

## Bloomington Public Schools use Google Apps and Chromebooks to prepare all learners for a rapidly changing world

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### About Bloomington Public School District

- Located near Minneapolis, Minnesota
  - Public school district serving 10,159 students
  - Has used Google Apps for Education since 2010, Chromebooks since 2013
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### Goals

- Prepare students for a rapidly changing world
  - Reach all students through a sustainable 1:1 environment
  - Accelerate learning through differentiated instruction and a broader set of learning resources
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### Approach

- Encouraged early adopters to demonstrate the power of technology
  - Adopted Google Apps and transitioned toward a 1:1 environment with Chromebooks
  - Encouraged students to drive learning and be creators. Hear student views in [the video they created](#)
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### Google for Education

Google for Education provides open technologies to improve learning for everyone, anywhere. Solutions consist of affordable devices, innovative tools, and educational content designed for learning and built for the classroom.

### Background

Located 12 miles south of Minneapolis, the city of Bloomington is home to 86,300 Minnesotans. A diverse student community of over 10,000 attends Bloomington's 19 public schools, which include early and alternative learning centers and elementary, middle, and high schools. Bloomington Public Schools (BPS) has a clear mission to develop, in all learners, the ability to thrive in a rapidly changing world. Through flexible learning models, technology-rich environments, and partnerships with parents and the public, BPS equips students with 21st century skills and passion for learning.

### Educational heritage

Beyond its history of academic success, BPS has built a strong foundation of innovative teaching and learning. John Weisser, the district's executive director of technology and information services, has been working for BPS over the past 20 years, focusing on mastery-based learning with an emphasis on building autonomy and purpose. Under Weisser's leadership, BPS had many teachers who'd started to use technology to enable learning. Then in 2008, the people of Bloomington gave their votes in support of education technology by passing a referendum for additional funding dedicated to tech in schools.

Sean Beaverson, secondary technology coordinator at BPS, explains that Bloomington became a technology leader by sharing knowledge with other districts in the area. "There's a shared culture of learning in the Twin Cities—if one school district makes a leap forward, surrounding districts ask 'how did you do that?'" Beaverson explains. "If we're going to provide what's best for students, we have to look to our neighbors and think big about what's next." Through this community, teachers in Bloomington heard about Google Apps for Education.

Katrina Mezera, currently the technology project coordinator at BPS and formerly a middle school math teacher, was an early adopter. In 2009, she introduced Google Apps to her 7th grade class while participating in a 1:1 pilot program. "I had access to devices, but wanted to find a way for my students to collect their own data, then share their outputs with each other and work on math outcomes," Mezera recalls. "I knew there had to be a better way." Google Apps met the need. Once she started using it in the classroom, Mezera encouraged other teachers to join, and observed the momentum growing organically.

"By fostering early adopters, we had many stories to tell about why rolling out the tools district-wide would be worthwhile," Weisser says. "We demonstrated the power of technology to accelerate learning through differentiated instruction, increased student engagement, and a broader set of learning resources."



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—Katrina Mezera, technology project coordinator, Bloomington Public Schools

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*"It's critical to involve classroom teachers deeply and give them the time and space to apply their experience and creativity to their learning environment."*  
—Sean Beaverson, secondary technology coordinator, Bloomington Public Schools

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*"We were doing a simulation and it was really helpful to use our individual Chromebooks instead of all having to share one desktop computer in the corner."*  
—Middle school students, social studies, Bloomington Public Schools

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## Preparing students for a rapidly changing world

After the adoption of Google Apps, BPS transitioned toward a 1:1 environment. In 2013, BPS launched a new [technology plan](#) and chose Chromebooks as the devices. "We decided to go with Google because it was already our productivity tool," Mezera explains. "And it was so simple. You don't have to learn how to use a Chromebook—you just use the Internet. The simplicity means we're gaining back teachers' time so they can focus their energy on students."

With 1:1, students are becoming content creators, rather than just consumers. In 6th grade language arts, teachers have created book blogs in Google Sites, so their students can blog about what they're reading. Two schools in the district have paired up their students as "book buddies" and share content across their sites. A geography teacher, who once used transparencies to project map images to his classes, has shifted to using Google Maps in the classroom so his students can publish their own collaborative versions.

The hands-on, flexible approach enabled by Google Apps and Chromebooks has helped teachers empower their students to engage with the material. "I was in a classroom for developmentally delayed students last week, and the teacher remarked on how many more questions kids can find the answers to," Mezera says. "Kids ask intriguing questions and can seek out the answers right away."

## Reaching all learners

BPS learned early on during its MacBook pilot program that a 1:1 program must be sustainable. After sunseting the costly program and assessing different devices against the district's sustainability and instructional model, BPS decided on Chromebooks. Middle schools are 1:1. High schools will be 1:1 next fall. And by the end of fall 2016, grades three to five will be 1:1 with Chromebooks and grades one and two will have 1:3 access to devices.

"We want to ensure a student can move from one classroom to another and be guaranteed the same level of education," Beaverson says. "Part of our rationale for going 1:1 is to level the playing field so that everyone has the same access to tools for learning."

Beaverson reflects on the change he's witnessed just over the past year. Two elementary school teachers participated in the flipped classroom cohort last year. Now they are 1:1. "They've moved from putting videos online to developing fully mastery-based processes so kids can work through different paths depending on their pace of learning," Beaverson says. In middle school classrooms, which are all now 1:1, Beaverson has noticed more co-working and collaboration: "During our pilot project in the spring, we saw kids using their devices to journal, sitting at their individual desks. In the fall, they were clumped in groups and working together more actively."

