

Forsyth County Schools discovers new ways to collaborate and save time with Google Apps for Education



About Forsyth County Schools

- <http://www.forsyth.k12.ga.us/>
- Forsyth County, Georgia
- 44,604 students

What they wanted to do

- Provide a faster, more efficient way for staff to collaborate and share information
- Invest in easy-to-use, low maintenance technology
- Provide digital equity to students whose families are unable to provide a device
- Give teachers a way to collaborate and provide real-time feedback to students

What they did

- Launched Google Apps for Education for teachers, students and staff
- Introduced 1,500 Chromebooks for middle school students

What they accomplished

- Increased real-time communication between teachers and students
- Improved collaboration between students, teachers and staff
- Automated manual tasks to save administrative time and IT resources



About Forsyth County Schools

From small beginnings over one hundred years ago, [Forsyth County Schools](#) has grown into a district of 20 elementary schools, nine middle schools and six high schools (including one online high school). The school district is home to more than 3,000 teachers and over 44,000 students. Its mission is to prepare and inspire all students to contribute and excel. Today, this means accelerating learning, communication and productivity with [Google Apps for Education](#).

Challenge

Sharing information and exchanging ideas can get lost in the hustle and bustle of daily school life. Forsyth County Schools wanted to use technology to increase productivity and communication. The district also wanted to give teachers and staff access to the same collaboration and professional development opportunities available to employees at innovative businesses.

Before introducing Google Apps for Education, the majority of students stored their digital assignments on the school network drive or personal devices, such as flash drives. Students suffered academically when they left their personal devices at home or didn't properly save their work. Relying on flash drives also made it difficult for students in group projects to share assignments with one another. Forsyth County Schools wanted to help students develop their collaboration skills as well as give them an easy way to access and save assignments. Given limited funds, the district needed a solution that was less expensive and easier to maintain than their current solution of PCs and laptops.

"Every time I visit a classroom, I see a new way Google Apps are being used. In a social studies lesson, for example, I observed all of the students in the group collaborating on a shared presentation in Google Slides. I could see which students were working on which slides and what they were creating. This is great for teachers who can now see what each student contributed in a group project."

*—Dr. Jill Earman, coordinator of instructional technology,
Forsyth County Schools*

Solution

After much research into workplace and learning technologies, Forsyth County Schools decided to introduce [Google Apps for Education](#) and [Chromebooks](#) across the district. Dr. Jill Earman, coordinator of instructional technology, found that Google outpaced other technology solutions, like Microsoft, in training and ease of implementation. Other tools would take weeks or months to launch across the school district, without the same level of access to information and online training that Google provides.

Forsyth piloted Google Apps with 8 schools in the early spring of 2015 and then with the rest of the schools before the school year ended. They then deployed 1500 Chromebooks to the middle schools when students and teachers returned to school in the fall of 2015. Staff soon began to experiment with creative ways to save time and share information using Google Apps.

Benefits

Insights into how students are learning

With Google Apps instead of flash drives, Forsyth students can access their assignments anytime and easily share them with each other and teachers. Students now turn in their assignments on time more frequently and work together more collaboratively.

"In a social studies lesson, I observed all of the students in the group collaborating on a shared presentation in Google Slides," Earman recalls. "I could see which students were working on which slides and what they were creating. This is great for teachers who can now see what each student contributed in a group project." Google Apps give teachers a way to observe collaboration as it happens, and to provide feedback in real time.

An unexpected benefit is the ability for students and teachers to access a full portfolio of their work, year after year, in Google Drive. With single sign-on, each student has a unique and secure login, which follows the students for the entirety of their time at Forsyth County Schools. At the start of the school year, teachers can see how their new students did the previous year and identify strengths as well as areas for improvement.

"My team is able to save a lot of time and money because Chromebooks are inexpensive to maintain, compared to PCs and laptops, as well as less expensive to purchase. But the biggest cost-savings we've experienced is time and resources."

—Dr. Lessell Martiny (Marty) Bray, chief technology and information officer, Forsyth County Schools

Discovering an inventive communication "hack"

At Forsyth County Schools, the transition to Google inspired many of the teachers and staff to try new ways to communicate and share information. One Forsyth County elementary school struggled daily with its chaotic after-school pick-up queue. The school's assistant principal attributed this problem to limited or slow communication between the car-line attendants who escort students to their parents' cars and the cafeteria attendants who supervise students as they wait to be picked up. The AP came up with a solution using Google Sheets.

Each family was assigned a unique number. Now when a parent drives up and displays the number on the windshield, the car-line attendants use a portable device, such as a tablet or smartphone, to input the car number onto a shared Google Sheet. Inside the cafeteria, the numbers are projected onto a large screen so the children know when their parents arrive. Dr. Earman tweaked the sheet with a query and LOOKUP function to help the little children who have trouble remembering their car numbers. Now, each child's name and number appear on the screen in the cafeteria. This real-time communication has increased parking lot safety and sped up the queue. This solution has also catalyzed conversations across the district around how schools can find unique ways to use Google Apps to share information.

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.

Saving time, costs and resources

Managing IT for 35 schools is no easy feat. The IT team at Forsyth County Schools invested in Chromebooks and Google Apps to save money; a Chromebook retails for a fraction of the price of a PC or laptop. The IT team has also benefited from time savings due to the ease of managing Chromebooks and Google Apps. Says Dr. Lessell Martiny (Marty) Bray, chief technology and information officer at Forsyth County Schools: “The biggest cost savings we’ve experienced are our time and resources. With Chromebooks, my team can push out an app or software to thousands of Chromebooks at the same time, and manage those devices remotely. The solution increases productivity, flexibility and employee retention — and that makes it extremely valuable.”

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—Dr. Lessell Martiny (Marty) Bray, chief technology and information officer, Forsyth County Schools

The leadership team at Forsyth County Schools believes technology is a vital part of fulfilling its mission to prepare and inspire students to excel. To that end, the district continues to give students the tools to work more collaboratively, while empowering teachers and staff with the tools to communicate more easily, do their jobs more effectively and come up with creative solutions.

