Limited Budget, Latest Technology

As a small private school in the industrial town of Oshkosh, Wisconsin, Grace Lutheran struggled to equip students with modern technology. With the rapid pace of change, it seemed as if the school always lagged a few paces behind. But now the school and its students are ahead of the curve with Google's Chromebooks for Education, devices that get better over time and save thousands of dollars each year on maintenance and software upgrades.

For many students in the United States, Labor Day weekend officially marks the end of summer vacation and the beginning of the new school year. At Grace Lutheran, a small private school in central Wisconsin, students are revved up and starting fresh with Chromebooks in hand. Google's Chromebooks for Education—an intuitive and easy-to-manage alternative to traditional PCs—are changing teaching and learning at this rapidly growing school.

"Our computer lab was at least seven years old but our budgets were limited, so we had a severe need for low-cost, yet up-to-date technology," says Peter Iles, principal, 7th & 8th grade teacher, and tech lead for Grace Lutheran School. "Our 20-workstation computer lab became so ragged and outdated that we did not even show it to prospective families. We were not keeping students current with technologies and trends."

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The Resources of the Web

Since finances are tight at the private school, Iles works hard to keep IT costs under control. When considering new computers, Grace Lutheran reviewed three options: a complete PC refresh ($35,000 upfront), Windows loaner laptops for upper grades ($15,000 upfront), or a set of Chromebooks ($4,080/year). Because the first two choices also involved additional license fees and IT resources to maintain a Microsoft Windows server environment, Chromebooks were the most economical, scalable choice.

It turned out that the Chromebooks made the most instructional sense as well. Grace Lutheran was already using Google Apps for Education—a powerful suite of web-based productivity tools—so adopting Chromebooks was simply a matter of students signing in with their Apps account. In his English class, for instance, Iles' students do peer reviews in real-time in Google Docs. "The web changes the way students interact. And really, we have to change the way we teach. To say 'listen to me because I'm the fountain of knowledge' is not always effective," says Iles. "Chromebooks open the whole world up to students. The collective knowledge of the entire human race is on their desks, and that is the best gift any teacher can give a student."

Faster and Safer

In all, 20 Chromebooks are being shared throughout the day in classrooms among 5th through 8th grade students. Iles is actively using Google's web-based Management Console, which allows him to whitelist certain extensions and pre-install educational applications on each student's Chromebook.

Grace Lutheran At A Glance
- Located in Oshkosh, Wisconsin
- Grades K–8
- Associated with Grace Lutheran Church

Management Console
School districts will benefit from Google's web-based Management Console, a tool that lets IT administrators manage their Chromebooks from the cloud—from pre-installing or blocking apps and extensions to managing user and network access. As Chromebooks continue to evolve, the Management Console's functionality will continue to develop.

Chromebooks for Education include:
- the hardware and operating system
- a web-based Management Console
- warranty, service, and support from Google

There's no need for software licenses, servers, security solutions, and maintenance plans, meaning that owning a Chromebook can cost up to 70% less than a traditional PC.

Chromebooks

According to Iles, the Chromebooks were quick to configure and ready to go without fuss. When it comes to instruction and learning on the web, Iles and the staff have found ample resources. "We're not seeing compromise with Chromebooks," says Iles. "Instead, we're seeing lower costs, and more freedom and possibilities with learning online in the cloud."

In addition to Gmail and Google Docs, the school uses resources available on the Web: video content and practice exercises from Khan Academy covering everything from arithmetic to physics, finance, and history, as well as the free Mavis Beacon typing tutor. Students also create their own podcasts and posters online, diving into the modern world of multimedia with ease, and are unleashing their creativity and their learning potential.

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And the machines are speedy: students are immediately up and running and can start ticking off their assignments right away. "If a Chromebook is completely powered down, I can verify that you can be on the web in less than 20 seconds. And if your Chromebook is just 'asleep,' you're live in 10 seconds. I've clocked it. Compare that to your traditional PC or laptop," he says. "The Chromebooks are, indeed 'instant on' and that valuable learning time adds up."

Says Iles: "If I had to sum it up, I'd say I am lucky to be here to see the amazing things that happen when you put Chromebooks into students' hands. The Chromebooks have opened so many possibilities for making education more effective and affordable."

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