

Growing with Canvas: A 10-Year Adventure

Howard County Public Schools

 Maryland  60,000 Students  Adopted Canvas LMS: 2013



Located right between Baltimore and Washington, DC, Howard County Public School System (HCPSS) is committed to learning and leading with equity. They have 78 schools serving just under 60,000 students and staffed by 5,000 teachers. Over the last decade, they have built a central hub for their community using Canvas LMS.

CLEAR EXPECTATIONS FOR EVERYONE

An LMS is a powerful tool. However, without clear guidelines, access to so many capabilities can be overwhelming. Howard County wanted to transform its learning management system into a central place to unite every student, teacher, family, and administrator.

“There was communication coming from many different directions,” Julie Wray, Coordinator of Instructional Technology, said. “We wanted to streamline and be more consistent with where communication was coming from.”

Additionally, many educators weren’t taking full advantage of the LMS. They used it as a gradebook—however, feedback was sometimes delayed and inconsistent. The instructional technology team saw this as a learning opportunity for every educator.

“We explained that teachers needed to maintain the gradebook throughout the year and underscored the value of timely feedback,” Audra Agnelly, Coordinator of Learning Management Systems, said.

Key Insights

- Creating a consistent homepage experience is essential to helping students feel comfortable in every course districtwide.
- Elementary students can learn with Canvas LMS. Howard County uses [Canvas for Elementary](#) and builds Canvas skills for its early learners.
- Clear communication is essential. Setting LMS expectations so everyone knows how to use Canvas eliminates ambiguity.
- Templates and Blueprints in Canvas LMS give teachers a framework for getting started with Canvas LMS.

A MASTERPIECE IN THE MAKING

Students also needed a consistent experience from elementary to high school—in terms of the skills they were building and how they accessed learning materials in their LMS. HCPSS created Canvas skills aligned with ISTE standards to ensure every student learned the digital literacy skills needed to grow. They also took advantage of [Templates](#) and [Blue Printing](#) to scale consistency.

Over the course of a decade, they have created their LMS masterpiece through intentional systemwide expectations for teachers and students, innovative courses that foster communication and community, and customized integrations with Canvas LMS. Every year, they’ve listened to their community and responded to their needs to continually improve their Canvas craft.

We use Canvas LMS pre-K to twelve. Some people say kindergartners can't use Canvas, but they can; they can use it. We created a list of basic skills that we want our students to be able to achieve in Canvas. We map them out based on when those skills should be introduced and developed, and all skills have to be applied by sixth grade when students use Canvas LMS exclusively

Julie Ray, Coordinator of Instructional Technology

CONNECTED INSTRUCTION & COMMUNICATION

For elementary and secondary teachers and students alike, the HCPSS team has created Canvas guidelines.

“Our expectations list very clearly for teachers what they must do. What is the bare minimum they must have in their Canvas course?” Melissa Daggett, Coordinator of Library Media, said.

Managing a large staff at HCPSS can be a challenge. However, sharing guidelines with every teacher helps scale consistency.

“Canvas has become an integral tool for instruction and communication in HCPSS. When fully implemented, students learn skills that develop executive function and promote college and career readiness by monitoring course progress, collaborating with others, tracking assignments and due dates, accessing instructional content, and receiving timely communications.” - [Canvas Expectations at HCPSS](#).

Their team recommends a course structure for every teacher while also allowing some flexibility so courses can adapt to specific classroom needs and teacher preferences.

“Perhaps teachers want to organize their modules by units, weeks, or quarters. We want some type of organizational structure for every module, and we encourage them to include details in Assignments so that students can access that information at any time,” Jody Jankoski, Resource Teacher Library Media, said.

INTEGRATIONS THAT CONNECT WHAT MATTERS MOST

Taking college-level courses in high school helps students prepare for their futures. Technology can facilitate their learning journey, and at Howard County, it does.

Through a custom integration with their SIS, Canvas LMS serves as a connector between Howard County and its local community college system in the dual-enrollment program, [JumpStart](#).

In addition to keeping their dual credit program aligned, Howard County's team takes advantage of the robust Canvas LTIs available such as [CidiLabs DesignPLUS](#), [Actively Learn](#), [Google Suite](#), and [FlipGrid](#) to keep students learning in a personalized, engaging, and accessible environment.

CANVAS FOR ALL

Staying connected is the key to success in many areas for K-12 schools. When an integrated, robust learning management system like Canvas comes together with a team like HCPSS dedicated to elevating every educator and student, a K-12 community thrives.

“Everyone wants their materials in Canvas LMS as they learn how Canvas works and are more involved in Canvas in the different areas across our school district,” said Audra Agnelly, Coordinator of Learning Management Systems.