



# Building Blended Learning Success

Florence 1 Schools and BetterLesson Partner to Support Teachers and Leaders in their PD Journey

## The Challenge

Florence 1 Schools serves about 16,000 students in the city of Florence, South Carolina and surrounding communities. Like nearly every district in the country, Florence 1 educators shifted abruptly to distance learning in March 2020 when the pandemic struck. For the 2020–21 school year, the district moved to a combination of hybrid and fully virtual models.

But fairly soon, district and campus leaders were hearing from teachers that they were struggling with this new learning environment. Teachers were struggling with creating a class community on-line where students were actively engaged and participating; with creating meaningful tasks in a digital environment; and with differentiating instruction using synchronous and asynchronous learning activities. At the same time, district leaders were hearing from their principals and instructional leaders that they were struggling to support the needs of both their virtual teachers and in-person teachers, and they needed better strategies and tools to build a collaborative professional learning space on-line.

### District-at-a-Glance

#### FLORENCE 1 SCHOOLS

*Located in Florence, SC and surrounding communities*

Serves 15,305 students

Students identify as:

- 55% Black
- 39% White
- 3% Asian
- 3% Other

67% of students on free and reduced price lunch

Data from [NCES](#) & [South Carolina Report Card](#)

**“We know that we need to meet students where they are and continue to grow their skills. To do that, we need to ensure teachers feel comfortable engaging students online, in rigorous activities.”**

MICHELLE MCBRIDE, Assistant Superintendent, PreK–5th

# The Approach

Superintendent Dr. Richard O'Malley and his leadership team knew that they needed to provide sustained, in-depth, job-embedded support to help teachers and leaders thrive in this new environment. Along with BetterLesson, they crafted a professional development plan that included 1:1 virtual coaching and a series of small group Virtual Workshops for 20 teachers and 23 instructional leaders. This plan would both meet each educator's specific needs and build common concepts across teams.

The goal of the partnership was to build student engagement, manage teacher workload, and provide better feedback strategies. Florence 1 and BetterLesson decided to focus on this targeted set of high-impact topics:



## FOR TEACHERS

**Social-Emotional Learning:** Creating a class community through systems, supporting student well-being

**Blended Learning:** Creating meaningful tasks in the digital and in-person space, balancing synchronous and asynchronous tasks



## FOR INSTRUCTIONAL COACHES AND BUILDING LEADERS

**Collaborative Professional Learning:** Setting up flexible PD to meet teachers' needs, and doing so virtually

**Accelerating Growth:** Using data to "stop the slide" and help teachers plan effective instruction

Participants were a mixture of educators who were struggling the most as well as experienced leaders who were eager to build their skills and share with others. All came in with a growth mindset and a desire to learn.

**"We were looking for strategic support for some of our classroom teachers, administrators, and instructional coaches—not just to build their individual capacity for blended learning, but so that they could develop as leaders within their communities and share the strategies."**

GREG HALL, Assistant Superintendent for Secondary Education

**"This program motivates you and inspires you to stay in the educational field."**

SENECA BRAND, Teacher Florence 1 Schools

Flexible, equitable, student-centered teaching and leading is more important than ever. Florence 1 Schools chose a few areas to focus on within these 4 Essential Elements of Student-Centered Teaching and Learning:



**Flexible Instructional Models**



**Instructional Leadership**



**Curriculum and Academic Content**

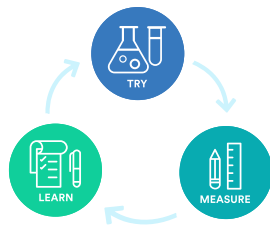


**Inclusive and Responsive Practices**

BetterLesson breaks each Element down into several Focus Areas and specific Topics. [Learn more here](#)

“I like that we were able to work in breakout rooms to go over real-life scenarios with our peers. We came up with instructional strategies, tools, and resources that can be used in a variety of classroom situations.”

TEACHER PARTICIPANT



### Try-Measure-Learn

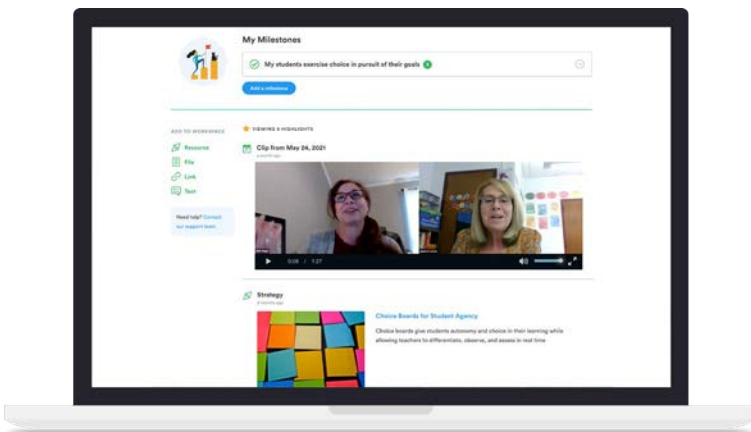
Florence 1 educators worked with their BetterLesson coaches to identify their challenges, make a plan to try new strategies, and then reflect on results. This collaborative, learn-by-doing method models what learner-centered instruction looks like.

### Expert Coaches

BetterLesson coaches are effective, experienced educators with training in active adult learning, who provide educators with an outside perspective and consistent, non-evaluative support.

### BetterLesson Lab

Florence 1 educators work together with their coaches in the Lab, an online platform where they can document their vision and milestones, share artifacts, and access thousands of instructional strategies and lesson plans created by experienced educators.



“BetterLesson provided a strategic partnership with content aligned to our specific goals. With a lot of other PD, you go and listen, but that’s it. No follow up. BetterLesson’s coaching makes a big difference—the opportunity to apply new skills, reflect, and set next steps.”

GREG HALL, Assistant Superintendent for Secondary Education

# The Impact

## Greater Collaboration and Confidence

Leaders observed that by the end of the semester, teachers were collaborating, sharing their successes and challenges, and observing each other more. They experienced less stress, knowing that they had a consistent outside ear to turn to. This was also true for leaders who had a supportive thought partner to problem-solve with.

**100%**

**OF PARTICIPANTS**

were highly satisfied with support provided by their coaches

**100%**

**OF PARTICIPANTS**

tried multiple strategies after working with their coach

## A Clear PD Journey that Meets Educators' Needs



### Personalized, action-oriented support:

PD focused on both the district's identified priorities and the specific needs of each educator; the Coaching and Virtual Workshop model created opportunities for setting goals, practice, and follow up—not a one-and-done training.



### Common language and resources:

BetterLesson coaches brought expertise in instructional fundamentals as well as virtual learning, along with access to hundreds of resources in the BetterLesson Lab.



### Transparency and accountability:

BetterLesson provided the district with ongoing data about teacher engagement and progress, allowing leaders to follow up, increase teacher buy in, and plan for future PD.

## EXAMPLE GOALS THAT FLORENCE 1 TEACHERS AND LEADERS SET

- My vision for my classroom is to improve small group instruction by differentiating the content for students based on their needs and abilities.
- I want to foster a learning environment where students and teachers feel safe to make mistakes and engage in rigorous lessons.
- I would like to work on effective feedback on lesson plans. I'd like to do less "telling" and instead coach teachers into their own growth.

## EXAMPLE STRATEGIES FLORENCE 1 EDUCATORS IMPLEMENTED IN THE CLASSROOM

[Developing Norms to Support Productive Group Work](#)

[Using Video for Flipped Learning Environments](#)

[Choice Boards for Student Agency](#)

[I Wish My Teacher Knew](#)

[GROW: 4 Steps to an Effective Coaching Conversation](#)



## Leadership Coaching For Teacher Success

In the spring of 2021, Ms. Calandra Brisbane-Davis was an assistant principal at West Florence High School. She needed to create a PD plan for her teachers, but didn't have buy-in. Her coach, Kristin, asked probing questions, shared resources, and created a safe space to share tough challenges. As a result, Ms. Brisbane-Davis created a plan which laid out clear goals and gave teachers lots of choice in their PD.

# Next Steps

Florence 1 Schools and BetterLesson have continued their partnership into Fall 2021, with a new and returning cohort of teachers.



**Blended Learning:** The new cohort will focus on transitioning the digital skills they learned during the pandemic into a blended learning approach in the classroom



**Accelerating Growth:** The returning cohort will focus on accelerating growth through effective remediation strategies, Universal Design for Learning, and using data effectively to drive instruction

To support these goals, teachers will start with an in person all day Design Workshop, followed by Virtual Workshops and 1:1 Coaching.

BetterLesson and Florence 1 Schools look forward to reimagining professional learning together—from one-off workshops and modules to a more targeted, personalized, job-embedded approach to building teacher and leader skills.



## Design Workshops



## Virtual Workshops



## 1:1 Virtual Coaching



BetterLesson provides 1:1 virtual coaching and small group professional learning focused on supporting educators to create classrooms where students drive their own learning, exercise choice and ownership, and develop the personal agency they need to succeed. We provide job-embedded support across a wide range of topics, including instructional leadership, student engagement, responsive and inclusive practices, innovative models and remote learning, and curriculum and academic content. We have partnered with more than 30,000 educators across 47 states, plus D.C., Puerto Rico, and five countries internationally. BetterLesson’s free Lab site hosts a continuously growing library of evidence-based strategies and is visited by more than 500,000 educators each month. BetterLesson values the pursuit of educational equity and is dedicated to ensuring that every student—regardless of race, income, national origin, gender identity, ability, or location—has access to an excellent education.

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