

NEO

BY CYPHER LEARNING

Mr. D Math

Turning a math tutoring class into a homeschooling online solution

Introduction

Dennis DiNoia (MR. D) has been immersed in education for over 30 years. He holds an M.A. in Education from the University of South Florida and has been a Florida State Certified Secondary Mathematics Teacher since 1988.

Now, Mr. D works with students from around the world on a variety of topics, including math, life skills, test prep, and more! He has a deep passion for helping connect educational concepts to everyday life and exposing students to endless possibilities and potential for their futures! Through his classes, curriculum, speaking engagements, Mr. D Live team, and resources, Mr. D strives to provide families with empowering solutions and a rich understanding of life!

NEO LMS is his tool of choice for delivering all of this impressive content for the past seven years. We were curious to find out how Mr. D Math started, how it evolved, and what role NEO played in all of it. We had the opportunity to pick his brain and find out how passion and technology helped him and his team expand the project, add more topics, and share his knowledge internationally.

How did you start using NEO LMS?

Dennis DiNoia, Math teacher and founder of Mr. D Math: I started writing a curriculum back in 2010 and found the NEO site. Before this, I hired a company to build a platform that we could use, but all their solution did was to store files. It was pretty bad, but at that time, with my budget, I couldn't afford much more. So coming on to the NEO site helped us grow tremendously. When I first saw NEO, **what I saw was this platform that we could never outgrow**. That's what's amazing about it.

What kind of content are you offering through the platform?

Now we have math courses, American sign-language courses, study skills courses, writing courses. We have a flamenco dance and a flamenco guitar class, and we just created a physical education class. We keep adding more programs, and our students are asking us to do that. That's one of the things about NEO; it's just so easy to continue to open new programs. **NEO provides us with that scalability** to continue adding different courses and growing our curriculum.

What do you like best about NEO LMS?

The thing that stands out to me above everything else is tech support. **Having tech support is gold for us** because support is very responsive by email. I tell other people about it, "Well, what do you like about NEO?" "Their tech support is amazing." Because the system is so robust, although I've been using it for seven years now, I still don't know everything it can do. But if I do have a question or don't understand something, the tech support guys are great.

The second thing is that **we can do our affiliate marketing** through NEO and our shopping cart. Students can order their programs from the website. It's just very, very well done. We have many bloggers who promote our programs to their blog readers through affiliate links. It's kind of a win-win in terms of helping our marketing and having our student base grow.

On the curriculum side, we love the equation editor. When building quizzes, entering equations is great, whether you're doing it in just a straight text format or if you want to do it in HTML format.

What would you say is the main benefit of using NEO from your students' perspectives?

That would be the **ability to message us** through the platform when they're taking a quiz or if they just have a question in their coursework. Parents can message us as well, but it's through the system. **This makes us stand out from competitors** that offer similar programs.

So if the students are taking a quiz and don't understand something or they got something wrong, they can send us a message right away. They can also upload their work. So we get to see their work, we can see what's happening. We can add more attempts and the due dates are flexible.

Whoever did the thinking behind this was brilliant. They took the time to think through all the different aspects of what a school looks like and how it operates. They also did it with the idea of accommodating students that are not your typical "okay, you go to class every day, this is what you need to do, and then if you don't have this done, too bad."

They also **took into account the new age of learning**, where not everybody will do math on Monday. They may not get to that until Friday. Maybe they're into sports, they're into dance, into arts or something. And our student population is a lot like that because, in the homeschool market, they do all kinds of things. They come back and work on the course when it works for them.

Give us a better understanding of how you use NEO, the benefits of using a management system:

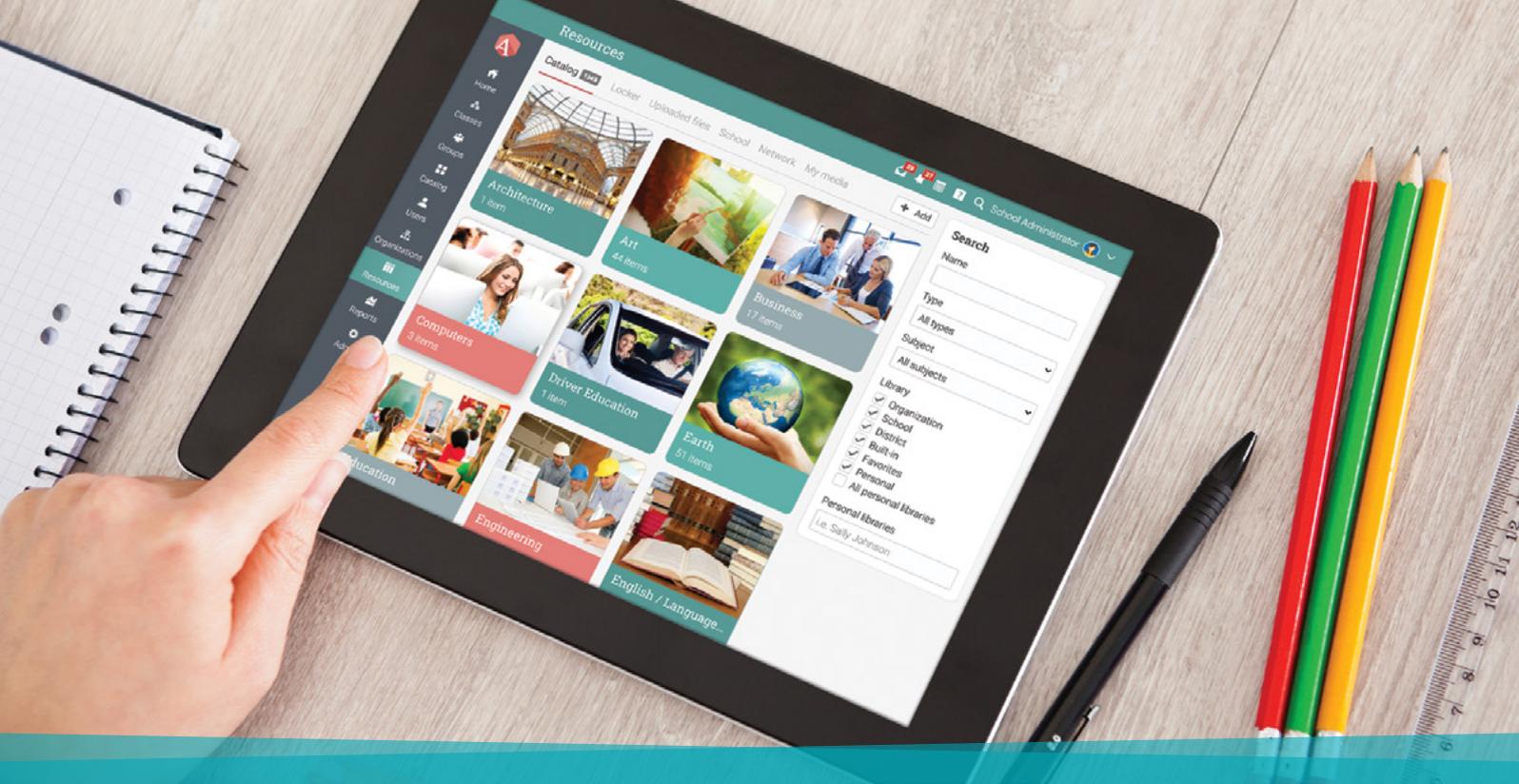
We use the self-paced and blended course features. We use assignments that can be scheduled whenever teachers see fit.

We probably run 100 classes a week. We record those classes, and then we upload them to the NEO site. This way, we have an archive for the students. They can go back to the class at any time, if they miss a class or if they just want to review something.

There's safety in what we do in terms of interacting with students. Students are free to share with us whenever they have a question, whenever they don't know the answer to something. Usually, we have ten people give us the answer, whereas normally, you've got 30 people in the classroom, and only five raise their hands. The teachers are only interacting with one person. That's not the way it works here. Here you feel like you're independent, but you're part of something at the same time.

We have students tell us often that they're not afraid to ask a question. Part of that is our staff because they are great with students, but the system allows that safety to be in place.





How has the pandemic and the shift towards remote teaching and learning affected what Mr. D Math does?

Well, here's how it affected us: **we got bigger**. This year was probably the first year that our staff struggled to keep up with the amount of growth. As for NEO, we didn't have any problem there. We had an upcoming program and we've been told, "Hey, can you accommodate 500 students?" And we're like, "Yeah, no problem." I mean, we just click a button, and the class is created, right? That was easy. Looking at it from the pandemic side of things, our company grew.

The pitfall in that kind of growth is that we don't know if students who joined our program will stay after the pandemic. Not because they don't like the program, but because they want to go back to their traditional school.

We've been doing this for several years, so we're not going to stop. In fact, we didn't change anything that we were doing. So **we were able to support other people that were trying to figure out how to do online learning**. That's what helped us as other instructors asked, "Well, can we put our course on the platform?" so we said, "Absolutely," because we want to offer more opportunities to our students.

How has NEO enabled you to remain engaged with the students?

The thing we hear most often from our students is that the site is super-easy to manage. It's well-organized, and it's in the flow. They log in, get started, and off they go. The system is so easy to use and so user-friendly that it's transparent to the student. There's no issue, and there's no learning curve. The platform's user-friendliness means that nothing gets in the way of their learning.

Our student base has doubled every year for the last three or four years. And if it weren't working the way it was working, that wouldn't have happened. NEO lets us grow. There are **no limits to what we can do with NEO**.

How do you see the future of online learning and edtech? Will you keep using an LMS?

More traditional public schools will start looking at platforms like NEO because they see that's the best way the teachers can communicate with students. I think schools are going to be more of a hybrid. You're going to have some kids who want to go back to school, some kids who don't, and now know that they can do both.

The other thing is the **flipped classroom**. There's actually a group on the NEO site for flipped classrooms where teachers share tips and tricks.

The main idea is that students do their work before they go to class. So they're getting their information through watching a video or doing research online or whatever their learning objective is. Then, they go to a class and meet with the teacher to go over questions. The teacher isn't necessarily delivering the lesson. Teachers act more as a resource to help facilitate what they're working on, to answer questions. **I think that people are interested in being more self-directed in their learning.** That's another thing that NEO has been able to provide. I got interested in doing this just because I'm so grateful for what the company has done.

