

Maine Township High School District Uses Google Apps & 1:1 Chromebooks for Education for Anytime, Anywhere Learning



About Maine Township High School District

- Google Apps for Education user since 2007
- The first district to adopt GAFE for K-12
- 1:1 Chromebooks for Education program launch 2013 school year with more than 3,800 devices

Goals

- Update email and calendaring systems for students and staff
- Provide students anytime access to information
- Roll out a 1:1 program with devices that are reliable, low maintenance, cost effective and have long battery life

Approach

- Used the full range of Google Apps for Education tools to transform learning, student cooperation, and teacher innovation
 - Brought collaboration into the classroom and extended it beyond the classroom
 - Implemented Google's Chromebook for Education 1:1 program so that students would have devices for instant access to the Internet and collaboration through Google Apps
 - Reallocated more than \$784,000 over six years that would have been spent on servers, on-premise email system and support staff
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Institution

Maine Township High School District 207, situated near O'Hare Airport in Chicago, has three schools and more than 7,000 students from a range of cultural backgrounds. The schools have been recognized as exemplary institutions through the Secondary School Recognition Program of the U.S. Department of Education, which honors schools with excellent academic and extracurricular programs, instructional aids and learning environments. In 2007, the school district adopted Google Apps for Education (GAFE), becoming the first district in the K-12 range to roll out GAFE. Faculty and staff are committed to using technology to put information at their fingertips and broaden their learning horizons.

Challenge

Maine Township High School District was behind the average school district in instructional technology when it moved to Google Apps six years ago. Schools used an outdated, text-based email system and a calendaring application that lacked many useful features. Everyone from teachers and students to parents and board members knew it was time to move to a system that would not just catch up to current technology, but move beyond that. Henry Thiele, Maine Township's Director of Technology, recommended the district consider Google Apps for Education and once they selected it he quickly worked to adopt the suite. But he wasn't satisfied with Google Apps alone. He also wanted computers for the classrooms that were easy to use, dependable and low maintenance. He wanted to really push the innovation envelope and realized in no time that Chromebooks was the best choice.

Solution

Thiele migrated 7,000 students to Google Apps in 2007 and 2008, and by 2010 had migrated 1,500 faculty members and staff to Google Apps. Students became heavy users of Gmail, Drive and Calendar, and teachers altered their curricula to incorporate the cloud-based suite. When it came to selecting new laptops to distribute to students, Thiele chose Chromebooks not only because they were the easiest and most reliable, but also because they expanded the power of Google Apps. He launched the 1:1 Chromebook pilot in 2011 after much preparation and community engagement. During the decision-making process, Thiele created a Google Form and sent it out to all parents and community members. He received hundreds of responses, all of which were answered, and he created a 1:1 FAQ that was broadly distributed. The message was loud and clear — the community wanted a focus on change management, meaning controlled, efficient, incremental and encouraging adoption. The theme for the implementation was "Being prepared to respond" and we did that by making sure every student had a working Chromebook for every class daily and creating a comprehensive FAQ list.

Google for Education

Google for Education provides open technologies to improve learning for everyone, anywhere. Solutions consist of affordable devices, innovative tools, and educational content designed for learning and built for the classroom.

- Google Apps — a free suite of communication and collaboration tools for schools including email, calendar and documents accessible from any device, at any time.
- Chromebooks — fast, secure, portable computers that allow students to collaborate and share their work. Devices starting at \$249 that are easy to setup and manage.
- Tablets with Google Play for Education — an affordable 1:1 tablet solution that you can set up and manage in minutes. Provide the right educational content by exploring thousands of teacher-approved apps, books and videos.

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“The biggest thing is anytime access to information. Those students have the world’s resources at their fingertips. One of our goals is that technology in the classroom should be as invisible as the chalkboard. With Google, the technology is not only invisible, it’s as adaptable and flexible as any tool that has ever been available in a classroom.”
—Henry “Hank” Thiele, assistant superintendent of technology & learning, Maine Township High School District 207

Benefits

The move to Chromebooks was made easy by the fact that the district was already using Google Apps. Chromebooks expanded the use of those tools, offering a way to leverage and access the information from anywhere — school or home. “The biggest thing is anytime access to information. Those students have the world’s resources at their fingertips,” Thiele said, on the move to Chromebooks. “You have a machine in kids’ hands that is online in under 10 seconds and they are working and connected to a cloud where all their resources are in one place to access at any time from any device.”

Ease of use is vital for adopting technology in the classroom -- teachers don’t want to waste precious time serving as IT admins or trying to get students up and running on a computer. “One of our goals is that technology in the classroom should be as invisible as the chalkboard. With Google, the technology is not only invisible, it’s as adaptable and flexible as any tool that has ever been available in a classroom,” Thiele said. The device “just needs to work. That is where things like 10-hour battery life and instant-on become so important.”

Chromebooks also offer a good baseline — each device is exactly the same. If one device isn’t working, it can be swapped out easily for another, with no fuss. “We wanted to ensure that no student would ever be without a device at any time of day. If a device is not working, or a student forgot to charge their device, they can get a replacement from the student-run ‘Chrome Depot’ and it’s exactly the same experience. Chromebooks are the only devices that offer that fail-safe.”

Security

With school districts under increasing scrutiny to safeguard the data of students, security and privacy are important considerations when choosing technology. Google Apps and Chromebooks are designed with security in mind, they offer automatic security updates and are easy to manage, and access to certain websites can be disabled.

“I am realistic about my resources and my team’s resources compared to Google,” Thiele said. “No school district that I know of has passed the same rigor of security testings that Google has. I might have a few people on my staff who are experts in Internet security and privacy, but Google has hundreds. There is no way that I can drum up the man hours within my walls to spend on security as Google has in their own walls. So, to me it’s much safer with Google in the long run, especially since the data is in the cloud and not sitting on someone’s laptop on their desk or on a USB drive.”

Results

Google Apps brought a culture of collaboration to students and staff at Maine Township, as well as cost savings from not having to buy and maintain servers and pay for software licenses. The district has saved more than \$784,000 over six years from the move to Google Apps, according to Thiele. Now, with 1:1 Chromebooks expected to be rolled out to all students over the next two years, the district is expanding the learning experience and making sure every pupil has the same access to information and advanced educational aids. “The key differentiation between Google and every other tool out there is how easy it is to collaborate and share in the same space. There are projects we have done here where people say ‘we just couldn’t have done this without the Google tools,’” Thiele said.

