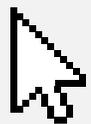




How to choose the best LMS for your school

A decision guide on differentiating,
selecting and implementing the right
software.



As the core instructional platform, a learning management system (LMS) is fundamental to supporting high-quality teaching and learning. Therefore, it is critical that decision makers evaluate goals, infrastructure and needs to choose the right solution for their schools.

An LMS that fully supports instructional goals helps teachers and administrators to prepare their students, classrooms, and schools for future success. **So, it is important to choose wisely.**

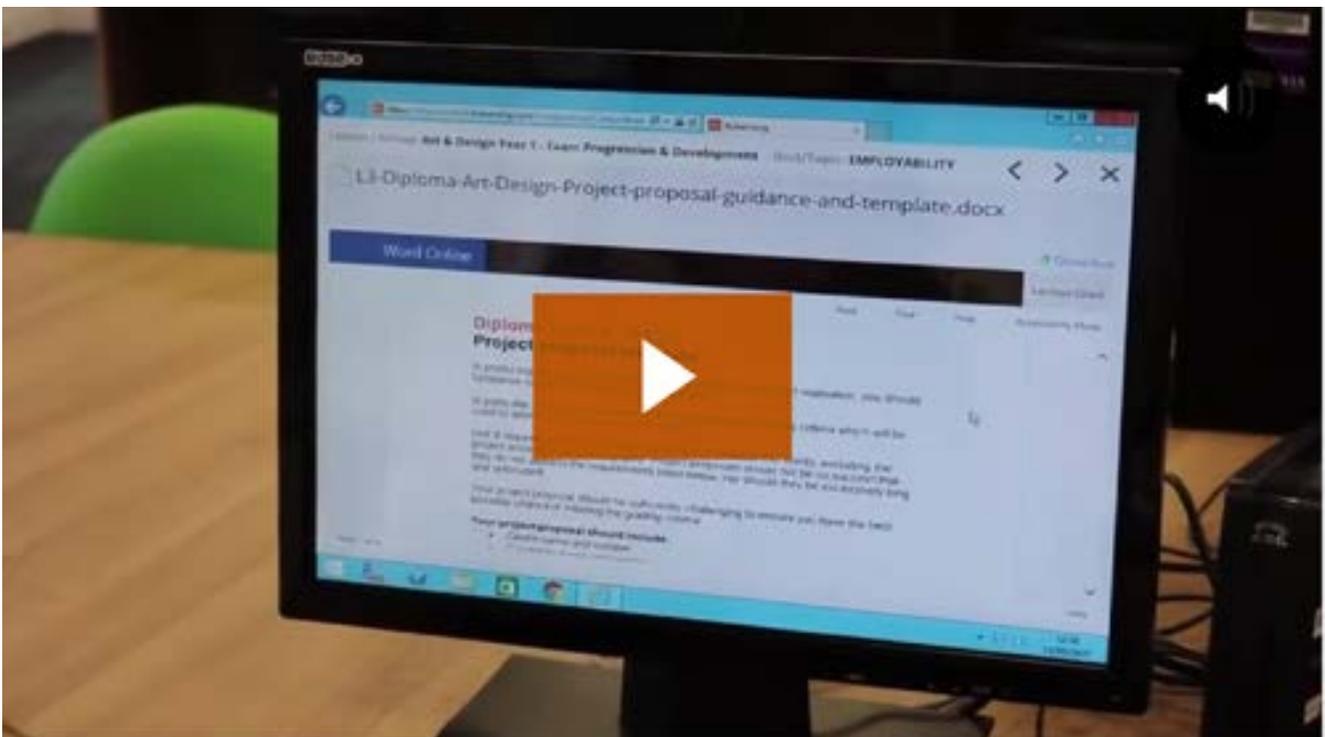
With so many learning management systems available, how can education leaders choose the best solution for their institutions or educational networks? This decision support guide contains key considerations, advice and proven best practices from schools, municipalities and states that have successfully selected and implemented a new LMS.

itslearning is a one-stop shop for everything. You can put your resources on it, learners can easily find their work, they can go back and revise their work. The platform makes it all so much more accessible.

We spent a lot of time looking at different platforms and evaluating them. We chose itslearning and we've been really happy with our choice."

Inka Clark, eLearning Developer,
Hopwood Hall College

See the [video on the itslearning YouTube channel](#)





Strategic planning

Align the capabilities of the LMS with your educational needs and goals

Start by outlining your educational initiatives and goals. Then match these to what the LMS can provide. Consider how well it would meet your long-term needs.

Remember: What suits another school/municipality/state might not work for you. Base your considerations on your school's unique needs.

5 key considerations:

1. Does the LMS support both traditional classroom learning and online learning (blended/hybrid/remote learning)?
2. Is the LMS easy to use and saves time so teachers have more time to focus on teaching?
3. Can the LMS efficiently function as a teaching and learning hub?
4. Does it empower students to take charge of their learning?
5. Can the LMS provide easy access to data/reports to improve teaching and learning?

The LMS should be part of the wider digital roadmap for your organization. This will ensure seamless implementation and an LMS that is in sync with all other digital tools at your school.

When there is good alignment between your instructional goals and the functionalities of the LMS, this virtual learning environment (VLE) can become a powerful tool to support a personalized instruction based on learning objectives and data. But if this alignment doesn't exist or falls short, the learning platform will not be used by a majority of teachers – and the school's digital transformation will likely not succeed. **Successfully choosing an LMS involves many steps.**

Ideally, the process should begin 9 months before full implementation for large school networks. This timetable will provide a comfortable timeline for necessary evaluations, testing and implementing the system properly. This timeline could be reduced for smaller school networks and individual schools.

Here are five key steps when choosing the right LMS



1

Assemble a team

Your learning management system will be used by a wide range of people, including curriculum specialists, IT personnel, principals, teachers and students. Primary and secondary education (K-12) providers should also factor in parents. Based on your institution, your selection team should include representatives from all the relevant stakeholder groups. Creating a comprehensive team will ensure that each group's interests and perspectives are reflected in the selection process. A solid team will help accomplish two things:

1. Choosing the selected product as a team will meet the needs of all stakeholders
2. Including the team in the selection process will earn their buy-in and support

When everyone involved agrees with the choice, they're more apt to adopt the system right away – and that's more likely to happen when you have more than one person or a small group of people making the decision.

2

Define your goals

What do you want instruction to look like in your school(s)? What do you want teachers and students to be able to do? Your choice of LMS should be driven by your organization's instructional goals. Therefore it is critical that you define these goals at the outset of the process.

When defining your goals and planning your needs, it is important to think not just strategically but also systemically. The need to aggregate, analyze, report, secure, manage, and leverage the data generated in today's far more digital classroom has driven the need to invest in solutions that will benefit the whole organization."

Kelly J. Calhoun

Research Director for Gartner's K-12 Education Division

3

Conduct a needs assessment

Once you have defined your goals, you can begin to describe what you're looking for in a learning management system.

- How can an LMS help you reach these goals?
- What features are critical in supporting your vision for instruction?
- What features aren't critical but would be nice to have?

For instance, if one of your goals is to modernize your curriculum delivery and pedagogy, you will want to choose an LMS that can align your curriculum across your school/network and help you personalize instruction. If data-driven instruction is a key goal, you will want an LMS that includes learning analytics to help teachers group students appropriately and plan their instruction. If you want teachers to learn from one another, then you should choose an LMS that makes it easy for teachers to share lessons and collaborate online.

Will the LMS improve teaching, learning and, eventually, student outcomes?

5

Choose a solution

Once you have defined your goals and your needs, included representatives from all stakeholder groups in your selection process, and have done your due diligence in evaluating all your possible solutions, you will have a good foundation for successfully choosing an LMS to support your digital transformation. The process doesn't end here — throughout the implementation phase and beyond, continue to evaluate the system you have chosen to make sure it meets your school's needs.

4

Evaluate products

Once you have outlined your needs, it is time to evaluate solutions that can meet these needs. This might involve drafting a Request for Proposal (RFP), inviting LMS providers to give presentations, and visiting reference sites to learn more about how they are using their learning platforms.



Beyond Costs and Features: Five Key Factors to Consider

As you evaluate learning management systems that can help you meet your instructional goals, you will find a wide range of options available. These options include free systems with basic functionality, hybrid systems where you can pay more for additional features, open-source systems without licensing fees, and enterprise-level systems that include full service and support. While free and open-source systems might seem attractive to schools with limited budgets, it is important to understand [the total cost of ownership involved in adopting an LMS](#).

Consider not only the upfront cost of the software, but also the rollout costs. These costs could include training staff to use the LMS, making sure it works well with your other software programs, building courses and integrating content from publishers, and supporting users. With open-source platforms, you could likely also need fulltime developers to keep the platform up to date to support your educational needs. When these expenses are taken into account, you might find there is little difference in cost between a “free” LMS and an enterprise system.

As you consider what features you want in an LMS, keep in mind to how the system supports the pedagogical strategies

you want to employ at your school(s). You should also consider whether the LMS will enable teachers to create, deliver, and grade assessments based on learning objectives. Review if the system will support your professional learning goals by giving teachers easy access to professional development resources from a single, central location. Your system should also give teachers the ability to collaborate, share lessons with one another and engage in other forms of collegial learning.

We were previously using a free platform, Google Classroom, which was fairly easy to use but it was severely lacking in terms of reporting functions and ability to track student progress and follow up on students. That changed when we implemented itslearning – now we have the capabilities to monitor student progress as well as better collaboration and communication. We now have a cohesive online learning system, and the implementation process was very smooth.”

James Bruton, Digital Learning Team Leader,
Bristol City Council

Why a free or open source LMS could cost more

Free	Open-source	itslearning (Enterprise SaaS)
No installation required	Requires installation and set-up	No installation required
Free - but limited license	Cost may increase based on usage	Certainty of cost - license based
Hosted on cloud	Server space - recurring cost	Hosted on cloud servers
No guarantee of scalability	No guarantee of scalability	Easy Scalability
Limited integration options	Limited integration options	Customizable integrations
Limited guaranteed upgrade path	Updates must be done manually	Automated updates
Minimal Support	No support and training from provider (training via user forums or external partners)	Support and training
No customization	User responsible for customization	Customization
Potential data privacy issues	User must maintain and upgrade data security	High degree of data security and privacy (ISO 27001 certified, GDPR compliant)

We switched to itslearning because it was aligned to our most important needs – good communication tools and the ease with which to share and collaborate on work.”

Isabelle Marx

Deputy Director, Collège Sainte Véronique, Belgium

Usability

An easy to use LMS will encourage widespread user adoption.

- Consider how easily stakeholders can accomplish their tasks?
- Is it intuitive to create and post assignments, share feedback with students, launch discussions, collaborate with colleagues, and use the system?
- How much training will these tasks require?

One of the key factors to consider is whether the system supports a single sign-on. Can students, teachers, parents, and administrators access all the tools and content they need from a single login? Will the LMS provide course curriculum and content that is already organized and ready to use?

Privacy & Security

When you evaluate an LMS, ensure that it is compliant with regional data security regulations, such as [GDPR in Europe](#), and provides the necessary data protection.

“Learning management systems contain a lot of sensitive personal data that is protected in many jurisdictions,” says Glenda Morgan, another education analyst for Gartner.

She also notes, “chief information officers at educational institutions want to have the certainty that this data is not being compromised and is being kept in locations and under conditions allowed by applicable laws and regulations. Most CIOs do not feel that this kind of certainty is provided by free providers.”

Integration

The LMS you choose should integrate with your student information system, instructional software, and other third-party software. To ensure seamless integration with these systems, look for an LMS that supports the Learning Tools Interoperability (LTI) framework, Common Cartridge and other industry standards published and maintained by the IMS Global Learning Consortium. You should also consider whether the provider offers content integration services as part of its solution.

Reliability

Implementing an LMS requires a significant investment in time and resources. To protect this investment, choose a stable, experienced, mature and well-respected provider who can support your needs well into the future.

It is crucial that the LMS is reliable and can guarantee uptime that is industry standard or above. itslearning guarantees a market leading uptime.

Training & Support

The level of support you receive is integral to the success of your LMS initiative – and it should be a key factor in your decision making process.

Consider the following:

- Is support for both end users and system administrators included as part of the LMS package? Is staff training available?
- Are these services included in the contracted cost of the system?
- Can the provider help with setting up the system, tailor it to a school's needs, import course material, and create a digital content repository?

Effective LMS Selection

We've designed this selection and implementation process to guide you through the steps for an effective and successful LMS implementation. This recommended process and timeline is based on successful implementations for hundreds of large institutions and school networks. Single schools and smaller networks might be able to carry out some of the steps outlined here in less time.

Assemble

9 MONTHS BEFORE LAUNCH

- Define instructional goals and requirements
- Determine change management approach
- Identify stakeholders, including curriculum specialists, IT personnel, principals, teachers, students. (Primary and secondary schools should also consider involving parents or representatives from the Parent Teacher Association (PTA))
- Develop a communications plan to inform everyone who will be affected
- Designate an LMS implementation team and project leader
 - Consider having committees to oversee each aspect of the project
 - Assign roles and responsibilities

Research

7 MONTHS BEFORE LAUNCH

- LMS project team to research and create a high level project plan, with clearly defined goals, milestones and processes to measure success
- Calculate ROI (Return on Investment) and TCO (Total Cost of Ownership)
- Prepare a plan for providing training and support
- Identify successful implementation stories and research thought leaders
- Translate requirements into necessary capabilities
- Put together a policy for governing security, permissions, and the setup of user profiles within the system that is aligned to data security laws in your region
- Develop a list of partners and technologies to research
 - Consider your data and operations needs (some LMS require considerable IT knowledge)
 - Determine how you want to set up automatic notifications, alerts, and reports in your LMS
 - Determine your course structure and curriculum support the LMS needs to provide
 - Know what types of evaluations must be supported with your system
 - Consider how you want student data to be extracted and whether the LMS aligns with your SIS (student information system)

RFP & Select provider

5 MONTHS BEFORE LAUNCH

- Time for reference calls and visits
- Schedule demonstrations
- Test and compare based on your priorities list
- Put out an RFP (Request for Proposal)
 - Describe requirements for problems you would like solved
 - Translate requirements into LMS capabilities
- Select provider and sign contract

The Implementation Process

Every school has its own requirements and goals. As your education partner, we are committed to providing real solutions for the real classroom situations at your school. At itslearning, we've found that a measured implementation approach works best.

Plan

3 MONTHS BEFORE LAUNCH

- Project team and LMS provider to create a detailed project plan, with clearly defined goals, milestones and processes to measure success
- Review your current curriculum design process and how this might change with a new platform
- Create a process for migrating your existing content to the new system
- Put in place a process for aligning your content with standards/learning objectives
- Identify who will have access to add content to the platform, where it will reside, how it should be tagged, and how it should be vetted
- Determine how you want to set up automatic notifications, alerts, and reports in your LMS
- Develop a training and support plan
- Design protocol for Learning Data and Analytics
- Establish KPIs
- Initiate change management activities

Integrate

2 MONTHS BEFORE LAUNCH

- Integrate with SIS and other apps
- Ingest content repositories
- Create course templates
- Train core staff, administrators and system administrators
- Put in place a local support team
- Consider training a pool of superuser students (for secondary and higher education) to train other students
- Roll out a safe environment to a limited set of users
- Have a plan for collecting feedback
- Evaluate and adjust

Launch

GO LIVE WITH FULL IMPLEMENTATION

- Be prepared and ensure your support teams and systems are in place
- Continue providing training for staff and students
- Offer best practices sessions and support
- Develop a digital learning roadmap for future expansion
- Review and adjust

Post Launch

ASSESS & IMPROVE

- Create an onboarding process for new employees and students
- Stay on top of product updates
- Do a yearly review of your LMS implementation and adjust or improve as needed
- Create a plan for further use or expansion of your LMS initiative
- Review and adjust your digital roadmap
- Continue to offer best practices, training, and support for users

How we can help you...

Implementing an LMS can be a complex process – but it doesn't have to be. Let itslearning guide you every step of the way. Our customizable training and implementation services will ensure that your LMS project is a success, from the initial planning stages all the way through evaluation and review.

To learn more about itslearning for digital curriculum management, visit itslearning.com

