Implementing a Successful Personal Learning Strategy to Support Student Voice and Choice

When Clear Creek Independent School District in Texas, realized its current learning management system (LMS) was only being used by 15 percent of its 41,000 students, they knew it was time for an overhaul. "That's a lot of money to spend on a solution that no one is using," said Andrea Winters, director of learning technology.

Around the same time the district put into place a new strategic plan that emphasized engaging students through an array of personalized opportunities and experiences.

“We wanted a platform that would help all of our students and our expanding ESL population, which encompasses 57 different home languages,” said Winters. In an effort to reach those digital natives and decrease learning gaps, she and a cohort team began searching for an LMS that ensured that no student was left behind.

The Overwhelming Choice

As a first step, the district came up with a list of non-negotiable criteria that answered the question, “In our dream world, what would our LMS do for us?” The list of must-haves included a clean, K-12-friendly interface, the fewest numbers of clicks to access important information, user-friendly icons, a searchable learning objective repository and the ability to import multiple types of learning (videos, free LTI learning tools, multimedia, etc.).
We started with 15, narrowed it down to five systems, and three vendors did demonstrations in front of 85 committee members who, in turn, selected itslearning as Clear Creek ISD’s new LMS in May 2015. “It was the overwhelming choice of our committee members,” said Winters.

Rapid Implementation and Quick Adoption

By June 2015, Clear Creek ISD was already administering professional learning to all of its principals and district administrators via a process that was “completely supported by itslearning,” said Winters. One month later the district held an administrative retreat and full, conference-style professional learning on the new system. Teachers were trained in August and the system was live and ready to roll out for the new school year. “We felt it was important for them to utilize the LMS for the first time as learners – not as facilitators or teachers,” said Winters. “That had a big impact on our log-ins and helped speed up implementation.”

Winters noted that by going beyond the traditional learning management system, itslearning allows the district’s teachers to easily plan and manage their curriculum. “We are saving time and driving efficiency by allowing teachers, curriculum managers and parents quick and easy access to courses, resources and student progress.” She added that it also facilitated a new level of teamwork. “It encourages best practices around course design and pedagogy through modeling and collaboration.”

Giving Learners a Voice and a Choice

Students have easily transitioned to the education platform, as well. With an average unique user log-in of nearly 30,000 per day – and with the average user logging in four times daily and using it for 40 minutes per session – Clear Creek ISD’s new LMS is already proving itself as a 21st Century learning platform. “When I see how long students are logged into the system, that tells me that they’re using it for learning,” said Winters, “and not just as an information repository.”

For the district, itslearning also serves as the vehicle for offering “voice and choice” to teachers and students across all grades. “They can go into the system and really have a choice of how they want to learn a specific objective,” Winters explained. “Teachers can give students many different options to engage with the content and to show proficiency based on key learning objectives.”