Why K-12 LMS Adoption is on the Rise

A learning management system can help schools better facilitate digital learning and improve the student experience.

When leaders at Springfield Public Schools in Massachusetts crafted a plan to help prepare students for a technology-based future, a learning management system (LMS) was a key part of their strategy.

"The use of digital learning helps students develop important technology proficiency, creative and critical thinking, and problem-solving skills," says Denise Matuszczak, senior administrator of digital learning and assessment for Springfield Public Schools. "A digital learning management system helps teachers deliver rigorous instruction aligned with standards and our district goals for learning equity."

Learning management systems have long been used in higher education, especially for courses delivered in a blended learning model. Now, several factors are prompting K-12 schools and districts to adopt an LMS for technology-supported instruction in all grade levels.

Why an LMS?

State and district-defined standards for learning and online assessments of student achievement require alignment of lesson content and activities. This alignment is easier when teachers have a single hub to access instructional content, organize classroom activity, and communicate with students and parents.

At the same time, technology-based learning is continuously evolving. Districts want a digital platform that will readily adapt to future technology advances involving devices, content or delivery methods.

An LMS enables teachers to integrate digital content and technology tools into classroom instruction and homework, as well as support student preparation for online assessments. Students access digital lessons and personalized learning materials stored in an LMS, both in class and at home, on a computer or a mobile device. Parents use an LMS portal to keep up-to-date on classroom activity and their child's assignments and progress.

At the district level, curriculum specialists can use an LMS to share learning resources for subjects and grade levels across schools. Administrators can use LMS data in analytics that track student achievement and instructional effectiveness.
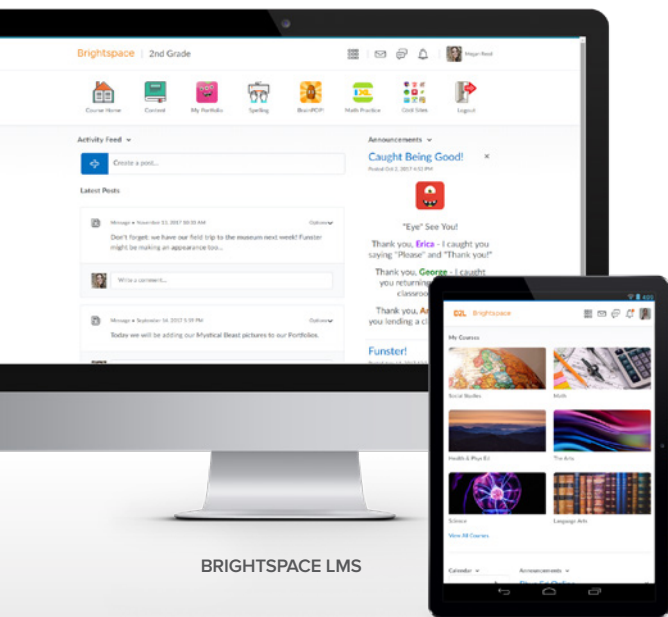
Challenges of a Traditional LMS

Most commercially available LMS solutions were developed for use in higher education courses, which have different needs for content access and instruction delivery. Although that system design may be suitable for some high school and middle school classes that use a blended learning model, it won't meet the instructional and learning needs of grades K-6. And although some vendors have modified their higher education systems for K-12, a district will likely need to develop extensive workarounds and training to fully support use of that LMS in the classroom.

Some teachers have jumped ahead of their districts by using free, online tools such as Google Classroom. These tools provide basic features to organize and access digital content, but they do not support full learning management capabilities, especially for schoolwide or districtwide adoption.

5 Best Practices for LMS Adoption

BRIGHTSPACE LMS

1 Identify the core problems an LMS must solve and define the parameters for success

2 Start with a pilot project to identify implementation, training and communication needs

3 Address teacher concerns by initially allowing adoption to be optional

4 Designate peer leaders to share experiences and provide ongoing resources to teachers

5 Seek a vendor that can act as a partner for successful system rollout

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Elsewhere, large districts have developed custom systems for learning management. However, this approach can be time consuming, complex and expensive compared to licensing a commercial LMS solution.

Springfield Public Schools chose the Brightspace LMS from D2L, which is designed to serve the unique needs of K-12 instruction.

Choosing an LMS specifically developed for use in K-12 education offers several advantages to students, teachers, parents and district administrators, such as:

A consistent solution: The same LMS solution serves grades K-3, 4-6 and 7-12 with appropriate instructional scaffolding. Teachers use a consistent set of tools across grade levels and subjects. Students also receive a consistent experience and personalization features as they advance to different grades and schools within the district.

Graphical student experience: Image-based and audible navigation deliver an easier experience for early readers and English-language learners. For example, the interface of the Brightspace LMS is appropriate to the student's grade and skill level.

A single platform for lesson development and management: A single platform makes it easy to share digital lessons with other teachers and update them for the next academic year. For example, the Brightspace LMS provides a central hub for teachers to store digital content and define and receive student assignments.

Improved parent engagement: Online access for a parent to see their child's work and teacher messages encourages greater involvement.

Data for analytics. Using a single platform to manage learning simplifies data collection and analytics for measuring key performance indicators.

Achieving High Adoption

Any LMS is effective only when teachers use it. Gwinnett County Public Schools in Georgia achieved high adoption rates for the district's Brightspace LMS, with 95 percent of the district's 12,000 teachers and more than 85 percent of its 180,000 students accessing the system regularly.

One reason for this success is the growing role of blended learning instruction, which today encompasses about one-third of student activity in a typical class. Another reason is the system's flexibility for delivering instructional content.

"The Brightspace LMS is a very useful tool for teachers who want to provide extra resources for their students," says Dr. Matt Waymack, director of eClass development at Gwinnett County Public Schools. "It's easy to create enrichment activities for fast learners to use on classroom computers while the teacher works directly with students who need extra attention."

Realizing the Power of Digital Learning

The wealth of learning content available today enables exciting and personalized education. But it can be difficult for teachers to collect, manage and access the digital tools and content on their own. By implementing an LMS, districts can simplify technology-based teaching in a way that is aligned to standards and individualized for each student.

D2L™

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