

How does Acton Academy successfully combine Montessori, blended, and projected-based learning?

The Acton program combines Montessori, blended, and project –based learning in a cohesive model to provide a rich entrepreneurial environment for students. During the mornings Kindergarten-3rd grade students will learn content through personalized and small group Montessori instruction. Consistent with Montessori philosophy, the student will work independently mastering content utilizing Montessori manipulatives, virtual manipulatives, and other proven online programs (i.e. ST Math). This teaches younger students to manage their learning and access blended learning tools to master academic requirements. As students move from Kindergarten to 3rd grade they gradually transition from being reliant on Montessori manipulatives to a blended learning environment.

Once a student is in the 4th grade, they will rely mainly on blended learning to master Utah Core Standards with access to Montessori manipulatives to understand concepts if needed. In this blended learning environment curriculum is housed in a learning management system that empowers students to move ahead at their own pace and can be accessed anytime, anywhere. Ignite will create a digitally engaging curriculum experience comprised of instruction videos approved by licensed teachers, proven online software, and supplemental videos. The teacher will use the LMS tracking tools to monitor student progress and identify students that have encountered difficulties. When a student is struggling with a concept the teacher will either give targeted instruction or pair the student with a peer that can further solidify understanding by helping another student.

During the afternoons the academic foundation laid in the mornings is supplemented by collaborative, project-based learning experiences that give meaning and depth to Utah Core Standards, as well as, teach and reinforce entrepreneurial skills. Each class is assigned projects that students work on individually or in small groups. These projects will include a variety of interdisciplinary projects; such as, bridge engineering, writing a screen play, a community service project, etc.

How is blended learning defined at Acton Academy?

In an entrepreneurial school students must be able to move at their maximum pace. Acton uses blended learning to ensure this flexibility. Ignite will house all curriculum online in a learning management system, and leverage blended learning in the mornings for students to master Utah Core Standards. This curriculum will include teacher instructional videos approved or created by Utah licensed educators. It will also include worksheets, supplemental videos, online software and assessments. Students will master as many core skills as they are able. Teachers will be monitoring student progress visually and through tools available in the learning management system. This enables them to coach students and offer targeted instruction as needed. The majority of students will be performing this work onsite. The students that are working offsite will be accessing the same curriculum and the distance education teacher will be monitoring their progress via LMS tools and offering the same targeted instruction online.

What does the time spent online look like for onsite students? Specifically what are the teacher/student ratios, percentage of curriculum/time online learning, test score standards?

As mentioned above online work happens in the mornings. Students are organized into classes of 25 students led by a licensed Utah educator. They begin their day with Socratic dialogue and goal setting. This focuses the students on learning and prepares them to make productive use of their online time. After completing their goals, the students sign onto the learning management system where they will have access to all curriculums. During this 2-3 hour period the teacher will monitor the room visually and through the LMS to see which students need help and offer targeted instruction as needed. In the afternoon students move away from online/blended learning and engage in project-based learning activities that serve to build entrepreneurial skills. In following this program, Ignite expects that students produce test scores that are 5% above Utah State Averages while at the same time honing skills that will be useful beyond the classroom environment.

How does Ignite track onsite students that are pursuing goals offsite?

An important part of the entrepreneurship training – especially for the older grades – is real-world business learning experiences. In a traditional school students often leave to engage in offsite learning activities – missing out on crucial instructional time. At Ignite, all curriculums are housed online in the learning management system which gives students flexibility to engage in mentorships, internships, etc. without missing instructional time. In order to engage in offsite learning students must submit a written overview of the project, a detailed list of activities and a plan for staying current on academic course work. The plan will require students to complete their work goals either before, during, or after their experience. Ignite will set detailed policies and procedures for these off-site learning experiences so expectations are clear.

How many students will be in school every day?

Students designated as onsite students will be expected to attend school all day, every day unless they have received prior approval to participate in an offsite activity.

What does distance education look like? Specifically what are the teacher/student ratios, percentage of curriculum/time online learning, test score standards?

At Acton Academy students who have gone through the proper training are allowed to be distance education students. Upon enrolling at Ignite Entrepreneurship Academy students will be designated as either an onsite or distance education student. Approximately 180 students will be designated as distance education students (30% of the target enrollment). Each distance education teacher is responsible for 75 students grouped primarily on location and age to facilitate teambuilding during offsite hours. The teacher's efforts will be supported by a project-based learning guide that will orchestrate onsite project-based learning activities.

Consistent with Acton methodologies, the distance education teacher and the project-based learning guide will lead students through a one week, onsite training course designed to teach entrepreneurship skills, navigate the learning management system, and team building with peers and teachers.

Having completed entrepreneurship training, students are equipped with the skills necessary to complete their assignments. Each week students submit their goals to the teacher for approval. The goals help distance education students to focus and prepare them to make productive use of their online time during the week. Students are expected to login to the learning management system and dedicate the same amount of time to completing Utah Core Standards as their onsite counterparts. The teacher will be monitoring student progress via the tools available on the learning management system, and identifying students that require assistance. As students require assistance, teachers will offer targeted online instruction as needed.

Once a week distance education students will be required to come onsite to engage in group discussion, account for progress, receive tutoring, and engage in team building and project-based learning activities. Students can petition Ignite to waive the mandatory weekly attendance requirement if special circumstances/entrepreneurial activities exist preventing students from participating.

In following this approach Ignite expects that distance education students will produce test scores that are 5% above Utah State Averages on Sage tests while at the same time having the flexibility to pursue entrepreneurial goals.

How is Montessori possible in a distance education environment?

Students will be able to access both online instructional videos and virtual Montessori manipulatives; such as those created by Mobile Montessori and Montessori Tech to progress toward mastering Utah Core Standards.

How does the project-based learning component work for distance education students?

Students will come onsite once a week and engage in a project-based learning activity with other students in their class to encourage collaboration.

Can a student move between onsite and distance learning?

Students are either designated as distance education students or onsite students at the beginning of each school year. For facility planning purposes offsite students will not be allowed to move between the two programs, but will come onsite once a week as previously described.

Onsite students can apply to participate temporarily in offsite activities as previously described.