Massapequa School District

Streamlines 21st Century Learning

MASSAPEQUA PUBLIC SCHOOLS
MPS
EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION

AT A GLANCE

CHALLENGE:
One place for teachers, students, administrators, and parents to communicate, collaborate, and create.

DECISION:
PowerSchool Learning, Google Apps for Education, Chromebook

RESULTS:
85% usage rate; Quick access to 21st century tools; Easy management of cloud-based solutions; Streamlined communication and collaboration.

The Massapequa School District (MSD) in Long Island, NY serves 8,132 students in grades K-12 across nine buildings. The school recently launched the next phase of its "Learning… Anytime, Anywhere" program, a 1:1 Chromebook initiative. The combination of PowerSchool Learning, Google Apps for Education™, and Chromebooks allow teachers and students to stay connected and gives each real-time access to content, online file storage and the ability to collaborate in meaningful ways.

"When we were piloting, we were just thinking in terms of instructional usage in the classroom. We quickly discovered that our building administrators were also interested in using [PowerSchool Learning] and Google to communicate and collaborate with their staff. While it wasn't what we had been gearing up for, it's become a really unbelievable outcome."

–Jenny Steigerwald
Executive Asst. for Digital Curriculum Support & Development

Overview

Four years ago, MSD was like many districts without a learning platform. The teachers were using different websites for their classes. Students had to juggle multiple logins for different platforms and apps for each teacher. Parents had to do the same for each child in the district. " We wanted to find that one platform for all teachers to use. It had to be easy to use, versatile, and allow for a "one-stop shopping" concept for students, parents and teachers, a place that would serve as an online planner so students would have instant access to assignments, notes, etc." said Jenny Steigerwald, Executive Assistant for Digital Curriculum Support and Development.

Solution

About five years ago, Vickie Ahearn, the district's Technology Integration Specialist, was a classroom art teacher who wanted to find an online platform for her class content. Vickie came across PowerSchool Learning. In her words, "It is amazing—[PowerSchool Learning]

has everything you need in an online learning management platform—easy to use content creation tools, the ability to embed digital content from the web into the class pages, create online discussions, assignments, and assessments, and so much more."

She set up a free account, and immediately started using it. "It was great, I was able to create a functional class website that was effortless to update. My students had 24/7 access to online class content and we were on the way to a paperless classroom. Among my favorite features? WikiProjects and MiniSites content blocks were perfect tools to showcase student work from my art and web design classes."

The following year, Jenny announced a district-wide pilot program for several learning platforms. Her goal was to find one that best aligned with the district's needs. Vickie was the first to volunteer and share the positive experiences she already had with PowerSchool Learning. Jenny liked what she saw and introduced PowerSchool Learning to a few more people.

It didn't take long to get people on board. Ed Kemnitzer, Executive Assistant to the Principal at Berner Middle School, created an entire class on his iPad the same day Jenny introduced PowerSchool Learning to him. Ed joked, "I got addicted quickly."

Results

Today, three years later, Massapequa has an 85% usage rate for [Powerschool Learning] amongst teachers. While the original goal was to be a "one-stop shop" for teachers and students, it's become much more to all the stakeholders involved: administrators, teachers, parents, and students.

"Teachers quickly realized the time savings in not having to continually upload a Word doc or a PDF with each edit. They really saw the value of that and it translated into a high adoption rate for [PowerSchool Learning] and Google. Teachers began posting class notes, homework, test reviews and more—anything that streamlines their work—the teachers love it."

–Vickie Ahearn, Technology Integration Specialist

ADMINISTRATORS MODEL USAGE, STREAMLINE COMMUNICATIONS

One of the biggest surprises was how administrators immediately took to the platform and used it to streamline communication with building staff.

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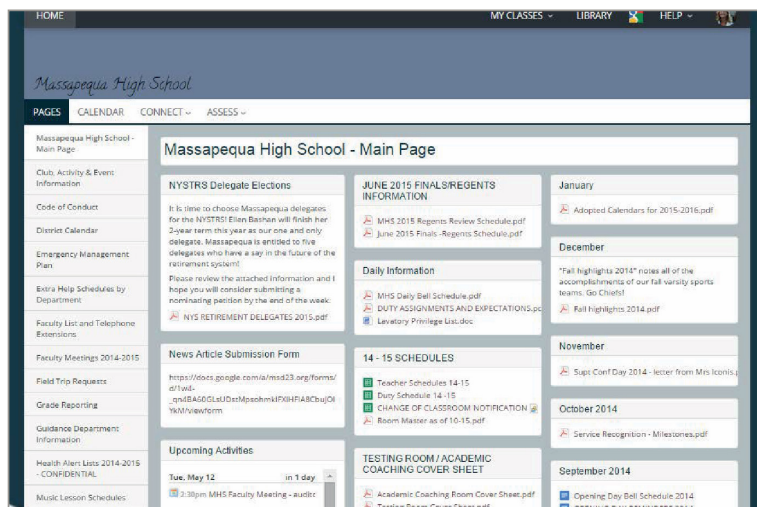
Benefiting first-hand from the streamlined communications exhibited by administrators, teachers were excited to do the same with their students. Teachers and administrators found the use of embedded read-only documents from Google Drive into PowerSchool Learning classes an efficient way to create content. Specifically, they liked how each edit is automatically updated on the document in everyone's class.

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Embedded Google Docs can be seen in this staff page. Administrators first demoed the efficiency of Google Docs and PowerSchool Learning. Teachers then did the same with their students.

STUDENTS GAIN INDEPENDENCE AND PARENTS GET REASSURANCE

The teachers also appreciate how using PowerSchool Learning has helped to reinforce skills, such as accountability and independence. Teachers are able to track students usage within PowerSchool Learning using Analytics. Vickie said one elementary teacher uses Analytics to motivate her students: She takes a screenshot of her class' Analytics on a weekly basis and posts it in her PowerSchool Learning class to encourage student usage.

The platform has also enabled students to take more ownership over their learning, according to Deja Berry, Executive Assistant to the Principal at Berner Middle School: "I think the biggest piece is creating student independence. When students are out, there is no need to wait till the next day to catch up with their teacher. They just log into [PowerSchool] on their own and access the day's work from home."

And the parents? Now it's easier to keep up with their child's work—and easier to understand it. The new math covered in the Common Core caused concern with some parents because the methods of teaching math are so different, and parents found themselves unable to support their child at home. In response, teachers posted videos of classroom lessons demonstrating the problem-solving process.

TEACHERS FOSTER 21ST CENTURY LEARNING, COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS

Something else the teachers love? How easy it is to enable students to be creators of digital content—a valuable 21st century skill and necessary to meet today's new standards, especially those focused on college and career readiness.

"Having students publish for a global audience is part of the Common Core standards," said Jenny. "And [PowerSchool Learning's] WikiProjects helps us facilitate that."

With WikiProjects, students can easily create online projects using video, audio, images, and text without writing a single line of code. And using the Embed the Web library enables students to create content in a huge variety of web applications and embed that work directly into their WikiProject.

With the early elementary grades, the teachers are using the platform as more of a portal to communicate with parents and families. Teachers embed pictures that showcase student artwork and other activities going on in the class. They also use it to provide information about things they can do outside the classroom, links to interesting museum exhibits, and back to school packets.

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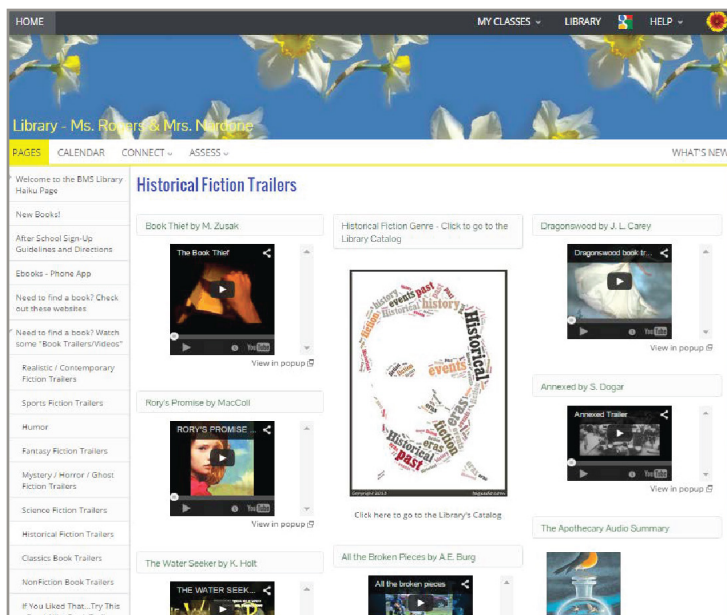

LIBRARIANS BECOME A SOURCE FOR TEACHERS AND STUDENTS

The librarians in the district jumped on board right from the beginning. "The great thing about our [PowerSchool Learning] class is that we use it to communicate with the entire student body," said Anne Nardone, a librarian at Berner Middle School. They host school elections using the Polls feature, and house all kinds of resources that help teachers and students.

Their PowerSchool Learning class supports district initiatives by posting helpful videos for teachers, like "How to Flip Your Class." For students, there are videos like "How to Make a Google Presentation." In addition, they have an "Ask the Librarian" feature for when students can't make it down to the library or just prefer communicating electronically.

Through the platform, the librarians even contribute to school spirit by offering monthly contests: In January, it was translating Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech into braille.

The librarians dedicate pages in their PowerSchool Learning class to video trailers of books to help students find books that might appeal to their tastes.

POWERSCHOOL LEARNING + GOOGLE APPS FOR EDUCATION = PERFECT TOGETHER

The district is now in its third year of using the platform and its second year of GAFE and its associated Chromebook initiative. Having the two work together so seamlessly has helped drive that overall adoption rate of 85%.

"It allowed teachers using [PowerSchool Learning] to easily integrate Google Apps as content and as collaborative assignments for students," said Vickie. "And then the reverse was true too. We had some Google users that weren't [PowerSchool Learning] users. When they saw how easy it was to add content from Drive into [PowerSchool Learning] as a way to share with their students, they were on board with it."

The PowerSchool Learning-GAFE integration has made it much easier to carry out Massapequa's 1:1 initiative. The Chromebooks are affordable, which made it even easier for them to get their 1:1 initiative going and continue its deployment to all of their 7th-12th graders over the next two years.

"We don't have to wait for boot up time, and in under 60 seconds we've got access to [PowerSchool Learning] and the GAFE platform through the Chrome browser on the Chromebooks," said Jenny. "It's just made everything more efficient, there's increased instructional time, and there's less distractions for students because everything is integrated."

For domain administrators like Jenny and Vickie, it helps that both platforms are so user friendly. "The management is a breeze because you can do it all from one Google Apps console, manage the devices, the Chrome browser, and you don't need to be a systems engineer to accomplish this," said Jenny. "Both the [PowerSchool Learning] and GAFE domains are very user friendly, no costly server or software updates and the customer service experience from both platforms is outstanding."

"We're starting to have more discussions with our technical team, we're sitting and making decisions together.

'What's best for all users? How do we accommodate everyone's needs?' Because we're not spending time on managerial tasks, we can spend more time making strategic decisions regarding instructional practices to improve teaching and learning."

"IT'S SUCH A PART OF OUR CULTURE NOW"

Teachers who live in town hear students and parents talking about PowerSchool Learning on the weekends. One teacher heard students talking about finding review material on PowerSchool Learning while at the movie theater during finals week last year. Vickie, who lives in town, often hears parents in the local stores referencing it in their conversations.

They even got union support. When a union rep first started asking questions like, "Is this something we have to do?" Jenny told her, "No, this is something you're going to want to do! You'll see the impact this will have on your classroom. People love it!" Now, according to Ed, that union rep "has one of the best [PowerSchool Learning] pages in the district!"

MSD has appointed two additional teachers to be on "special assignment" in the middle school and high school as Technology Learning Coaches (TLC) to assist with district technology initiatives including PowerSchool Learning, GAFE, and their 1:1 Chromebook rollout. The TLC works on site just for instructional technology to help the staff apply best practices from what they've learned these past few years to transform what the teachers will do there. Next year they'll be rolling out Chromebooks to the 9th graders and the incoming 7th graders.

Despite all the work they've accomplished with PowerSchool Learning, Jenny still sees MSD as being in the "infancy" of its program. "It seems like longer, though, because it's such a part of our culture now."

About PowerSchool

PowerSchool is the #1 leading education technology platform for K-12, serving more than 20 million students, 36 million parents, and 57 million users in over 70 countries around the world. We provide the industry's first Unified Classroom experience with best-in-class, secure, and compliant online solutions, including registration and school choice, student information systems, learning management and classroom collaboration, assessment, analytics, and special education management. We empower teachers and drive student growth through innovative digital classroom capabilities, and we engage families through real-time communications across any device. Visit www.powerschool.com to learn more.

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