

Wilson School District transforms traditional classrooms into collaborative, digital learning environments with Google for Education



Goals

- Improve teaching methods inline with inquiry based and student centered learning.
- Increase student exposure to, and use of, technology.
- Revamp internal administrative processes and systems

Approach

- Transformed traditional classrooms into digital, mobile learning environments.
- Replaced static software and manual processes with dynamic, automated online productivity apps.
- Used technology to drive a positive culture shift toward innovation and progressive education.

Results

- Put Google devices in the hands of every K-12 student, and increased accessibility for district faculty and staff.
- Reduced faculty and staff time, financial, and resource costs by implementing Google Apps for Education.
- Created extraordinary opportunities for teachers and students to leverage technology to dramatically improve their educational experience.

Background

Located in tranquil southeast Pennsylvania, Wilson School District (SD) is steadfast in its commitment to provide extraordinary educational opportunities, through the use of technology, to its 6,000+ K-12 students. With nearly 650 faculty and staff members across five elementary schools, two middle schools and one high school, Wilson SD empowers students with necessary 21st century skills—creativity, communication, collaboration and critical thinking—to become exceptional citizens.

Challenge

In the mid-2000s, Wilson School District could see that a technology transformation was on the horizon. Minimally used computer labs with archaic desktops running old programs, and a staff who relied heavily on Microsoft Office software, appeared the norm. Students, educators and parents were starting to question available technology resources. Although collaboration wasn't increasing, small pockets of innovation were, fortunately, bubbling to the surface.

Time was on its side, as Wilson SD became part of *Classrooms for the Future*, a 2006–2009 Pennsylvania Department of Education initiative, to increase the use of technology throughout high schools in Pennsylvania. As part of its two-year participation in the grant, Wilson SD hired an Instructional Technology Coach, Christopher McCaffrey, to support effective instructional technology practices, as well as determine new ways to meet the demands of progressive teachers and advancing students. McCaffrey harnessed the energy within those pockets of innovation and fueled their enthusiasm to drive positive change.

Solution

As *Classrooms for the Future* wound down, Wilson School District's educators geared up. Teachers wanted to take traditional classroom learning to a higher level, and began requesting new technology, such as tablets and laptops, for each student.

"In fall of 2014, we piloted both Google Chromebooks and Apple MacBooks to select ninth grade students, faculty and staff members," McCaffrey says. "The ease of use, collaborative tools and intuitive nature made the response for the Chromebooks overwhelming. Google Apps for Education can be used by *anyone* at *any time* from any location on *any device*."

In the fall of 2015, phase two of the pilot project put 3,500 Chromebooks in the hands of 6-12 grade students and 500 devices throughout the elementary schools. By the fall of 2015, Wilson's K-12, 1:1 revolution was well underway.



"I can't imagine having the high levels of learning, classwork, resources and student engagement that we have today, without Google Apps For Education. District-wide research shows that the seamless integration of Google has forever changed our mobility, culture and offerings, which ultimately results in a better learning environment and school experience for our kids."

— Chris Trickett, director of technology for Wilson School District, Pennsylvania

Benefits

Transforming Learning through the Community

Wilson School District quickly transformed into a digital 1:1 ecosystem. In Fall 2015, the technology department ensured that every K-1 student had a Google Nexus 7 tablet and 5,200+ grades 2-12 students received Chromebooks. The district rolled out additional carts with ready-to-use devices in every school. McCaffrey estimates the technology department has distributed almost 7,000 devices, all accessing Google Apps for Education.

"We hired three additional instructional technology coaches to help support teachers in the district wide implementation, offered professional development sessions to faculty and staff to learn how to get the most from Google Apps for Education, and hosted a two day Google Summit in the summer to make sure everyone was off and running before school started," McCaffrey says.

For an example of a typical Wilson professional learning day, visit <http://WilsonSD.org/Oct12PL>.

Google has changed the way teachers teach and students learn throughout Wilson SD. Google Docs, Sheets, Forms and Drawings are the most widely used applications, with Hangouts, Chrome apps and extensions close to follow. Google supports the district's commitment to using technology as a tool to fuel community learning via a collaborative environment most reflective of the world today, in preparation for what's ahead.

Inspiring Collaboration, Connectivity

Chris Trickett, director of technology for Wilson School District, implemented a satisfaction survey prior to phase two of the 1:1 initiative.

"More than three-quarters of the students at the high school agreed that the integration of Chromebooks in classrooms has created a much more effective learning environment," said Trickett. "We also confirmed positive shifts in culture, engagement and pride for a district that embraces teaching and learning that leverages technology to increase collaboration, innovation, and critical thinking within the district, as well as out."

"In pretty much any career path we go on, it's guaranteed that we will need the knowledge and the skill to work with technology," said Sneha Anmalsetty, a junior at Wilson High School. "The 1:1 initiative is guiding us towards becoming better technology users."

McCaffrey and Trickett describe a virtual shared classroom experience one of their second grade classrooms run with a seventh grade classroom in neighboring New Jersey. Using Google Hangouts, Docs, Forms and Drive, second graders submit science questions through an online form for the older students to answer. Then, the seventh graders create presentations, videos and learning objects with Google Apps to answer the second graders, as well as teach live, virtual lessons.

"The creativity, communication, collaboration and critical thinking skills the students in these two classrooms are developing, through the use of Google for Education, is life-changing," said Dr. Amy Flannery, director of curriculum for Wilson School District. "Not only is it easier for a teacher to be innovative, but Google empowers them to adopt an instructional practice of inquiry learning, which is a method for prompting students to figure things out for themselves. Google's positive impact on lesson creation and delivery is radically changing curriculum development, for the better."

"Google Apps for Education was the tipping point for our district. The IT department supported the teachers and students who, in a groundswell of organic growth, quickly brought about significant positive change that didn't cost a lot to implement."

— Christopher McCaffrey, instructional technology specialist for Wilson School District

Increasing Productivity, Efficiency

Moving from static, local software and manual processes to automated, dynamic Google applications resulted in increased productivity and efficiency throughout Wilson School District's faculty and staff. Creating Docs and Forms, distributing them through Gmail and Google+, and better managing time with Calendar and Sheets has become commonplace.

"Managing field trip requests, help desk tickets, transportation schedules, meeting agendas and planning are all core functions that have been vastly improved by using Google Apps," said Trickett. "It's a night and day difference in culture, process and workflow that directly translates into saved time, money and human resources."

Flannery considers the impact on curriculum assessments one of the greatest evolutions the district has seen, since switching to Google Apps for Education.

"Evaluating and updating curriculum is a huge endeavor: working through one quarter of K-5 math assessments used to consume 18 employees and 40 onsite hours," she said. "With Google, we're able to accomplish the same work with 12 employees in 12 onsite hours, and whatever else remains can be done virtually. Google saves teachers from sacrificing classroom time with students, or giving up summer days to plan upcoming lessons. Simply stated, we're more efficient, productive and happy."

Students can see productivity and efficiency improvements in themselves, and peers, too.

"I could go back to the first assignment for English class that I did last year because I saved everything on Google Drive," said Kayla Schaub, junior at Wilson High School. "Since we did everything digitally, it definitely helped with the transition into the 1:1 initiative, especially with how to do assignments and write notes online."

Wilson SD remains committed to turning traditional classrooms into progressive, digital learning environments, with the help of Google Apps for Education.

More Information

<http://wilsonsd.org/1to1>

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.

