

Anaheim Union High School District streamlines operations with Google Workspace for all students and employees

Background

With 30,200 students, the Anaheim Union High School District (AUHSD) in Southern California is one of the largest in the state. In 2014 it began a pilot to revise the English Language Arts (ELA) curriculum across grades 7-12. Because Chromebooks are fast, portable, secure devices, AUHSD purchased 9,000 to facilitate curriculum use and collaboration for the students in those classrooms. The ELA teachers were delighted by the responsiveness of the Chromebooks, and the initial project was so successful that the district bought 9,000 more devices and committed to using them exclusively for ELA courses across all grades and schools.

At the same time, AUHSD adopted Google Workspace for Education, enabling every student in the district to have an email address and access to Google Drive. School administrators found Google Workspace and Chromebooks easy to manage centrally and maintain without arduous upgrades. In addition, Erik Greenwood, Chief Technology Officer, started noticing what he called “crazy demand” from other teachers, who were asking for the Chromebooks that the ELA teachers used, as well as “much more collaboration across Google Docs.” Over the past few years the IT department continued purchasing Chromebooks and the district now has about 21,000 of the devices in use.



School at a glance

The Anaheim Union High School District (AUHSD) comprises eleven high schools and seven junior high schools in five cities in Southern California. With 30,200 students, it is one of the largest school districts in the state and also among the top-ranked. Thirteen of their campuses are designated California Gold Ribbon Schools for their academic excellence.



Challenge

The district licensed Microsoft Exchange for the majority of their 2,800 staff members, including 1,200 teachers. Having employees using Microsoft Exchange locked them into a cycle of expensive and time-consuming maintenance: Greenwood reports that the last, costly upgrade was outgrown in only two years. “We couldn’t continue that turnover,” he says. The district also set quotas on users to mitigate demand. Greenwood knew that efficient operations requires good communication across every single person in the community. He needed an easy way to reach full-time teachers and administrators, as well as employees that did not have email — school bus drivers, cafeteria workers, and substitute teachers.

Solution

As Greenwood investigated options to manage rapid demand, it became clear that migrating all their employees to Google Workspace would be, as he put it, “the most attractive financially and have the most capacity for expansion.” First, he rolled it out for the IT department, and then the District Office, which “went surprisingly smoothly,” he says. They were able to customize the interface of Google’s console to make it as familiar as possible and staff were impressed by how easy it was to set controls and regulate apps. “If we want to allow an app on Google Workspace we change a setting and we’re done,” Greenwood states. IT staff can also easily set permissions so that parents of students under age 13 could opt out of some features if they wanted to.

AUHSD can now offer email addresses to all students, teachers, and staff in the district, and is starting to roll them out to temporary employees as well. The shift to Google made for “more effective use of staff time,” Greenwood concludes. And the results were clear: over the past few years their Google console showed usage of Chromebooks rising from 2,000 times a day to 10,000 times a day. Today users in the district store 81 terabytes of data on Google Drive.



Know your users."

Erik Greenwood,
Chief Technology Officer



In addition, the AUHSD IT department no longer has to maintain and upgrade legacy technology. Instead IT can focus on infrastructure initiatives that directly affect learning, like improving wireless access: Greenwood reports the district has already added wireless to every classroom and is now expanding it to external and common spaces. “Adopting Chromebooks and Google Workspace have had a huge impact on the classroom and beyond. We appreciate Google putting more resources into education,” he adds. “Having a dedicated Google representative for the state is really helpful. They listen, marshal resources, and take an interest in what districts are doing. That goes a long way. We can’t ask for more than that.”

Summary

Greenwood and the IT department at AUHSD focused on optimizing efficiency for everyone in their district and directly impacting teaching and learning, working closely with Google’s support services to deploy Google Workspace and Chromebooks across the large school district. To colleagues considering the move in their districts, he offers this advice: “Know your users needs. Understand what the devices can and can’t do and make sure they connect to classroom screens with an app like Google Cast.”



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