

How APEC Schools nurtures a generation of independent learners with Google for Education



School at a glance

APEC Schools is one the largest networks of private secondary schools in the Philippines. Established in 2013, APEC Schools addresses the growing need for affordable education for high school students as an alternative to other private schools in the country. The network has since grown to comprise over 15,000 students across 20 campuses in Metro Manila and the surrounding province.

Background

To support and enable the network's exponential growth within its first five years, APEC Schools switched to the [Google for Education](#) ecosystem in 2015. Instead of building separate computer laboratories, APEC Schools made [Chromebooks](#) available in classrooms for students to use — a more cost-efficient way to provide them with access to technology used in workplaces.

All Chromebooks are managed with [Chrome Education Upgrade](#), which equips IT administrators with access to advanced security settings to safeguard school data, and easy control of device usage and access settings.

When the pandemic struck in 2020, APEC Schools' familiarity with [Google Workspace for Education](#) helped it to transition to online learning. However, with new environments came new demands.



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[Using Chromebooks] was pragmatically cost-effective, and it was easy to manage from our IT's end. APEC Schools' transition to Google for Education not only resulted in productivity and efficiency gains, but also reduced costs by as much as 60-70%, owing to savings in hardware and licensing costs.”

Mark Sy,

Chief Academic Officer, APEC Schools



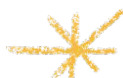


Challenge

The first and most pressing challenge was ensuring that every student had access to a personal learning device at home. APEC Schools Chief Academic Officer Mark Sy worried that students unable to afford personal learning devices would be disadvantaged.

Secondly, teachers had to learn to adapt to changes in their roles. “Since the start of APEC Schools, more than being providers of information, they have been facilitators of learning experiences. However, with the current situation, they also had to learn to assist students with technical problems with digital tools.”

Thirdly, students faced challenges in learning independently, managing their own time, and working with others online. “Students have become used to just going to the school, sitting down, listening to the teacher and following the schedule for the day,” said Sy. “But now, they have to do so much more. We have synchronous and asynchronous modes, and they have to manage their time carefully, plan, and work with others. So it became quite a challenge for them compared to what it was in the past.”



Solution

Increasing access to education and passions

To ensure every student could access lesson materials and learn independently at home, APEC Schools rented out Chromebooks to those who could not afford their own personal learning device.

Students like Myrtle Joe Huelgas, a Grade 10 student at APEC Schools’ Kalumpang, Marikina branch, found this especially helpful. “I did not have a laptop or a Chromebook in the beginning. I was using only my phone,” she explained. “Now, with my Chromebook, I like doing group discussions and activities on [Google Meet](#), especially when everyone turns on their camera and mics, because I get to hear their voices and see their beautiful faces.”

Giving students access to Chromebooks from home also creates opportunities for them to explore their interests in greater depth. “An important part of school is when we get to research about topics we are passionate about,” said Huelgas. “The topic I chose is diversity, equality, and inclusion. I am able to look up information in my free time and educate myself by using the Chromebook for research.”

Personalizing learning for students

After the pandemic hit, the school created approximately 2,900 classes for 422 sections and enrolled over 15,000 students into [Google Classroom](#). Synchronous teacher and student interactions happened on Google Meet and [Google Jamboard](#), while formative and summative assessments were administered through [Google Forms](#).

“These tools kept us functioning operationally and academically amid all the chaos,” said Sy. It has also empowered teachers in APEC Schools to further personalize their classes, to help their students become more independent learners.

“The key to learning independently is designing the right learning experiences that are interesting, relevant and practical to our students,” said Sy. “For every lesson that we design in Google Classroom, we provide students with many different content pieces in many different forms — video, audio, or print.” Students can then choose which type of media they prefer to consume. Doing this allows students to learn independently more easily.

“When students can learn on their own, teachers can then focus on providing a personalized and differentiated learning experience for them,” said Sy.

Nurturing creativity in students

Google for Education has not only enabled students to choose the kind of content that would best aid their learning, but has also helped them become self-taught creators.

To replace face-to-face showcase activities in which students would typically perform in front of a live audience, teachers and students used [Google Sites](#) to create their own online showcase platform instead. Students’ videos and projects would then be posted on the site for everyone to see and appreciate.

“Students were able to edit videos and build websites with Google Sites, and they’ve done all these on their own,” said Sy. “We were pleasantly surprised by the amount of creativity they had.”

Outside of academia, Google for Education has also allowed students to explore their own personal interests. For instance, Huelgas now uses her rented Chromebook to explore songwriting, video-editing and poetry. “Technology has helped me to write, edit, and produce from everywhere,” she said.

Improving time management and self-discipline

APEC Schools now segments their school days into morning and afternoon periods. Each period starts with a synchronous session for a teacher to explain the lesson, followed by a set time for students to study on their own, then by another synchronous session for discussion and synthesis.

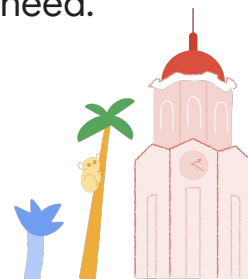


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When it comes to the matter of ‘how do we get information?’, the traditional way is that the information comes from the teacher. In a distance learning environment, the teacher is no longer the giver of information, but rather the person who curates these resources, assesses where students stand, and diagnoses the help they need.”

Mark Sy,

Chief Academic Officer,
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Google Calendar and Google Tasks stand out especially in helping students follow the school schedule and manage their time. “Students use Google Calendar to schedule appointments with teachers, groupmates, and even themselves, so they can block off time to work on what they need to work on,” said Sy. Google Tasks, on the other hand, is used by students to capture their to-do list, plan ahead on how to go about accomplishing them, and to set deadlines.

Google Calendar has been especially helpful for Grade 11 student Dave Renz Delay to juggle his classes with his extracurricular activities, including his student council duties, at APEC Schools’ Kalumpang, Marikina branch. “I make sure to finish my tasks and balance my time with the help of Google Calendar,” he said. “Now I like having classes in my personal space because I’m more independent, focused, and disciplined.”

Summary

Sy believes that the future of learning will be a combination of online and face-to-face learning. Moving forward, APEC Schools will continue to build upon the digital skills that teachers and students have gained from using Google for Education, to continuously foster independent learning.

“The future of education is one where the curriculum is going to be personalized to the needs of the student, and where the focus is no longer going to be on the grades, but the actual learning process and learning that happens,” said Sy. “Technology plays an important role in this.”



Chromebooks provide the perfect balance of functionality and portability, and makes designing and delivering learning experiences much more convenient. It has allowed our teachers to focus on what really matters: interacting with and guiding students in their learning experience.”

Mark Sy,
Chief Academic Officer, APEC Schools



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