

Canvas and Sweetwater Union High School District

Nation's second-largest union high school district picks Canvas for its 1:1 iPad initiative



At a Glance

- Nation's second-largest union high school district needed an LMS for its 1:1 iPad initiative
- Tech director put a premium on support, responsiveness, and sense of partnership
- Teachers gravitated toward Canvas and the support and implementation have lived up to expectations

The Challenge

Sweetwater Union High School District near San Diego is the second largest union high school district in the country. So when it decided to eventually equip each of its 44,000 7-12th graders with an iPad to deliver a blended learning environment, every decision about how to implement this 1:1 initiative was under a microscope.

David Damico, Sweetwater's director of Educational Technology and Alternative Education, led the team that deployed 6,500 iPads to teachers and 7th grade students in July 2012. Sweetwater's plan includes providing all students with personal devices over the next six years—adding a grade level each year.

"We're pushing to bring the whole district into a 21st-century framework and have teachers and parents more connected," he said. "We were looking to stay relevant, because kids have many educational choices as they come into middle school."

The district saw the virtues of giving students a dashboard with information about their progress in school and the opportunity to have "class" even when they're not physically at school. With the hardware decision made, Damico set out to find the best learning management system to pair with the iPads.

The Decision

Damico was looking at Desire2Learn, Moodle, Haiku, and some open-source solutions when he found out about Canvas, which had been used as part of an independent iPad pilot at one of the district's middle schools.

"[Canvas'] iPad integration really stood out to me," he said, and the fact that the software was built as a hosted solution, or

“I feel good about the choice. Instructure went out of their way to adapt. They’re very easy to work with, responsive, and flexible.”

— David Damico, director of Educational Technology and Alternative Education, Sweetwater Union High School District



“Their response time to our needs has been great; the partnership has been great.”

— David Damico, director of Educational Technology and Alternative Education, Sweetwater Union High School District

as a “second generation” LMS, as he put it, was also appealing. Teachers told him they found it intuitive and very user friendly, and they and Damico also liked the following features:

- **SPEEDGRADER**
- **VOICE/VIDEO CHAT FEATURE**
- **WYSIWYG EDITOR**
- **GENEROUS STORAGE SOLUTION**
- **EPORTFOLIO**
- **DRAG AND DROP TO MOVE FILES AND POPULATE CONTENT**

Damico narrowed the options to three and gave a group of teachers access codes. They immediately gravitated toward Canvas.

“I kept trying to encourage people to look at the others, too, and kept getting pushback,” he said. Finally he decided to “have the common sense to listen to teachers using it everyday—they were unanimously enthusiastic about Canvas.”

The Result

The district signed its deal with Instructure in June of 2012, and the system was up and running when the students got their iPads in late July.

“Our Instructure team followed through on making sure things were getting done, and the implementation was really good all the way through,” Damico said. “That’s very important to a buyer like me responsible for such a big initiative—you don’t want people complaining.”

Many teachers are integrating Canvas seamlessly into their classrooms by posting content, resources, and at-home quizzes to supplement in-class instruction. The district’s Curriculum and Instruction and Educational Technology departments also use Canvas to create professional development resources. This provides an effective way for teachers to learn more about Common Core State Standards and using iPads and other technologies in the classroom.

To demonstrate how smoothly Canvas is running in his district, Damico explained that he visited a school in another district using Moodle. After demonstrating what his district is doing, the Moodle users are now interested in Canvas.

“For a company whose primary focus has been higher education to have transitioned into K-12, [Instructure] has done it well,” Damico said. “They’re very easy to work with, responsive, and flexible.”