



DISTRICT FINDS COST-EFFECTIVE CHROMEBOOK COLLABORATION FOR NEW SCHOOLS



Kelli Marsh is the Director of Technology Integration for grades K-12 at Urbana City Schools in Urbana, Ohio. The district is beginning to implement a 1:1 student Chromebook initiative from sixth through 12th grade. It utilizes Chromebooks carts for students in kindergarten through fifth grade. In the next few years, each teacher will receive a new MacBook and an iPad. Every room will be equipped with a 75-inch monitor.

Note: Urbana City School District uses the term "learning studio" when describing its classrooms.

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CHALLENGE

Urbana voters passed a school levy in 2014 to replace every school building in the district. The buildings were old, averaging over 90 years in age, and the layout of the schools had a negative impact on instructional delivery options. As Urbana district leaders and architects began discussing learning studio (classroom) design, they realized they needed to rethink school technology as well.

"Our district decided that we need the same technology in every learning studio from kindergarten through 12th grade," Kelli said. "This is important in the new schools because our learning studios are designed to be flexible. Teachers may not teach in the same studio every day. They need to know how to use the technology in any room."

The district also wanted less restrictive technology. Teachers wanted technology that would let them move away from their desks or computers and boost full-class collaboration.

"We realized our teachers are tied to their computers or interactive whiteboards," Kelli said. "Interactive whiteboards are expensive, become outdated rather quickly and are restrictive in terms of software compatibility and collaboration. Only one student or teacher can use them at any given time. The rest of the class becomes passive bystanders."

SOLUTION

To make all school technology consistent and less restrictive for teachers in the new flexible learning studios, Urbana City Schools will implement the following:

- More than 600 Chromebooks in the form of 1:1 and cart deployments
- A MacBook for every teacher
- An iPad for every teacher
- A 75-inch non-touch-screen monitor in every learning studio
- Wireless HDMI connection or hardwired connection to each 75-inch monitor
- Reflector device collaboration software on each MacBook

The district declined the option to acquire interactive whiteboards or projectors for the new buildings. Neither are a necessary component of the new learning studios, and the decision will cut technology acquisition costs drastically. Kelli said the district found more cost effective and convenient means of classroom collaboration. Each MacBook will be equipped with the \$15 Reflector software. Reflector allows students and teachers to wirelessly display Chromebooks and iPads on the teacher's computer.

Reflector is already in use in more than 50 learning studios at Urbana City Schools, and it will be rolled out to every teacher MacBook when the new schools are finished.

"We know mobility leads to better class management," she said. "Reflector allows our educators to be mobile while they teach. As students get devices that can connect to Reflector, their engagement goes up. They love seeing their work projected and are blown away by the ability to see more than one peer's work at a time."

Urbana teachers use Reflector to add a collaborative and visual component to lessons and activities. Kelli said it's common for students to present Google Slides presentations, videos and Kahoot projects to the class from their Chromebooks.

"Being able to wirelessly present student Chromebook screens is powerful," Kelli said. "The students are excited to show their work and are engaged in what's happening."

In the new schools, each teacher's MacBook will be connected to the 75-inch monitor by cable or wireless HDMI. This will allow the entire class to see what is happening on the Chromebooks and iPads that are displayed in Reflector.



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RESULT

Urbana City School District will cut costs and increase collaboration in the new school buildings with its revamped technology strategy. The decision not to implement interactive whiteboards and projectors in the new schools will save hundreds of thousands of dollars on product purchases, installation, maintenance and repairs.

There are currently 53 teachers using the Reflector device collaboration software. A full-district, 150-license deployment is scheduled once the new buildings are finished.

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