



Necedah Schools: Extending Learning Beyond the Classroom

Necedah Schools help students take ownership of their education and extend learning beyond the classroom

In an increasingly AI-driven world, it's hard for schools to know how to prepare students for future careers in roles that may not even exist today. Necedah Schools is embracing D2L technology to help its students learn independently, in their own time and on their own terms—giving them the skills to adapt to whatever the future holds.

AT A GLANCE

Student Number: 700

Interviewees:

- Mark Becker, Middle School/High School Principal
- Kris Saylor, Technology Coordinator
- Elizabeth Baughman, Health/PE Teacher
- Peter Lowery, Middle School Teacher
- Molly Moseley, High School Science Teacher



“We were impressed with D2L from the get-go. Their team genuinely cares about customer success; they were eager to get our input and grow the product to fit our needs.”

Mark Becker, Middle School/High School Principal

Fostering Innovation

If you pay a visit to Necedah Schools, you may not find what you expect from a small school district in rural Wisconsin. Although its entire K-12 enrollment is just 700 students, and its elementary, middle and high schools currently occupy separate wings of a single building, the district is pioneering a thoroughly modern and innovative approach to education.

The whole school environment is set up to encourage the use of technology to enhance learning, both in the classroom and beyond. This isn't just about providing every student in the district with access to their own tablet or computer; it's about making technology exciting and inspirational.

For example, the district has recently instituted a Maker Space lab for middle- and high-school students, where they are encouraged to experiment with Raspberry Pi and Lego Mindstorms devices to build robots and learn the principles of programming.

These students will graduate into a world where AI and automation may have eroded some of today's traditional career-paths. By encouraging students to explore technology in their everyday lives, Necedah

is helping them gain the skills they will need to make a positive contribution in that future society.

To reinforce this message and help students take greater ownership of their own education, Necedah wanted to build an online environment that could help extend learning beyond the classroom. The aim was to empower students to learn in their own time and on their own terms, and help teachers make the most productive use of face-to-face time in the classroom.

Finding the Right Platform

Necedah had already experimented with a learning management system (LMS), but quickly reached the limits of the platform it initially selected. Although it was simple to use for a few basic tasks, it didn't offer the full range of functionality the district needed to achieve its vision.

In particular, Necedah wanted a system that could manage student assignments and provide a repository where teachers could upload their course materials and students could showcase their work. This was becoming especially important as the school increased its emphasis on project-based work and assessing students as individuals rather than just members of a class or grade.



Necedah quickly recognized the potential of the Brightspace platform from D2L, but was concerned that the more powerful platform might be more complex to manage and difficult to use. D2L offered to run a pilot project where a small group of teachers would use Brightspace platform in parallel with the existing LMS, to prove that the solution would meet their needs.

Proving the Case for Brightspace

The pilot project showed that the Brightspace platform could deliver everything Necedah needed—and of the teachers who were involved in the project, several became strong advocates of the platform among their peers.

The district decided to go ahead with a full implementation of the solution. Working closely with the D2L implementation team, Necedah tailored the user interface to meet its exact requirements.

Necedah finds the Brightspace platform considerably more robust than its previous LMS. Because the platform is built as a responsive web application, it is compatible with almost any device that can run a web browser. As a result, it eliminates all the time

the district's technical team used to spend debugging user interface issues across multiple apps and devices. Essentially, from an IT perspective, “Brightspace just works.”

“I love having the students use the data notebooks and the portfolio feature. It allows students to share the progress of their current projects they are doing in our Maker Space lab.”

Peter Lowery, Middle School Teacher

Integration is another strong point: Necedah teachers are already using Google Docs to set up projects and share them with students for feedback, and using Padlet for online discussions and sharing photos and videos. Teachers appreciate the flexibility of the platform—they can start with a simple interface and gradually turn on additional features as and when they find a suitable use-case.

One of the most popular features with students is the Brightspace platform's first-class support for video content. Teachers can create videos to complement traditional course content, upload them to Brightspace, and set them to be released to students at specific times. Students can then watch the videos whenever is most convenient, make notes and comments directly in the Brightspace platform, and upload their own coursework for teachers' feedback.

“As a small district with just 700 students, it’s often difficult to get a vendor’s attention—but D2L really made us feel like we mattered. A couple of times we asked for a feature and D2L’s engineers implemented it within 24 hours.”

Kris Saylor, Technology Coordinator

Seeing the Big Picture

The Brightspace platform fits in perfectly with Necedah’s goal of encouraging students to learn independently, with teachers taking the role of supporting instruction rather than leading it.

Instead of confining learning opportunities to school hours and classroom sessions, the Brightspace platform empowers students to build their own timetables and learn whenever and wherever best suits their own personal needs. Meanwhile, it provides powerful tools to help teachers monitor individual student progress and ensure that everything stays on track.

Equally, because the platform provides a space where students can upload their own work, it makes collaborative and creative projects much more viable. As a result, learning becomes much more of a two-way process: students actively participate and contribute, instead of just passively absorbing instruction. This unlocks new possibilities and helps initiatives such as the Maker Space lab play a larger role in the district’s overall strategy.

Finally, it’s not just about educating the students. The Brightspace platform also acts as a stage for teachers and board members to share information and collaborate. By allowing teachers to be “students” in the system too, the Brightspace platform provides a single source for all the board’s professional development content, and makes it quick and convenient for teachers to engage.

Kris Saylor concludes: “To change the way we support our students throughout their education journey, a learning management system is not just a nice-to-have, it’s essential. By providing a single platform for content and communication, Brightspace makes it possible for students to take ownership of their education, and extend their learning outside of school hours and beyond the classroom.”

“Brightspace provides me a streamline, organized way to deliver content to my students. Students are diverse in their learning styles and Brightspace allows me to provide many different modes for content mastery. Whether it is a video tutorial or an embedded study tool, Brightspace provides choice for my students.”

Molly Moseley, High School Science Teacher