



Teachers Become the Students

*Reinventing Professional Learning
at London District Catholic School Board*

Overview

The government of Ontario has a program that lets teachers support student learning through a provincial virtual learning environment, or learning management system (LMS) for blended learning and online courses. In addition, the Ontario Educational Resource Bank (OERB) offers an array of digital learning resources for teachers.

Under a multi-year agreement signed with the Ontario Ministry of Education, Brightspace is the government's LMS of choice. This provides students and teachers across the province with access to many tools, including Brightspace ePortfolio, mobile learning, and an integration with board Student Information Systems. The program was recently extended to allow school boards across Ontario to leverage Brightspace for staff professional learning.

The London District Catholic School Board (LDCSB) is taking full advantage of the program. They've brought Brightspace into their network of schools to foster 21st century hybrid learning.

Now the board is extending its use of Brightspace to leverage the LMS for the delivery of professional learning curriculum to staff, teachers, and principals. In a two-phase pilot, LDCSB first used Brightspace to deliver and track board staff compliance to legislated workplace safety training. In the second phase, spearheaded out of John Paul II Catholic Secondary School, the LDCSB is exploring Brightspace as a delivery medium for professional learning of school principals.

AT A GLANCE

Client	London District Catholic School Board
Students	18,000
Staff	3,300+
Level	K-12
Solution	Brightspace Professional Learning solution

CHALLENGE

- Deliver professional learning curriculum to all board staff and transient teaching population
- Meet and track compliance of regulated workplace safety training
- Scale delivery of supervisory course content to principals across the school board and potentially across the province
- Expand staff awareness of the Brightspace platform

SOLUTION

- Consolidate tools and deliver professional learning through one platform
- Integrate Brightspace with Microsoft® Office 365 to provide even more learning tools for teachers and students

RESULT¹

- Approaching 100% completion of workplace safety training among a total "classroom" size of 3,300
- Countless hours saved through centralized tracking of teacher and non-teaching staff completion rates (required for compliance)
- 100% awareness of Brightspace among board staff, principals, and teachers
- 2.5X increase in Brightspace usage by teachers within the classroom
- Opportunity to scale supervisory course content across the board via online delivery



Challenge

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING FOR TEACHERS ON THE MOVE

As school boards go, the LDCSB serves a large area. It's nearly 800 square miles in size. With 45 elementary and 9 secondary schools, the board supports 18,000 students across various counties.²

In part due to the large geographic area it serves, the LDCSB has more teachers working on a part-time and supply basis than ever before. This transient teaching workforce often transitions between schools and is creating new training challenges for the LDCSB. The board has had to look at new, more efficient ways to deliver professional learning curriculum to staff. They've also had to reassess how they manage and monitor compliance to legislated workplace training programs.

“Under the Occupational Health and Safety Act, we must ensure our teachers and staff members think, practice, and feel a personal responsibility for occupational health and safety,” says Jon McGoey, a teacher at John Paul II Catholic Secondary School and Curriculum Leader with LDCSB. “In the past, teachers ‘belonged’ to a school and health and safety training (and the tracking of successful completion of training) would have fallen to the principal. But with more of our teachers working part-time and moving between schools, responsibility for administering and tracking health and safety compliance shifted from the school principal to the board—a big undertaking when you consider the board employs thousands of teachers. It was taking half of a person’s job at the board office to track completion rates and it was a real nightmare to administer,” he adds.



FROM DISCONNECTED TOOLS TO A COMPLETE LMS PLATFORM

Originally LDCSB used a variety of disconnected tools to deliver mandated training, such as workplace health and safety training, to their staff. Completion and compliance were tracked in a spreadsheet. However, with the Ontario government program in place, the LDCSB took the opportunity to leverage Brightspace. They were able to replace their existing mix of tools with a single platform.

“Our teachers were using different tools for their professional learning than they were for teaching,” explains Ed Clark, Coordinator of Innovative and Collaborative Technology Services for the LDCSB. “By using Brightspace within the classroom and for staff professional learning, we create more alignment and give our educators the opportunity to experience Brightspace as a learner. This creates familiarity with the platform and a greater understanding among our teachers for the need for clarity and regular feedback. As educators, we may not always see the importance of this kind of ongoing communication, but as learners we can readily see the gaps in a student’s experience.”

100% FAMILIARITY WITH BRIGHTSPACE

Clark believes using Brightspace to deliver workplace safety compliance courses and track teachers’ successful completion also guarantees board-wide familiarity with the platform. “We have 3,000+ staff and it’s required by the Ontario government that everyone complete the Worker Health and Safety Awareness (WHSa) training. This means 100% of our staff have to log into Brightspace to complete the course. Not all of our staff members are in front of the classroom, and a number of our employees had never heard of Brightspace. Now everyone is aware of the platform.”

Clark also notes that teachers’ and principals’ greater familiarity with Brightspace has led to a 2.5X increase in classroom use over the previous year.³ “We are absolutely seeing an increase in enthusiasm for Brightspace as a teaching platform. WHSA training got them into the platform, but once they were there they realized how great it is, and they are now starting to use it more as a teaching tool. For instance, we have more teachers now using the Quiz tool as a way to confirm student knowledge.”

As a teacher and curriculum leader, McGoey likes that Brightspace can deliver content in small, bite-sized chunks. “It keeps a teacher’s time commitment down to around 10 minutes at a time. This means they can start and stop and complete the full workplace health and safety training module over span of five breaks.”

Solution continued



MICROSOFT OFFICE 365 INTEGRATION MAKES FOR SEAMLESS LMS USE

To further encourage staff adoption of Brightspace, LDCSB has integrated the platform with Microsoft Office 365. This offers teachers the best of both applications and even more reasons to actively use Brightspace.

“We recognize that each platform has its strengths and duplicating information can create confusion. Brightspace is a great learning platform, and Office 365 offers unlimited data storage and all of the online apps our teachers and students use for content creation,” says Clark. “So we brought the two applications together—for instance embedding Office 365 email within Brightspace, to provide our users with a fully integrated environment.”

Clark adds that to complete the user experience, LDCSB has also integrated other popular third party tools with the Brightspace platform. They’ve had success bringing in tools used by teachers and students for mind-mapping and interactive career guidance.

PRINCIPALS ARE STUDENTS TOO

Principals within the LDCSB are also heading back to “school” using Brightspace for their professional learning. Principal Daniel P. Howard of John Paul II Catholic Secondary School recently created the first course in what he hopes will be an online professional learning curriculum aimed at fellow supervisors.

For the last year, principals across the LDCSB have tapped into the Brightspace platform’s anywhere, anytime learning capabilities to take Howard’s course, called “Instructional Leadership for Improving Student Achievement.” They’re learning more about an eight-year-old student support initiative to help applied students improve their achievement.

Course content, created and delivered through the LMS, connects to evidence-based instruction. The lessons coach principals in working with protocols and even guides them on how to hold sessions and workshops. Currently, all related course materials are housed in Office 365 and accessed through links embedded in Brightspace. In the next revision of the course, materials will be migrated into Brightspace.

Howard has also been asked to present the course approach to all principals province-wide, and sees the benefit of having an LMS backbone to expand the reach of supervisory courses. “I think this is just the beginning in our learning of how to leverage Brightspace to have more courses like this one, where we are able to convey a process behind the principles, delivered online in a highly efficient way,” says Howard. “Especially if this course is well-received and accepted as a provincial format. Just think about the economics of scale and cost savings we can achieve through better knowledge sharing across boards.”



To date, almost 100% of staff across the LDCSB have successfully completed their WHSA training using Brightspace.⁴ Using the platform for compliance-related training has saved board staff, school secretaries, and principals time otherwise spent chasing down compliance among staff and teachers. Furthermore, the compliance training has given teachers and principals far greater exposure to the platform. This familiarity has led to a 2.5X increase in Brightspace use in the classroom.⁵

The board is now looking to move its professional learning efforts past compliance to use Brightspace to deliver the New Teacher Induction Program (NTIP). NTIP is curriculum required by the Ontario Ministry of Education targeted at new teachers transitioning into the profession.

As for Howard's supervisory course content, principals across the board can now access the materials through Brightspace to improve their capacity to help students boost their achievement. The ability to take the course online has reduced the need for costly in-service days. Howard has hopes that the course, which has been well-received by his principal counterparts in the London area, will be approved by the Ontario Ministry of Education for use province-wide. Hopefully it will allow more supervisors to benefit from knowledge sharing delivered through Brightspace.

About D2L

D2L is the software leader that makes the learning experience better. The company's cloud-based platform—Brightspace—is not a common one-size-fits-all learning management system (LMS). It's easier to use, more flexible, and smart. With Brightspace, you can personalize the experience for every learner to deliver real results. The company is also a world leader in learning analytics: its platform predicts learner performance so that you can take action in real time to keep them on track. Brightspace is used by learners in higher education, K-12, and the enterprise sector, including the Fortune 1000. D2L has operations in the United States, Canada, Europe, Australia, Brazil, and Singapore. | www.brightspace.com

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