

Advanced Blended Learning With Canvas

Elizabeth Forward School District

Elizabeth, Pennsylvania 2,278 Users Started 2019



Known for its innovative approach to teaching and learning, Elizabeth Forward School District strives to create lifelong learners by “creating learning environments that nurture the academic, social, and emotional skills of each student.” Educators at Elizabeth Forward embrace the ever-changing educational landscape by integrating technology into all learning objectives and offering courses that challenge the status quo. The forward-thinking district was part of the Digital Promise for eight years, a global initiative committed to closing the digital learning gap, and remains committed to providing equitable access to learning technology today.

The Challenge

As digital learning evolves, Elizabeth Forward intends to keep up. Its advanced blended-learning model required technology tools that could grow with the district and its needs.

Leaders at Elizabeth Forward needed a learning management system that had the ability to connect all of their favorite apps and learning tools in one centralized location. Additionally, they needed a system that was scalable and reliable to ensure every teacher, especially in K–5, could fully adopt the tool and connect it to their instruction—both in and out of the classroom.

“While EBackPack worked for us for a while, one of its shortfalls was that its functionality was very limited. With Canvas, it’s so robust. There are so many different things you can do, including outside applications, collaboration, group features.”

– Steve Hartnett, Director of Digital Teaching and Learning

Key Insights

- 01 Elizabeth Forward is using Canvas in grades K–12 to strengthen instruction and technology literacy at young ages.
- 02 In just one day, the district was able to pivot to remote learning with Canvas when classrooms closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 03 Implementing Badgr is considered one of the early wins with Canvas because it keeps teachers, students, and parents informed throughout the entire badging process.

The Solution

“We have a culture of being innovative. We take pride in trying new things and not being afraid if they don’t work. It’s been a really important piece during the whole implementation process.” – Keith Konyk, Assistant Superintendent

In August of 2019, Elizabeth Forward implemented Canvas LMS to establish a sense of consistency in teaching and learning, increase engagement in K–5 grade levels, and fuel teacher collaboration.

Adopting any new initiative, especially something as large as a learning management system, can be overwhelming. However, teachers quickly saw the value of Canvas and were willing to dive in

“Investing time and resources in getting teachers trained has really helped during the pandemic. When we began remote learning, we felt that our teachers were prepared and our students would still be able to learn. Canvas has been an integral piece of keeping the classroom routine going.”

Steve Hartnett
Director of Digital Teaching and Learning

early on. District leaders have rolled out Canvas with a “boots on the ground” approach by implementing grade-level meetings to address concerns and celebrate successes related to Canvas every step of the way.

At Elizabeth Forward, teachers are seen as learners, too. That’s why administrators also use Canvas as a professional development tool to provide individualized instruction that enables teachers to grow in their craft. Using Canvas in this way also helps teachers understand the tool from a student perspective, allowing them to reflect on their own instruction even more.

Implementing technology at primary-grade levels can add an extra layer of difficulty, but teachers quickly discovered the many ways in which Canvas can simplify learning for young students and strengthen their understanding of technology early in their education.

The use and purpose of Canvas in grades K–5 is not to replace one-on-one instruction, but rather to capture evidence of learning and increase student engagement. Primary teachers can easily track student progress with project- and performance-based learning, and students can easily connect with all learning tools with just one click, thanks to the single sign-on (SSO) feature.

“With our kindergarten students, we don’t give out grades, we give out badges. The badging component we built into Canvas has blown up throughout all the grades. It’s been so powerful—it’s instant feedback for parents, and the kids are really excited about it.”

– Steve Hartnett, Director of Digital Teaching and Learning

The Results

Although Elizabeth Forward is in its first year of using Canvas, the adoption couldn’t have come at a better time. With the unexpected shift to remote learning and the recent pandemic, the school district was able to stay ahead of the curve by using Canvas to keep the learning going when the classroom closed. Leaders at Elizabeth Forward feel as though they haven’t missed a beat, even with the unexpected transition to remote learning.

In addition to the consistency Canvas provided Elizabeth Forward during the COVID-19 pandemic, it has also enabled them to develop and retain great teachers with meaningful professional development.

As leaders at Elizabeth Forward prepare for next year, they’re leveraging what they learned during the pandemic to take the next step toward Canvas proficiency. To achieve this, they will continue their journey by creating learning playlists and MasteryPaths to accelerate personalized learning, create custom professional development courses for teachers, and expand their Canvas network to learn from other users in their area.

“The pandemic has really allowed our teachers to step up and dive in and get to know Canvas even better. Our teachers cannot wait for next school year because they’ve learned so much from our training and doing remote learning.”

– Steve Hartnett, Director of Digital Teaching and Learning