

## Huntsville Independent School District helps close the digital divide with Google Chromebooks and Apps



### At a Glance

#### What they wanted to do

- Allow students to use the internet to collaborate more efficiently and work together in new ways
- Provide students with access to online learning resources in and out of the classroom

#### What they did

- Distribute Chromebooks to 800+ students and staff (and growing!)
- Provide all students with Google Apps for Education accounts

#### What they accomplished

- Enable students to access more information, work flexibly and become independent self-learners

### Background

Huntsville Independent School District (HISD) is a public school district in Huntsville, Texas serving 6,300 students, ages 3–18, across 9 campuses. The district focuses on delivering a broad educational experience, including access to vocational learning, to ensure the future success of its students. HISD is especially committed to providing great opportunities and access to online learning resources to close the digital divide among a student population where 70% qualify for free or reduced school meals.

### Challenge

HISD wanted to change the way instruction was delivered and use technology effectively to improve student engagement and learning. The district did not have access to online educational resources across all its schools and students. If teachers wanted to use technology in their classes, they first had to schedule time in a lab that was consistently overtaxed with requests. As a first step, HISD invested heavily in its wi-fi infrastructure, laying the foundation for use of online educational resources in the classroom.

The cost of hardware was also a major issue. The district's IT team was stretched managing an Exchange email server that constantly had problems and suffered viruses. Worst of all, this maintenance used funds that would have otherwise been used to acquire new devices for students.

Amy Mayer, Director of Staff Development and District Initiatives for HISD, explains, "We badly needed a cost-effective, low maintenance approach to using technology on a daily basis."

*"There are now many occasions where I can adapt my lesson plan by finding additional activities and shared learning experiences to help the group or specific individuals go deeper on a topic. This amount of flexibility is made possible through Chromebooks."*

*—Charly Baker, Middle school math teacher, Huntsville Independent School District*



### Solution

The easy access to online resources, affordability and durability made Chromebooks the perfect option for HISD, which piloted 350 Chromebooks in junior high and high school in 2012. Chromebooks, Google's laptop running Chrome OS, are fast, portable, secure devices that allow students to easily get online, find educational resources, and collaborate and learn.

The district also signed up for Google Apps for Education, which is a web-based productivity suite with email, calendar and document creation, free for schools. This meant that the costly, high maintenance Exchange server was no longer needed and time and resources could be re-focused elsewhere.

"The convenience of having a device where everything is stored online and boots up at lightening speed means teachers can now use them in the classroom whenever they think they could help. When you consider all the software licenses, server investment and ongoing maintenance costs of running

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## About Google for Education

Google for Education provides open technologies to improve learning for everyone, anywhere.

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

For more information visit:  
[google.com/edu/gogoogle](http://google.com/edu/gogoogle)

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regular laptops, we were blown away by how cost-effective and practical the Chromebooks were," adds Mayer.

### Benefits

Huntsville now has over 800 Chromebooks and continues to purchase more. As Chromebooks take only seconds to boot up and allow for easy access to Google Apps and online resources, introducing them to staff and students was hassle-free and easy to manage right from the start.

### Student-driven learning

The ability to use online resources has also made learning much more student-centric and student-driven. Where students were formerly reliant on teachers for answers and information, they're now able to research topics independently. When they do call upon their teachers, it is no longer for fact-based answers, but rather for in-depth, creative questioning. In turn, the content students produce is more substantial.

One example is a project on the "Power for Food" where students kept a food journal for 7 days to understand what their nutritional intake was. Brenda Schultz, 7th grade math teacher, explains, "It was really interesting how involved the kids were with this project. If it had been on paper, it would have just been a table or a paragraph from a book but using Chromebooks and Google Apps, students developed richer projects, with detailed research supplemented by images and video content."

### More resources for teachers

Chromebooks also give greater flexibility in lesson planning for teachers. Charly Baker, a middle school math teacher explains, "Chromebooks have challenged me to think outside of the box in terms of teaching. There are now many occasions where I can adapt my lesson plan by finding additional activities and shared learning experiences to help the group or specific individuals go deeper on a topic. This amount of flexibility is made possible through Chromebooks."

### Increased access to learning—anytime, anywhere

Students can also take Chromebooks home and for some, this was the first time they had access to such technology and learning resources out of the classroom. With Google docs, students can access all their documents created in class from any location and continue their work from home. This ease of access makes a particular difference for students trying to balance financial needs of supporting their family with part-time jobs and completing their studies.

Susan Cason, high school math teacher, recounted, "One of my students has a part-time job to help his family pay bills. His grades used to suffer as his time after school was spent working. The Chromebook allows him to get all his learning and school work done during the school day in a more productive way or at home after his job. He can also supplement his learning through online videos. As a result, his grades are improving."

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*"The impact of Chromebooks within our classrooms and the wider teacher/parent community has been phenomenal. We have had parents literally burst into tears with gratitude that their children's school can supply something so potentially life-changing that they couldn't afford to provide—the access to online learning resources both in school and at home."*

*—Amy Mayer, Director of Staff Development and District Initiatives,  
Huntsville Independent School District*

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