District 30 and Google
Empowering *All* Learners

Since 2009, District 30 has been using Google Apps for Education with our staff and students. Through this service, we have been able to use Google's email program, calendar program, and many additional tools for creation and collaboration.

Our initial implementation of Google Apps was for our staff. Gmail is a powerful communication tool, with integrated virus and spam filtering. Our staff also uses the Google Chat component of Gmail extensively, to connect with colleagues and for quick contact with our technical and instructional support staff.

Beyond the value that Google Apps has added to staff communication, it has also facilitated collaboration in countless ways. Google Docs is a full-featured online productivity suite, including a word processor, spreadsheet and presentation program. Google docs can be created easily in any web browser and shared with other Google Docs users. The amount of meeting time that this tool has saved continues to increase. Collaboration between buildings has become easier and more instantaneous.

The District has been housing curriculum on Google Sites, which are collaborative web sites, allowing users to update pages, upload resources and communicate through online forums. These sites were not only useful for the curriculum review and writing process, but also provide staff with an easy to access archive of the curriculum. They will be regularly updated and are always available for staff to reference.

Student Learning with Google

After an initial implementation with staff, the District began to use Google Docs with students. These tools have been wonderful opportunities for online writing, collaboration and publishing. Peer revision of documents can be easily done online, and students can meet face to face to discuss comments and revisions.

Google sites have been a wonderful resource for many of our classrooms as well, and some teachers have set them up to replace their standard web pages.

Additional Google tools have added tremendous value to curriculum. Students have used Aviary to record podcasts and edit them online. Tools like EasyBib assist students in collecting and citing resources for papers.

And because Google Docs is online, it is constantly updating itself to keep pace with innovation... and our students!

WHAT PROGRAMS MAKE UP GOOGLE APPS FOR EDUCATION?

Google Docs: Online word processing, spreadsheet, presentation and drawing program

Google Sites: Collaborative websites with discussion boards, document drop boxes and integration with other Google tools.

GMail: Online mail program.

Google Calendar: Online calendaring and resource scheduling

Google Reader: Online RSS news reader. Allows users to follow news sites and blog posts in one place. Simple to use and great for staying current.

Google Groups: Message boards and mailing lists.

YouTube: Online video sharing. Can embed videos in Google docs and sites as well.

Picasa: Photo editing software and online photo collections. We are using this with staff only at this point.

Sketchup: 3D modeling and design application. Easy to use and powerful. Finished designs can be uploaded and shared.

Aviary: Online audio recording and editing software.

EasyBib: Assistant in the research process for students.

Lucidchart: Online mind mapping software

SurveyMonkey: Professional survey tools which syncs with Google docs.

Zoho Creator: Create powerful online database for websites or embed in docs.

Mavenlink: Project management software for teams.

And that's just the start...

Value On Many Levels

Google Apps clearly has great value for our staff and our students, and the decision to move towards this platform made great practical sense as well.

Simply migrating to gMail has allowed us to save an initial cost of $12,000 towards a new mail server, and it continues to save us $7000 per year on annual mail server, spam protection and virus filtering. Additionally, our licensing with Google provides us with ten years of mail archiving.

Since adopting Google Docs in our District, we have not purchased any additional licenses or versions of Microsoft Office. Upgrading our current computers to Microsoft Office 2011 would have cost approximately $15,000.

While we continue to use our older Office licenses on laptops, student use of Microsoft Office has declined considerably.

The additional tools within Google Apps (listed above) provide additional value to the suite, and also represent applications and services which we did not have to purchase and implement ourselves. In some cases, online applications have already replaced desktop programs which we used in our labs or on select machines. They are now accessible anywhere.

Moving Forward

District 30 looks forward to continuing its relationship with Google and to the additional tools that might be added this summer. We will be taking part in several summer institutes from Google, learning more about how to use these tools with students.