

# The future of K-12 education, part 1: overcoming resistance

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Curt **Bonk**, professor of Instructional Systems Technology at Indiana University, is a former CPA with master's and Ph.D. degrees in educational psychology and is the author of many books about emerging technologies for learning. (Courtesy photo)

School will not look the same in the fall.

That's what Curt Bonk, professor of Instructional Systems Technology at Indiana University, thinks, because

whether students are able to return to classrooms in the fall or not, there are too many forced experimentations happening for things to return to the way they were.

Bonk, a former CPA with master's and Ph.D. degrees in educational psychology and author of many books about emerging technologies for learning, said there will be thousands of changes to the world of K-12 education. These changes will stem from quick plans school districts had to put into action due to the COVID-19 pandemic, such as extended periods of e-learning.

Bonk predicts more professional development on e-learning learning, an increase in a blended approach, which is a combination of face-to-face teaching and e-learning, and that some people who were once resistant to online learning will shift to becoming the pioneers of it. Not all adjustments will be immediate, and there is no one-size-fits-all scenario, he said.

Since the late '90s, Bonk has traveled the world to train people how to teach online. In a metaphorical sense, he often got tomatoes thrown at him, he said, and was met with people who were hesitant of the ideas.

Corporations were afraid of online learning until they started doing it themselves, he said, and about a decade ago, there was a shift in thinking at the higher education level. Indiana has always been a leader in technology and education, particularly online, at the higher education level, he said.

But at the K-12 level in the state, online learning has been hit or miss. [A recent study](#) in Indiana revealed that students fell more behind after transferring to virtual charter schools. Some virtual schools are also associated with scandals, such as Indiana Virtual School and Indiana Virtual Pathways Academy, which misreported enrollment numbers and misspent more than \$85 million in state funds. That causes concern.

“The K-12 level has ebbed and flowed, especially in this state where they approve virtual schools and then they have problems with them and change the rules,” Bonk said.

Bonk does foresee people overcoming resistance to online learning at the K-12 level, though it's too soon to really get a sense of how the quick jump to extended e-learning has gone for districts such as the Monroe County Community School Corp. and Richland-Bean Blossom Community School Corp.

“A lot of the pros and cons will not be apparent until months down the road, people are really doing things on the fly in many ways,” Bonk said. “And they might not be aware of their successes as well as their failures because things are happening so fast, and that might be a good thing because the change process is a difficult one for human beings.”

Bonk explains the change process through stages. The first stage is awareness of what can be done with online learning and technology, the second is resistance, the third is understanding what's possible, the fourth is trying it out, the fifth is sharing what you've done and the sixth is advocacy.

"The online learning space in Indiana for K-12 has been stuck in the awareness and resistance stage for the most part," Bonk said. "It's now, because of coronavirus, been pushed for every teacher. Everybody has been forced to go into stage three and four."

As teachers have been forced to jump into trying e-learning out long term, they have skipped stage three, Bonk said, and haven't had adequate training. They'll have to go back to that stage.

"If they're going to teach this way in the future, let's say the fall starts out this way or some part of the fall people are home because of the reemergence of coronavirus, there's going to be an emergence of outside services for professional development of teachers and educators, administrators," Bonk said.

Starting in 1998, Bonk had a project focused on rural Indiana teachers and technology integration, the TICKIT project, and the state was providing related grants. After a downturn in the economy around 2000, that money went away, but the project ran through 2002.

"The state at that time, 20 years ago, was doing this, was giving school districts money for infrastructure as well as professional development of teachers, and that has to return," Bonk said. "That kind of idea has to return and that makes a lot of sense."

Emergency preparedness training for online learning will take place to prepare for any number of events, such as natural disasters or viruses, he said. This isn't the first time people have had to adapt to a catastrophe, but people tend to be reactive, not progressive, he said.

As for students without reliable internet access, Bonk said organizations are already developing ways to get people broadband internet access for a low cost, and these are global initiatives. There will have to be internet stations of some sort in rural communities in the future, he said.

"That's going to have to be federal in nature as well as state in nature, expanding broadband network within this country, and of course, then around the world, is going to be addressed because it's an obvious concern here," Bonk said.

Bonk also predicts that there will be more blended courses, or courses that are partly face to face and partly online, because people will be less resistant to that idea. It could be possible for someone in a school to be known as the

blended learning expert, he said. The blended learning option could be helpful in cases where students are at home for any reason, such as during a flu outbreak, or for students who are pregnant or being bullied.

Bonk said a majority of people who have been hesitant or reluctant of online learning will now embrace it and become the leaders in the future. In some cases, teachers are burnt out, he said, but others will see this as a breath of fresh air and will see teaching in a new way.

Technology can completely transform teaching and allow for people to totally rethink the way a school operates, he said, and it can enhance and extend teaching.

Enhancing a bit could look like online exams or an online discussion forum. Extending could look like having students work with people from other countries or from other school districts via an online platform.

“We can just enhance a little bit or extend and it will still be a huge change,” Bonk said. “We can just blend a little, and it will still be a huge change, but other places are going to be at the deep end. So there won’t be a one size fits all.”

While there isn’t one set list of changes to come or one way to think about them, they are coming, some more immediate than others.

This story is the first in a series on the future of K-12 education. Contact Emily Cox at 812-331-4243, [ecox@heraldt.com](mailto:ecox@heraldt.com) or follow @HT\_InSchool on Twitter.

