

Poway Unified School District

Crafting Consistency with Canvas LMS

 San Diego County, CA  35,000+ Students  Adopted Canvas LMS: 2014



Poway Unified School District (PUSD), the 3rd largest district in San Diego County, is “Creating Culture and Conditions to Empower World-Class Learners.” PUSD’s Technology and Innovation team identified several enduring practices “to connect the best practices of virtual instruction to in-person learning.”

THE CHALLENGE

Previously, PUSD had a learning management system that was “hit-or-miss,” particularly at the elementary level, according to Brenda Gillies, Technology and Innovation Coach. To provide a more modern, user-friendly tool for all levels, they switched to Canvas LMS.

Initially, Canvas LMS was used to varying degrees across the district, Gillies explained. Schools across PUSD needed a better way to streamline communication and course content delivery with a districtwide consensus on taking full advantage of this tool.

Like many other districts realized, the onset of the pandemic radically changed the typical school day and came with a myriad of challenges. PUSD took this as an opportunity to “expand their mindsets about learning” and the district committed to several key initiatives:

- Innovative Professional Learning Model
- Personalized Learning
- Racial Equity and Inclusive Practices
- 1:1 Technology
- Building Tech Capacity
- Virtual Learning Academy

The Technology and Innovation team later compiled stakeholder feedback – classroom teachers, teacher leaders, principals, directors, and students – to identify which practices added value to in-person instruction moving forward.

Key Insights

- Consistency is key. Using Canvas LMS as the districtwide learning management system is instrumental for streamlining communication and organizing classroom materials.
- External tool integrations with Canvas LMS allow teachers to offer various platforms for students to showcase their learning.
- The Gradebook in Canvas LMS allows teachers to monitor student progress and provides a platform for student feedback and informing instructional next steps.
- Parents and guardians can access their students’ course information in Canvas LMS and support them as they learn.

THE SOLUTION

Several key enduring practices emerged from the feedback including:

- Adaptive Learning
- Alternatives to Instruction & Assessment
- Consistency of Canvas
- Personalizing Learning and Providing Voice & Choice
- Rethinking Structures and Pacing
- Increased Cognitive Empathy & Emphasis on SEL/Relationships

During remote learning, Quizzes in Canvas LMS were especially helpful for formative assessments, and the Gradebook allowed teachers to document student assignments, quizzes, and test scores in one, consistent place. External tool integrations with Canva, Nearpod, and Google Drive allowed PUSD teachers to seamlessly promote independent learning and voice and choice from their LMS.



Being able to find all of my children's school work and class information in one place [Canvas LMS] has made it much easier to support my kids in their learning.



Parent from Poway Unified School District

CONSISTENCY WITH CANVAS LMS

Gillies said that several factors contributed to furthering Canvas LMS use at PUSD in addition to remote learning. One of those factors being the Technology and Innovation team's dedication to working directly with educators.

"We were working with this small group of teachers, and once they felt comfortable with the tool, they were telling [their colleagues], 'Hey, you're missing out on this. [Canvas LMS] is where we need to start moving and housing our content,'" Gillies said.

PUSD was also intentional about facilitating professional learning for educators in Canvas LMS.

"Before COVID, we started adopting curriculum that integrates with Canvas [LMS]. For example, Benchmark is our elementary English Language Arts program. That curriculum was housed in Canvas [LMS] so...that was one entry point that jump-started usage," Lana Nguyen, Director of Technology and Innovation, said.

To provide ongoing support for teachers and encourage LMS usage, PUSD Innovation Coaches have also created a YouTube channel full of tutorials. Teachers can choose which features, integrations, and tips and tricks to learn in this on-demand content library. Videos vary in length and complexity so that educators can choose the topic they are interested in and revisit it as often as they would like.

"Using a single learning management system [like Canvas LMS] streamlines content delivery and communications with students and families. Shared virtual schedules provide teachers and students with a structured way to organize their learning and access resources from a central location," Michael Gizzo, High School Assistant Principal at PUSD, said.

PERSONALIZING LEARNING WITH VOICE AND CHOICE

Understanding that learner profiles changed and the pandemic accelerated these changes, PUSD adapted its practices accordingly. When students can choose what, how, and the pace at which they learn, they are more likely to engage in learning. By offering personalized learning focused "on students' strengths, interests, and aspirations," they are providing more "relevant and meaningful learning experiences" in Canvas LMS.

Personalized learning is as impactful for teachers as it is for students. PUSD has incorporated this same individualization into its professional learning program. Learn more about how meaningful professional learning opportunities support teacher retention and increase student learning.

THE RESULTS

From housing course content to streamlining teacher-family communication and personalized learning, Canvas LMS was a valuable tool as PUSD ushered in a more consistent digital learning experience for teachers, students, and their families.

"We encouraged all teachers and students at our schools to use Canvas LMS...this was one of the silver linings that came out of the pandemic." Associate Superintendent of Technology and Innovation Dr. Jennifer Burks said.