



Maine Township High School District migrates 7,000 to Google Apps, reclaims \$35,000 from budget, and reaches students in new ways

AT A GLANCE

What they wanted to do:

- Update current email and calendaring systems for students
- Get ahead in the arena of instructional technology

What they did:

- Used the full range of Google Apps Education Edition productivity tools to transform learning, student cooperation, and teacher innovation
- Brought collaboration into the classroom and extended it beyond the school halls

What they accomplished:

- Reallocated \$35,000 away from student email and toward a new email archiving system
 - Won back valuable time that was being wasted on maintaining outdated systems
 - Invigorated teachers and students with new, collaborative ways to make the classroom come alive
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Institution

Maine Township High School District 207, located near Chicago's O'Hare Airport, represents five schools and approximately 7,000 culturally diverse students speaking more than 60 languages. Recognized by the U.S. Department of Education in the National Secondary School Recognition Program, District 207 schools are comprehensive learning facilities that reach beyond the classroom, offering outstanding athletic and fine arts programs and more than one hundred clubs and activities providing opportunities for personal growth and development.



Challenge

Henry Thiele, Maine Township's Director of Technology, recalls that "Just a year ago, District 207 was well behind the average school district in the area of instructional technology." The schools used a slow, text-based email system and a calendaring application that lacked much-needed features. "The network infrastructure was secure, but we didn't have enough bandwidth – and the spirit of collaboration was totally absent," Thiele continues. Teachers, students, parents, and board members wanted to transform the way that the district used technology and asked for a system that delivered more capabilities, allowed innovation, and offered a better way of learning. The challenge was to not only play catch-up, but also to move forward – and Maine Township did this by turning its attention to Google Apps Education Edition.

Solution

After surveying students, parents, and staff to assess current and future needs, Thiele and his team determined that getting better technology into the classroom meant finding a system that provided necessary features like HTML support, improved storage limits, and seamless ease of use. He was also drawn to a "cloud-based" solution – one that allowed secure access to hosted information and made information easily available through any browser. His search led him to Google Apps Education Edition, a free, integrated suite of communications and collaborative tools that includes Gmail, Google Calendar, and a range of tools for document creation and publishing. Thiele liked the integrated, "one solution" approach, trusted Gmail's quality, and saw the ease and value inherent in a cloud-based solution. Once he compared the options, he says the answer was clear: "Google Apps met all of our needs. It was the only product that made sense for us."

Thiele had recommended Google Apps more than a month before joining the Maine Township School District from his previous role, and made deployment one of his first initiatives. After preparing for migration during the early summer months, he guided the team toward implementation. In August, the district moved forward, migrating its 7,000 students to Google Apps over the course of a few days. As Thiele sees it, success was immediate and has held strong. "There has been an outpouring of shared ideas and teaching methods across the district," he says, "and

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Henry Thiele
Director of Technology

ABOUT GOOGLE APPS EDUCATION EDITION

Google Apps Education Edition is a free suite of hosted communication and collaboration applications designed for schools and universities. Google Apps includes Gmail (webmail services), Google Calendar (shared calendaring), Google Docs (online document, spreadsheet, presentation, and form creation and sharing) Google Video (secure and private video sharing – 10GB free) and Google Sites (team website creation with videos, images, gadgets and documents integration), as well as administrative tools, customer support, and access to APIs to integrate Google Apps with existing IT systems.

For more information, visit
www.google.com/a/edu



we have developed a culture of collaboration that has fit in perfectly with our goal of infusing current hardware, with updated software and infrastructure. We set out to update our systems and gained the unexpected result of building the foundation for a more collaborative educational culture.”

Using Gmail has allowed students to share information real-time with other students, even if they’re in different classrooms, allowing them to work together on shared projects. In addition to streamlining the writing process, Google Docs makes it easy for students to manage information like student elections and lets teachers track the participation of workgroups and teammates and to work with other teachers to build curriculum. Google Calendar has helped the Orchestra group schedule practices and concerts and share that information with parents, and Google Sites – which enables easy, code-free web publishing – allowed students to create and launch a website exploring alternative energy sources (<http://sites.google.com/site/mainewestschlesserchemii>). District nurses even used Google Docs to build a guide educating teachers about chronic illnesses, easily publishing this important information for the District’s teachers.

Benefits

Thiele reports that the migration to Google Apps has fundamentally changed how students are learning and how teachers are instructing. “The collaborative working and learning environment has moved outside the walls of the classroom,” he explains. “Students are able to access their work from school, home, or other places they work, and multiple users are able to collaborate on the same document, real time, even when they’re not physically together. Many of our students write directly ‘to the cloud’ and no longer use flash drives or rely on our network storage. I’ve had students ask me, ‘Why should I have to launch software when I can just open up a browser anywhere and start typing?’ Tools provided by Apps have opened this door to reshape the way we educate our students in ways that were never before possible. It is simply the best product on the market for providing students with an authentic email experience in addition to the other collaborative tools that are becoming essential in today’s workplace.”

Outside of this new focus on cooperative learning, they have also been able to reallocate an estimated \$35,000 – originally budgeted for student email – toward a new email archiving system. Thiele adds that “The switch to Google Apps has allowed teachers and tech staff to divert time they used to spend futzing with hardware and software problems, and direct that time to teaching and learning.”

In fact, “winning back time” is a key side benefit that Thiele and his team report gaining since they switched to Google Apps. “Throughout my career in education,” he reports, “time has always been the single most limiting constraint. Bringing Google Apps into our schools lets us gain back some of the valuable time that was previously lost on working with outdated systems and trying to teach students and staff how to use them. Because the Google Apps are intuitive by nature, people just naturally start using them.” Thiele adds that some teachers are also gaining time outside of the classroom because they are distributing notes online, assigning pre-reading activities to be completed before class, and planning engaging lessons that take place outside of the classroom. He concludes by saying that “The changes we have been able to make, primarily as a result of our switch to Apps, have enabled us to stand out as leaders in both instruction and educational technology. The power of the cloud is real, and we’re benefiting from being a part of that.”