



## Making the Whole Class Flip: The Online Learning Revolution

By Michael Van Beek

### Summary

Public school districts are using digital learning to offer a more diverse curriculum, improve student achievement and better meet individual students' needs.

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Imagine providing each student in Michigan with a customized educational experience, designed specifically to ignite their unique interests, engage their passions and exploit their strengths. Imagine freeing teachers from the paper-pushing, repetitive classroom management tasks that consume precious learning time.

Now imagine schools could do both of these things without needing more money. All of this is possible with the new power of digital learning.

A great example comes from Clintondale Community Schools — perhaps an unlikely source of innovation, since the district is struggling with an operating deficit of about 15 percent. Only a dozen other Michigan districts are in worse financial shape.

Yet at the district's high school, things are looking up. In 2010, the failure rate for freshman was 52 percent in English classes, 44 percent in math classes, 41 percent in science classes and 28 percent in social studies classes. Clintondale High School Principal Greg Green determined it was time to try something different. "As a principal, it's just unconscionable to have that going on in your building," he says.

So Green did something radical: He had all of his teachers "flip" their freshman classrooms. A flipped classroom makes use of digital and online technologies to deliver instruction to students when they're outside of class, often via a video recording of a presentation streamed online. Teachers and students then devote nearly all their classroom time to practicing and applying the material.

With this model, teachers have much more time to tutor and mentor students individually. By enabling students to control when, where and how often they receive instruction, the flipped classroom allows students to progress at their own pace and encourages them to take responsibility for their learning.

So far, the results at Clintondale High are impressive. The freshman failure rates dropped to 19 percent in English, 19 percent in math, 13 percent in science and 9 percent in social studies in just one year. Such rapid improvement is almost unheard of in the K-12 public education sector. Now all classes for all grades at Clintondale High are flipped.

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A student at Clintondale High School reports to her teacher via webcam. An online video discussing Clintondale appears at [www.mackinac.org/16706](http://www.mackinac.org/16706).

The flipped classroom benefits teachers too. One veteran Clintondale teacher told me the model allows him to do what he feels teachers really want to do: coach individual students to help them achieve their best. He says he'd never want to go back to the old model.

A flipped classroom is not the only way to use digital learning to improve student outcomes; districts are using "virtual" academies as well. Such programs offer hundreds of online courses to which students might not otherwise have access. Students can customize their schedules and complete the coursework more quickly, inside or outside a school building.

The Oxford Virtual Academy is one of the state's largest online academies, and it is full of success stories. One example is a student who had tried three different high schools before she reached the 12th grade. Not surprisingly, she was behind academically and worried she would not graduate on time. In just one year at the OVA, however, she completed the equivalent of two-and-a-half years' worth of schoolwork.

She claims her achievement was the result of customized courses, her personal relationships with the OVA mentors, and of course, her own hard work. She says she learned more in one year at the OVA than at all of her previous three high schools combined.

Success stories like these are not possible without bold leadership. On May 23 in Lansing, the Mackinac Center is hosting an event that will feature former West Virginia Gov. Bob Wise. Gov. Wise is co-chair of the nonprofit Digital Learning Council. He's experienced in helping public school leaders unleash the power of digital learning to better serve the diverse needs of individual students.

There are no silver bullet reforms, but digital learning can greatly improve the way educational services are delivered. More schools should embrace this innovation.

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**See [www.mackinac.org/virtual](http://www.mackinac.org/virtual) for more information about the Gov. Wise event.**

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