

Parklands College creates a collaborative, dynamic community for teaching and learning with Google Apps for Education



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—Tiaan Lotter, language teacher,
Parklands College

The Rundown

Parklands College is a private independent Pre-K-12 school in Parklands, Cape Town, South Africa. Founded in 1998, the College believes in using information technology to enrich the teaching and learning experience. Parklands calls its students "learners" to reflect the school's philosophy that everyone has learning potential and deserves support in the pursuit of excellence. With three campuses for learners ranging from 2 -18 years-old, Parklands has focused on integrating ICT into all areas and programs.

The Challenge

Because the school was growing rapidly, the supporting ICT infrastructure was becoming difficult to manage. Multiple systems and multi-vendor applications made operations fragmented and inefficient, adding to licensing costs, and making staff training needs more critical and time-consuming.

The entire staff suffered from email overload. Document creation was challenging in a single-user editing environment. The constant emailing required to share information and make scheduling changes was complex and proved frustrating for staff. Creating and amending calendars – and ensuring that all learners, parents, and staff stayed up-to-date – was highly inefficient and even confusing at times. Data collection from learners and parents required data capturing and wasting a good deal of paper.

The Approach

Most of the students and staff already used Gmail outside of school. Gmail accounts, which are easily accessible, intuitive to use, and offer 30GB of storage for each account, were a natural next step. In January 2012, the entire Parklands College went live with Google Apps for Education.

They began using Google Docs, Calendar, Sheets, Drive, Google Plus, Google Hangouts, and YouTube – all of which have been incredibly helpful and well-received. YouTube, for instance, has supported students' movie clips in both English and Afrikaans, which can be accessed from anywhere in the world. URL links are emailed to teachers for assessment, instead of clogging up valuable hard drive space.

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— Sylvia Steyn, Principal of the Secondary Faculty, Parklands College

Learners now complete Google Form surveys, a method of information-gathering which has been very simple and effective. Language teacher Anthony Peters praises Google Forms for its ability to obtain attitudinal data, "as well as assessing comprehensive understanding of any concept, which can be incorporated into a host of statistical tests to determine

About Google Apps for Education

Over 30 million students, faculty, and staff use Google Apps for Education worldwide. Google Apps is a free suite of hosted email and collaboration applications exclusively for schools and universities. You can learn more and sign up to try it out by visiting our website:

www.google.com.au/intl/en_au/chrome/education/devices/

learner improvement, class averages, and virtually anything that includes a comparative element.”

Another language teacher, Tiaan Lotter, marvels at how Google has transformed the classroom experience as well: “I’ve almost halved the time it takes to go over questions and answers regarding poetry,” Lotter says. “Everyone now has access to all the information and there is no risk of losing it.”

Apps are integrated into learning in intuitive ways that make sense for educators and students alike. “We look at the curriculum and processes first, and see how we can integrate Google Apps from there,” says Richard Knaggs, Director of Technology and Innovation.

Stephen Le Feuvre, Principal of the Senior Preparatory Faculty, is enthusiastic about the technological improvements: “Our staff wants simple and innovative systems in their teaching and learning,” he says. “We’ve modernized the learning environment to engage our kids, and we ended up engaging our teachers as well, which is great.”

The Results

As Parklands College approached one-to-one deployment, Google provided solutions along the way: a uniform system that runs (and is stored) in the cloud. Google helped simplify processes and cut costs with free software and licensing – part of the Google Apps for Education package.

“Now that we use Google Apps, tedious jobs of the past can easily be completed by sharing documents and spreadsheets with all parties involved,” says Sylvia Steyn, Principal of the Secondary Faculty.

Google Docs has greatly enhanced collaboration and communication at Parklands College. For instance, educators now enter announcements into a document shared with learners at the beginning of each day, and again at midday. If needed, the document can be updated throughout the day. Only one document goes out, rather than numerous e-mails with individual notices. (“If it’s not on the calendar, it won’t happen,” explains Steyn.)

The College emphasizes the importance of having four calendars – one for each faculty – to keep the schedule of events updated as the school grows in complexity. With Google Calendar, events can be managed seamlessly. Plus, both staff and parents have constant access, which has saved time and reduced stress considerably.

Both learners and educators use Google Hangouts for real-time communication, eliminating the need to constantly check email. Now there are more than 1,700 mobile devices supported, at least one for each student and two for each educator.

Storing information in the cloud provides easy access to documents across any device, regardless of location. Because of the dependence on Internet connectivity, the College has installed a redundant ADSL line that can be used by users if the primary link fails. It’s a smart yet simple system.

“The functionality of Google’s online collaboration tools is unique and futuristic,” says Richard Knaggs. “It’s always exciting to see what Google is doing, and to know that you’re using the software of the most innovative tech company in existence. Our ICT environment before Google was complex, inefficient, and costly. Now it’s simple and effective – and free.”

