

7 Best Practices for Getting Faculty Buy-In for a New LMS

The Challenge

Getting faculty buy-in for your LMS is imperative for success and is one of the main challenges faced by any institution. If faculty don't buy in, the implementation falls flat.

The Approach

Communication is key. Being transparent about your goals, along with continually training and modeling best practices, enables faculty to see the value of the LMS firsthand.

The Result

When faculty buy in to your LMS, the benefits it provides ripple out to affect students, straggling late adopters, and all other stakeholders, enabling everyone to build on each other's successes.

You've carefully vetted the field and selected an LMS that has the potential to enhance and transform the classroom experience for teachers and students. That's great, but getting faculty buy-in for a new LMS can be challenging, to put it lightly.

In fact, adoption is a top concern for any educational institution purchasing a new technology—one that will ultimately determine an initiative's success more than any other factor.

But making a systematic shift to successful implementation doesn't have to keep you up at night. Just follow these seven guidelines, and you'll be off to a great start.

1. Communicate Before, During, After, and Often

A great deal of thought and careful analysis goes into the selection of an LMS, but sometimes the 'why' is not clearly communicated to the end users (e.g., students, faculty, staff, and parents). It is important to carefully craft the messaging related to the release of your new LMS to include the possibilities and educational goals of the tool you've chosen.

After deciding to make the switch away from an LMS that was not viewed positively by most of its teachers, Jefferson County Schools in Colorado (Jeffco) knew that some re-branding needed to be done to help teachers understand how the new LMS was different from their previous experiences and to see the transformative effect this new LMS could have on classrooms.

A few months prior to the debut of the new LMS, Jeffco released a **video** to its schools, highlighting the key features of Schoology in an effort to create interest and generate some positive buzz about this new tool.

Planning for frequent and diverse modes of messaging is critical to getting the word out, especially if your school district is large. Email messaging, video announcements, and blurbs in school and parent newsletters paired with face-to-face communication delivered by school-based technology leaders can help raise end-user awareness and lay the groundwork for training opportunities.

Also, having online collaborative spaces opens the lines of communication so faculty can get much of the support they need from their peers on their own. **Faculty-led groups** played a critical role in the success of Jeffco's LMS rollout.

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2. Provide Iterative Training, Not Training Events

Moving teachers from awareness about a tool to implementation in their classrooms requires repeated opportunities for training, practice, training, and more practice. It may be easier to provide a one-day comprehensive training event on the features your LMS offers, but user adoption following these one-hit wonders is limited.

For the best results, break up training events into frequent and focused smaller trainings to allow users to practice between sessions.

Also, providing **on-demand training** information and in-house experts will increase teacher buy-in. A resource bank of short how-to videos or written step-by-step guides curated and developed by your institution can provide the just-in-time assistance that moves an end user past a point of frustration.

It's worth developing accessible experts at each school for supporting and sustaining LMS buy-in. School-based teacher-librarians or technology integration specialists can be equipped as in-house experts. This gives faculty more confidence to integrate the LMS into daily instruction since help is just down the hall should any potential road bumps arise.

3. Eat Your Own Dogfood

Asking teachers to change their practice without a similar change in administrative practice creates a double standard that can undermine the success of an LMS rollout.

One of the more impactful changes you can make to your practice is **using the LMS to deliver professional development** content and courses. This lends credence to the tool and models various ways teachers can use the LMS for instructional purposes.

Modern LMSs like Schoology have a strong social networking component that is ideal for district messaging and the facilitation of professional learning communities. Content and grade-level groups can be easily created to provide a collaborative forum for lesson sharing across schools.

You can also encourage collaboration via tools separate from your LMS, if it doesn't already provide them, but more systems to juggle means more frustrations. When collaborative components are built in to the LMS, faculty are more likely to use them and benefit from the simpler workflow.

Using your LMS as the primary communication tool between leadership and faculty is an important step in achieving widespread buy-in, continuous engagement, and product understanding.

4. Ease of Use Should Be Main Consideration

One of the main purposes of an LMS is to save teachers time through auto-grading, insightful analytics, and excellent workflow advantages for delivering content and collecting and assessing work. These savings, however, come down the road. Initially, teachers must invest time in learning the tool and converting their existing content into the LMS platform.

A good LMS will have a **streamlined, user-centered interface** that is intuitive and simple to use, limiting the initial investment of learning time. Factoring usability into your initial LMS decision benefits students, faculty, and other end users tremendously in both implementation and daily use (See graph below).

In addition to selecting an LMS with a manageable learning curve, school leaders can generate teacher buy-in faster by creating and sharing ready-to-use curricular resources. Content experts and

school leaders can build rubrics and common unit assessments in the LMS, creating take-aways that can be implemented in classrooms immediately. With minimal LMS expertise and effort, teachers can implement these common resources in their classrooms. Providing a pool of resources like this provides them with a great first experience that highlights the ease of use and data-rich benefits of using an LMS.

5. Support the Early Adopters

It would be great if rolling out an LMS were as simple as flipping a switch, but earning teacher buy-in will take time. Luckily, there are always some early adopters that will jump on board right away. Start small, **support those early adopters**, and allow them to be your evangelists. Provide strategic opportunities for these teachers to tout the benefits the LMS brings to their classrooms and showcase their use of the platform.

Newsletters and classroom videos are great for this. They help other teachers see how the LMS can transform their classrooms as well. Just remember that some teachers will need more time and encouragement to make the transition.

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The Impact of an Easy-to-Use LMS After Less Than a Year

Usage Skyrockets with Easy-to-Use LMS at Jefferson County, CO



Jefferson County Public Schools in Colorado, a Schoology client since 2012, saw an astounding increase in faculty buy-in within the first year of using the platform, compared with 10 years using their previous LMS.

6. Embed Your LMS in the Institutional Culture

Keep your LMS in the foreground as a critical learning tool in your district through modeling its use for messaging, professional development, and resource curation and sharing.

Make sure to develop a plan to onboard new teachers as they join your institution and maintain iterative training cycles that provide multiple opportunities for teachers to access support and resources whether they are ready to dive in or simply want to take some baby steps.

And remember the faculty-led groups mentioned above? When collaboration is the new normal, everyone benefits, especially new teachers.

7. It's All About the Learning

Teachers, by nature, are learners, and most are receptive to new technology that will improve their practice and student learning. So continue to emphasize the features of your LMS that align with these goals.

When teachers see how student grouping features in an LMS like Schoology can help differentiate content for learners and how rich data on student learning aligned to standards and learning objectives is only a click away, it will become readily apparent how your LMS is a win-win for everyone. ●

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