gathering process and a partnership with their regional service center, West40, that Bellwood School District 88 decided to explore implementing a blended learning professional development program through BloomBoard. The goal was to equip the teachers with new blended learning strategies and help them feel confident with teaching in a remote or hybrid environment via technology.

“One of the things we loved about the blended learning program is that it first and foremost focused on building student relationships,” said Suzy Dees, Director of Professional Learning at West40 Intermediate Service Center. “With all the trauma brought on by the pandemic, we really needed to make sure our teachers knew how to intentionally build relationships to help students feel safe, secure, and ready to learn in a remote or hybrid environment.”

## OFFERING SUPPORT FOR EDUCATORS

That summer the district promoted the program, Foundations for Blended Learning, a holistic, competency-based learning initiative designed to prepare educators for the challenges they would face the next school year. The goal was to recruit 40 teachers to the program, covering all schools and grade bands.

“We didn’t want to hand select teachers or force teachers to participate in the program,” said Dr. Victoria Hansen, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction. “We put a flyer out there to let teachers know we were offering help through this program and over 80 educators raised their hands to say they’re interested in learning more. We filled up all 40 spots within minutes after the initial informational session. This is a testament to the dedicated teachers we have here at Bellwood who are there for the kids and want their students to succeed.”

## DEVELOPING AMBASSADORS TO CHANGE SCHOOL CULTURE

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With 40 participants enrolled, the district launched the program at the start of the 2020-2021 school year. Each participant would be required to complete six micro-credentials that make up the Foundations for Blended Learning micro-endorsement. By earning all six micro-credentials, the educators would become “Blended Ambassadors” at their respective schools. As an ambassador, they would be able to share the knowledge and strategies acquired with their peers. Remaining staff members would also be invited to attend Blended Learning Seminars, a series of seven synchronous, virtual professional development sessions around blended learning “survival skills”.

Nine months in and participants are not only finding value in the job-embedded nature and “learn by doing” model of the program, but it has also had a meaningful impact on school culture. New vernacular around blended instruction is being used across the district, and staff leaders are discussing how the school day can be restructured for the 2021-2022 school year leveraging a “blended learning arc”. This initiative has also led to offer a new “U88” personalized professional development program that emphasizes the BloomBoard micro-credentialing model to drive district wide professional learning goals.

“The Bloomboard program helped give me the confidence I needed in this new educational environment,” said Diana Pappas, a Kindergarten teacher at McKinley Elementary School. “I’ve been able to improve my relationships with both my students as well as their parents and families. It is a very engaging program that encouraged me to build on strategies that have already been established in my classroom. I have shared many of these strategies and techniques with my colleagues.”



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**- Diana Pappas,  
Kindergarten Teacher**



## LOOKING AHEAD

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After a full year of remote instruction, Bellwood educators will face a whole new set of challenges as students return to the classroom. These include recovery of learning loss, social and emotional well-being of students, and advancement of strategies and policies to address equity disparities. The district’s U88 program will offer new micro-endorsements designed to help educators build the skills needed to address these challenges. Educators will also be able to earn credits towards promotion and compensation advancement by completing these micro-endorsements.

Of the 180 teachers surveyed this school year, 160 indicated that they wanted to participate in the new U88 program kicking off this summer. Given the overwhelming amount of interest, the district plans to tap into various funding sources including CARES, Title I & Title II and to help expand the program and support teachers as they work towards COVID recovery.