

## Community Consolidated School District 59 encourages critical thinking with Chromebooks and Google Play for Education



COMMUNITY CONSOLIDATED  
SCHOOL DISTRICT 59

### About CCSD59

- School district Chicago suburbs serving 6,700 students
- Google Apps for Education user since 2014
- Chromebooks user since 2014
- Android tablets user since 2014

### Goals

- Drive greater creativity and collaboration
- Use technology to amplify learning
- Encourage teachers to take charge of their own paths for innovative learning

### Approach

- Form technology committee to determine tactics and timeline for innovative learning
- Create 2:1 program using Chromebooks and Android tablets
- Adopt Google Apps for Education as the foundation for instructional change
- Close learning gap between junior high and elementary schools

### Results

- Students learn to choose the best tools for each learning experience
- Teachers gain the freedom to select apps for their classrooms
- Students engage in critical thinking about using technology to improve learning



Community Consolidated School District 59 (CCSD59) in Arlington Heights, Illinois is dedicated to creating future-ready learners. “We want to do more than prepare students for the next grade level – we want to prepare them for life,” says Benjamin Grey, Assistant Superintendent for Innovative Learning and Communication at CCSD59. “We want to build deep thinkers who can choose the path they want in this changing world.”

For CCSD59, the challenge was delivering on this promise across a diverse student population. CCSD59 serves 6,700 students, grades K through eight, in four different communities in the Chicago suburbs: Arlington Heights, Des Plaines, Elk Grove Village, and Mount Prospect. Half of the district’s students are from low-income families, and a third are English language learners – yet the district’s achievement scores rank near the top of the state.

### The foundation for the journey

In December 2013, the district formed a technology committee to lead its “[Innovative Learning Implementation Timeline](#)” for using technology to amplify student learning. “We want to drive greater literacy, collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity,” Grey says. “It’s not simply about which devices we should buy. This was about putting instructional changes in place to support our mission.”

*“We want to do more than prepare students for the next grade level — we want to prepare them for life”*

*—Benjamin Grey, Assistant Superintendent for Innovative Learning and Communication Community Consolidated School District 59*

### 2:1 program

At the same time CCSD59’s tech committee widened access to Google Apps, committee members considered how to close the online learning gap between the district’s elementary and junior high schools. When the committee began meeting in late 2013, the junior highs had 1:1 laptops, but the elementary schools didn’t even have wireless access – only a cart of MacBooks for each school. (Wireless access was added to elementary schools in 2014 as part of the overall innovative learning program.)

“We thought, how can we get the most access for the most kids, with the budget we had?” says Ross Vittore, CCSD59’s director of innovative learning. When he and other members of the tech committee compared standard laptops to Chromebooks, “it was clear that Chromebooks could do everything we needed, plus they had better battery life and portability.”

As they looked into available devices and compared costs, the tech committee realized they could add Android tablets to the mix, since the prices for Chromebooks and Android tablets were a fraction of similar laptops and tablets.

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## Google for Education

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Google Classroom is a teacher-focused application that brings together all the parts of Google Apps – including Google Drive, Google Docs, and Google Presentations – and helps teachers keep class projects organized and communicate better with students.

Google Apps is 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 start at \$249 and are easy to set up and manage.

Tablets with Google Play for Education — an affordable 1:1 tablet solution that can be set up and managed within minutes. Tablets provide the right educational content by allowing students to explore thousands of teacher-approved apps, books and videos.

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“We saw the potential of creating a 2:1 program, where students could choose the tools they need, depending on the assignment,” Grey says. “Price-wise, we could bring our older students both devices.” All CCSD59 students in grades three through eight now have both a Chromebook and an Android tablet and can take home the devices; students in kindergarten through second grade have tablets only, which remain at their schools. In total, CCSD59 now has 4,500 Chromebooks and 6,800 Android tablets for students.

## Different tools for different learning needs

In keeping with the goal of letting students choose the best device, a first grade class at Juliette Low Elementary School took advantage of their tablets to take photos on a field trip to a replica colonial village. The students decided which photos to keep and place in a shared Google Drive folder, then used Google Slides to create a class presentation. “It’s a level of engagement that we wouldn’t have expected in such young students,” Vittore says.

Older students are also getting creative with their devices. A seventh grade physical education class at Holmes Junior High used their tablets to record video of a new fitness routine they developed, and eventually created a class presentation using Slides.

“We recently developed a video for the U.S. Department of Education, and we came upon a group of sixth grade students working in a hallway together,” says Vittore. “They were having a healthy debate about whether to use Chromebooks or tablets for their upcoming project. They all had valid arguments, and showed just the kind of critical thinking we like to see.”

Teachers now use Google Play for Education to reduce the time and hassles of finding useful apps to share with students. “The apps on Google Play for Education are vetted by teachers, so they’ve already been tested in classrooms,” Vittore says. For example, teachers and students alike at CCSD59 love using an interactive whiteboard tool called Explain Everywhere.

## Ideas for innovative learning

Grey and Vittore recommend that other districts form technology committees to get started with integrating technology into teaching and learning. And technology coaches must be part of any such initiative, Grey adds. “Our coaches have been a critical part of our success – you have to provide embedded training for staff,” he says.

He cautions that this transformation doesn’t happen overnight. “Explain to boards and superintendents that this is a process,” Grey says. “Don’t expect everything to change in two months. And support your staff on this point – they need to know you’re not keeping score.”

Careful planning, combined with a willingness to let educators experiment, are key pieces of any innovative learning project. “Don’t adopt technology for technology’s sake,” Vittore says. “You want to create an environment for 21st-century instruction.”