**LEARNING MANAGEMENT**

**SYSTEM (LMS) RECOMMENDATION**

**Submitted to**: Debra Carr, Acting National Director, National Office of Job Corps

**Developed by**: Job Corps Operator Community

On behalf of the Operator’s Workgroup as well as the Virtual Learning Workgroup, which is a subgroup of the overall group, we are delighted to be able to submit, for your review and discussion, a recommendation for a Learning Management System (LMS). Following your initial review of our information, we would welcome the chance for an in-depth conversation with you and/or any members of your team to further the discussion.

We believe the adoption of an LMS is of fundamental importance to Job Corps’ success in a virtual learning environment, in conjunction with the acquisition of the appropriate technology for our students.

**BACKGROUND**

Since Spring Break began on March 16, 2020, the Operator Work Group has worked diligently to provide resources to the Job Corps community for the development and implementation of a distance learning model and appropriate infrastructure in support of remote and blended student learning.

After much deliberation by the Operator Work Group, and the actions of our smaller sub-group, dedicated to the development of resources to support the success of virtual learning, we have concluded that it is of vital importance that Job Corps have the support of a robust, comprehensive learning management system (LMS). We also believe there is ample support in the field for such a program, as well as the need for the increased accountability and tracking of student participation that an LMS will provide.

In the early weeks of distance learning, Job Corps rolled out Google Classrooms and Google Suites. Google Classroom / Google Suites was an immediate on-line option that all centers could have immediate access to through the Job Corps Data Center. Google Suites allowed instructors the opportunity to teach on-line in a way never experienced in Job Corps before. Similar to a baby learning to crawl, our instructors began using these resources on a tentative basis, while gradually gaining in confidence and knowledge. Thanks to a multitude of on-line training for instructors from entities such as the National Job Corps Association, our instructors have gained expertise and skills. They learned to crawl; and then to walk. Although it has many helpful resources, there is still much that Google Suites cannot do; and there is a definite need for a full LMS system. As an operator group, we all agree this is particularly relevant since we know distance learning and blended learning will continue beyond the current COVID-19 concerns; it is the new normal.

We believe that these current concerns have provided an opportunity for the Job Corps program – *and our students* – to experience the powerful resources of a LMS. A robust LMS will allow for easy transference of the existing instructional content of the Google Classrooms while providing a much richer content experience for our students. In addition, an LMS allows for easy tracking of attendance, progress and grading by instructors. Equally important is the ease of customization, so important in Job Corps, with its many different contractors and courses.

Our recommendation to adopt a learning management system as well as our specifically-recommended LMS, outlined on the subsequent pages, is based on the need for this fundamentally important resource. With the addition of the Chromebooks, distance learning and blended learning will be mechanisms used to enhance learning from this point forward.

An LMS is fully in support of National Office policy while in virtual operations status.Per Program Instruction Notice 19-17*:*

*Effective April 14, 2020, Job Corps extended spring break through May 10, 2020. Thereafter, on May 11, 2020, Job Corps will transition to virtual operations and move students from the COVID paid leave status used for spring break to a present for duty status with students participating in various aspects of the program virtually. All centers must implement distance learning with programs in place on May 11, 2020. This allows students to remain connected to the program by engaging in distance learning activities that support gains in learning and career skills training. Center operators, in the interim, should continue their existing work providing student enrichment activities.*

**Methodology:**

The virtual learning workgroup began by looking at a variety of companies which provide LMS. After much discussion and research, including an in-depth review of the current learning platform, Google Classroom/Google Suites, we decided to request presentations from two industry leaders; Schoology and Canvas. After the first presentations, done by WebEx, we realized that we needed to involve the practitioners. A second round of presentations was requested, which resulted in at least 100 participants for each of the second presentations. Among the 100 participants were instructors representing CPP, academics, a variety of CTT areas including NTCs, and CTR staff. Also observing the presentations were Center Directors and programs managers, and almost every operator was represented, to include Forest Service Centers. In total, over 220 corporate and center staff viewed presentations by Canvas and Schoology by WebEx.

All participants were asked to rate the LMS systems on sixteen different factors. Factors incorporated in the ratings included the following:

* Ease of use for staff and students
* Ease of access to other curriculum such as IXL and the Khan Academy
* Ease in allowing both synchronous and asynchronous learning
* Availability and ready access to technical support

Overwhelmingly, the ratings revealed **Canvas** as the preferred choice. The instructors were transparent in their reasons for their preferences for each of the platforms; to include this comment from an instructor at a Forest Service Center:

*I have used Canvas at a different school. I like the program; there is a lot of help offered; and it worked easily for me, who is not a “techy” person.*

However, all instructional staff saw the benefits of either Schoology or Canvas. Schoology tends to be more widely used by K-12; whereas Canvas is the leading provider for technical colleges and higher education.

As indicated, all instructors were interested in which platform offered the most comprehensive technical support as well as up-front training during implementation. Many asked, both in the chat box during the presentations, as well as in their comments on the rating sheets, about staff training. Both Canvas and Schoology provide options for staff training, but it appeared that staff rated Canvas more highly as to tech support and training.

Finally, the instructors on both sessions asked if any LMS adopted will allow for easy transference of information from the LMS to CIS. We urge that alignment with CIS be considered in the adoption of any LMS.

The workgroup reviewed all options and reviewed all recommendations by the staff. We also received and reviewed preliminary cost proposals from each company, which varied widely. After receiving a preliminary quote from each vendor, we found that even the more expensive of the options, Canvas, will cost, on average, no more than $588 per month, per center.

A candid discussion was held debating the merits of each company, to include remaining with Google Suites and not recommending an LMS. Ultimately, the many features of a comprehensive LMS led us to determine that an LMS was needed, with **Canvas** being the clear choice by the presentation participants and the workgroup.

Below is briefly summarized some of the most compelling elements of each of the programs reviewed by the participants and the work group:

**Canvas**

* Canvas was the first cloud-based LMS and is considered the leading provider.
* With 40,000+ student users as well as thousands of staff, Canvas is an ideal choice as it is well suited for large institutions managing a lot of different courses.
* Instructors can access any screen or content in three clicks or less.
* Canvas does a great job of easily integrating third-party providers such as Storyline and the other vendors that instructional staff are currently using.
* The LMS is completely customizable and includes a free content library for academic and trade support.
* Students with language barriers can experience the class in their primary spoken language.
* The Mastery Path feature aligns well with Job Corps competency based learning.
* Canvas uses a simple Rich Text Editor that allows instructors to create text, insert pictures, develop and insert videos; all of which are linked to assignments.
* The grade book is viewed as easy for students to read and interpret; allows for easy documentation of accountability and participation.
* Integrates well with third-party software such as Google Docs and Blackboard Collaborate web-conferencing software.
* Is currently in use on at least one Job Corps Center, Cascades, so the company is familiar with the Job Corps program.
* Canvas is viewed as the premier system of choice for colleges, technical colleges, and universities.
* May be considered the most expensive but is also the most comprehensive and thus, may the most able to deliver the three most essential ingredients to the instructors – 1.) Up-front and on-going staff training; 2.) Compatibility with CIS; and 3.) On-going and accessible technical support.

**Schoology:**

* Is widely used by K-12 and is considered simpler and easier to use for teachers.
* Has a lot of the same features as Canvas as to grading, accountability and tracking of participation. However, users say it takes “more clicks” than other systems.
* Both Canvas and Schoology allow for transfer of content from Google Classrooms/Google Suite.
* Schoology tends to be cost effective and thus may be a more accessible and affordable option.

**Google Suite – Google Classrooms**

* Is not a true LMS, rather is an instructional tool; a platform to host classes.
* Is the current system and is widely used by all center staff.
* Staff appreciate the ease of use and feel it is user-friendly.
* Is likely the most cost effective option but is not a LMS

**SUMMARY**

Finally, as a group, we wish to reaffirm the importance we are placing on Job Corps securing a viable LMS. With the roll-out of the Chromebooks, students will have more access to all that can be offered through on-line learning. The acquisition of an appropriate LMS will allow more effective services to both students and staff, including more effective tracking of accountability and participation.

We also want to reiterate that whatever LMS is adopted, the staff were clear that the following three elements are critical:

1.) Up-front and on-going staff training;

2.) Compatibility with CIS; and

3.) On-going and accessible technical support.

We greatly appreciate your open lines of communication with the Operator Workgroup. It has been invaluable, especially during COVID-19, and these unprecedented times. We are grateful for your leadership and thank you for your dedication and commitment to the Job Corps program.

We look forward to your feedback and again, welcome the chance for a discussion.