

Waukegan Public Schools encourages students to take charge of their learning using Google for Education tools



What they wanted to do

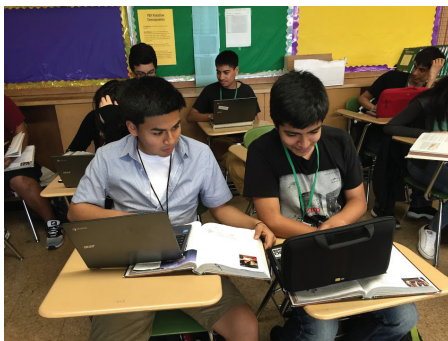
- Provide students with equal opportunity to use learning technology
- Shift to a digital curriculum

What they did

- Rolled out Google Apps for Education to 17,000 students
- Introduced a 1:1 Chromebooks program in the high school to 4,600 students
- Piloted Chromebooks in grades 2-6

What they accomplished

- Encouraged students to communicate with teachers outside the classroom
- Leveled the playing field so all students have access to digital learning
- Improved students' organization
- Reduced the IT burden of managing devices



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—Mary Mlinar-Stephens, Director of Educational Technology Innovation, Waukegan Public Schools

Background

Waukegan Public Schools educates 17,000 students from diverse socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds. Located on Lake Michigan, just south of the Wisconsin border, the district includes 23 schools, 16 of which are elementary schools. The district's mission is to prepare students for the future by providing them with resources, setting achievable goals and inspiring them to be their best.

Challenge

The district wanted to provide students with equal opportunity to use technology for learning; many students, however, don't have internet access or devices at home. The district set out to introduce an entirely digital curriculum, with all learning resources available online, by spring 2015. They needed tools that would support the core curriculum at an affordable price, and that would be easy for a small IT department to manage.

Solution

In fall 2013, the district introduced Google Apps for Education. It was a grassroots effort: tech-savvy teachers comfortable with Google Apps for Education, called Lighthouse Lead Learners, helped train staff and students in their buildings how to use the tools. "Since the instructional technology staff can't be at every school all the time, this group of teachers is instrumental to making sure teachers and students get the support they need," says Mary Mlinar-Stephens, director of educational technology innovation at Waukegan Public Schools.

The schools introduced a 1:1 program with Chromebooks for all high school students in spring 2014. The district's 4,600 high school students have their own Chromebooks, which gives them the flexibility and convenience to learn where and when they want, whether they're in the hallways, cafeteria or classroom. "Students are taking charge and starting to own their learning," Mlinar-Stephens says. "That's a big change for them, and it's sprung from the fact that they have a learning device with them at all times."

Teachers are using digital content instead of paper-based content. Science classes replaced lab notebooks with lab reports in Google Docs and Sheets. If a student is absent from class, the teacher can share the lesson plan and resources, so the student can catch up on the content, even if he's sick in bed.

Sixth grade classrooms are piloting Chromebooks, and classrooms for grades 2-5 have clusters of three or four Chromebooks for students to use in a collaborative setting. With Chromebooks' multi-user environment, multiple students can use the same device. The district's long-term plan is to roll out Chromebooks in a 1:1 setting for all students grades 2-12.

Benefits

Real-time, two-way communication

With Google Classroom, teachers can personalize visual, audio and text resources based on students' distinct learning styles. For example, a history teacher uses

Google for Education

A solution built for learning and designed for the classroom that includes easy-to-manage, affordable devices like Chromebooks, productivity tools like Google Apps for Education with Classroom, and limitless educational content in Google Play for Education. Together these tools help teachers inspire curiosity, while students learn better together, wherever they are.

For more information visit:
www.google.com/edu

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—Anne Truger, Director of Educational Technology Innovation, Waukegan Public Schools

Google Earth to take students on a virtual tour of buildings they're studying, catering to visual learners. If one student needs help with one lesson covered in a video and another student would benefit from a different lesson of the video, the teacher can designate different segments for the students to watch. With a more streamlined workflow, teachers can spend more time customizing content for each student and providing more one-on-one instruction.

A leveled playing field

Students now have 24/7 access to technology and digital learning, regardless of their technology resources at home. They don't have to wait for a device to be available at the library and then only have a short period of time to use it. With tools at their disposal, they can access Google Apps for Education at home using the offline capability if they don't have internet access. "Access to technology makes a difference in the level of effort students put into an assignment," says Anne Truger, director of educational technology innovation. "They no longer only have 20 minutes until mom picks them up from school."

Improved students' organization

Poor organizational skills often prevent students from delivering their best work, but now students don't have to worry about losing papers. With paperless classrooms and documents in Google Apps for Education, students stay organized. "Students have told me that they used to be a 'C' or 'D' student, and now they're an 'A' or 'B' student because their work is in the cloud," Truger says.

Greater motivation to learn

Students are spending more time learning outside the classroom now that they have the tools to produce their best work. For example, one teacher emailed the department chair telling him that when he gave students access to lesson plans and videos for the rest of the week, students did all of the lessons and came out ahead of schedule.

This increased motivation speaks to what Alice Keeler, educational technology specialist and teacher in Fresno, Calif., told the teachers at a professional development session. She said education is about teaching, not tools. Teachers need to use tools to empower the student's choice and voice. Students are now choosing the pace at which they learn and the resources that resonate best with them whether they're visual, auditory or kinesthetic learners. This is a new philosophy that now guides the district.

Ease of management

Waukegan Public Schools has less than a dozen technicians in the IT department for the entire district. With Chromebooks, the team can push apps to certain students or devices within seconds. The Waukegan High Student Store, for example, helps regulate the apps students can access and ensures security. Chromebooks help streamline the process of managing 5,000 devices and several thousand Google Apps accounts. Since Chromebooks are easy to manage, teachers can focus on the curriculum rather than the technology.

"We're really pushing our students to not worry about the device, but to learn the skills of collaborating, problem solving and networking because that's what will matter in their careers," Truger says. "Our bottom line is preparing our students for the jobs that don't even exist yet."

