

# Learning Management System (LMS) Guide

toolkits

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## Organizing and Presenting Digital Content through an LMS

If your district is making the move toward a digital curriculum, you will likely want to consider implementing a learning management system. A learning management system (LMS) is an online platform that enables the delivery of materials, resources, tools, and activities to students both in and out of the classroom environment. It allows teachers to offer tailored instruction that can be accessed by students anytime, anywhere without geographic constraints.

With unique learning and design features, learning management systems can be implemented for a range of students at every grade level. Most learning management systems contain a standard set of tools that are used to facilitate learning and discussion in an online environment. Some tools, such as a threaded discussion forum, are used to foster communication and collaborative learning. Other tools, such as assessments and online grade books, are used to increase teacher productivity and track student performance while ensuring that the course is meeting curricular objectives.

While the online environment of an LMS shares many features with traditional teaching and learning, it also has some unique attributes, such as flexibility (anytime, anywhere) along with time for reflection and learners' anonymity. Additionally, learning management systems offer the convenience and support of a common system used by teachers, support staff, students, and parents.

## Benefits

An LMS can be very useful for organizing and presenting digital content. If you are deciding whether or not your district should use an LMS, consider some other benefits:

## Communication

LMS tools foster communication with students and parents outside of the classroom. This may include:

- Discussion forums
- Real-time messaging
- Videoconferencing
- E-mail
- Announcement posts

## Accessibility

Web-based learning management systems are accessible to all students regardless of their location. This allows colleges and universities to reach a diverse student population. At high school and middle school levels, an LMS allows students to access their assignments and course content from home. Furthermore, the technology promotes globalization with open, flexible learning environments.

## Time

Learning management systems allow instructors to post additional content and resources to enhance the curriculum, providing learning opportunities without the constraint of classroom schedules or limited class time.

## Flexibility

Students learn at different rates, and learning management systems provide the flexibility needed to meet their unique learning needs. Students can go back and review content as needed, or spend additional time researching a topic of interest. This self-directed learning gives students more control over their education.

## Variety

Learning management systems support multiple learning modes. Students can learn the content through audio, video, photos, articles, and interactive simulations.

## Collaboration

LMS tools foster student collaboration on group projects. Built-in features support group blogs and wikis as collaborative spaces for learning. In addition, file sharing tools allow groups to post and share information.

## Community

An LMS platform supports a community of learners working together to build knowledge. Discussion forums, link and file sharing, and real-time messaging encourage student communities to come together and share knowledge.

## Choosing a Learning Management System

Finding the right learning management system to meet your educational needs and expectations starts with a clear vision of your learning goals and objectives. A variety of learning management systems are available, both free and commercial. Although they share many of the same tools, each one offers a unique set of features and user interface.

Use the questions below as a starting point for evaluating and choosing an LMS.

### Purpose

- What primary purpose will my online platform serve?
- Will it be used primarily to support discussions? Post assignments? Foster group work outside of class?
- What types of LMS tools will support my planned purpose and objectives?
- Existing Resources
  - Does my district already have a license with a particular LMS?
  - Does my district already provide Web space on the school site to post homework and announcements?
  - What existing resources are already provided by my district? Am I required to use these resources?
  - Are any other teachers familiar with using an online platform?
  - Technology Infrastructure
    - What are the biggest hurdles for student access to technology at my school?
    - Will my students be able to access the required technology?
  - Does my district have an Internet filter? Will this limit my ability to use a particular LMS?

## Budget

- What is my budget?
- Can I accomplish my goals with an open source, free learning management system?
- Does the LMS charge fees per user? What about use fees?
- Will the LMS charge extra for additional items, such as data, file storage, or video streaming?

## Multimedia Tools

- Do I plan to incorporate multimedia on my site?
- What kinds of media need to be supported?
- Do I need synchronous communication tools?
- If I plan on presenting synchronous lesson content, does the platform support the capability to archive and post my lesson for students to review?

## Assessment

- Do I want to be able to post online quizzes and exams?
- Does my school require an online grade book? If so, am I required to use the one provided or can I choose my own?
- How much data do I expect to receive on student performance and usage?
- What assessment features am I looking for? Do I want self-scoring assessments that pull questions from a question bank? Do I want automated feedback for each question?
- Do I want a learning management system that supports the creation of rubrics?
- Do I need anti-plagiarism tools?

## Communication

- Do I want to simply transmit information to students, or do I want to create an online community?
- Do I want videoconferencing capabilities?
- Do I need file sharing?
- Do I need community discussion forums?
- How much use of asynchronous communication tools do I expect?
- Does the LMS support internal messaging services, or will I need to provide e-mail accounts?
- Do I want an RSS feed feature to ensure that new messages and announcements are sent directly to student and teacher e-mail boxes?

## Design

- Do I need the ability to customize the color, language, layout, and design?
- Is the user interface intuitive, or is it difficult to find my way through the maze of features?

## Accessibility

- Do my students need mobile access to the site?
- Is the online platform compatible with smartphones?

## Technical Support

- What support resources are available if I have questions about the learning management system?
- Who can I contact for technical help? What is their availability?

## A Review of Learning Management Systems

Many online platforms have tools and features designed specifically for educators. Below is a sample of LMS systems, both free and commercial.

	<p><b>Blackboard</b>  <a href="http://www.blackboard.com">www.blackboard.com</a>            A comprehensive online education platform that includes a mobile application and real-time collaboration features. Assessment tools include an online test generator, interactive rubrics, and built-in reports.</p>
	<p><b>Desire2Learn</b>  <a href="http://www.d2l.com">www.d2l.com</a>            An integrated suite of products for the creation, delivery, and management of online courses. Includes a mobile application, student assessment data, and tools for capturing and broadcasting presentations live and on-demand.</p>
	<p><b>Edmodo</b>  <a href="http://www.edmodo.com">www.edmodo.com</a>            A free online platform that emphasizes collaboration and social media to customize learning. Designed specifically for classroom use, this platform includes tools for homework, assessment, discussion, and mobile learning. Additionally, Edmodo communities connect teachers to a global network of educators.</p>
	<p><b>Google Sites</b>  <a href="http://sites.google.com">sites.google.com</a>            Free, customizable Web site templates with settings for accessing and sharing information. Provides seamless integration with Google Docs* and Google Calendar*.</p>
	<p><b>Moodle</b>  <a href="http://moodle.org">moodle.org</a>            A free web application that educators can use to create effective online learning sites. Includes an educator community and support center.</p>
	<p><b>NEO</b>  <a href="http://www.neolms.com">www.neolms.com</a>            Offers both free and premium plans with unlimited storage. The K12 platform features instructional content delivery, calendar, discussion, videoconferencing, blog, and wiki tools. Assessment tools include an online grade book, rubric generator, and built-in reports.</p>
	<p><b>Rcampus</b>  <a href="http://www.rcampus.com">www.rcampus.com</a>            An intuitive platform for managing instructional content, grade books, assessments, and collaboration. Includes an e-Portfolio application and rubric builder with real-time student progress reporting.</p>
	<p><b>Schoology</b>  <a href="http://www.schoology.com">www.schoology.com</a>            A free platform with tools to embed media and manage online discussions. A collaboration feature allows educators to share materials and integrate public content. Assessment tools generate tests, provide direct student feedback, and track progress. Additional tools can analyze student activity and engagement with the material.</p>