

Plainville Citizen Op-Ed, October 2013

Plainville Community Schools began this school year with a new tool in place to help students learn - - Chromebooks for every student in grades 8 - 12. With these devices, our school district has started the transition to digital resources for teaching and learning. Chromebooks are laptops that use software and applications that are web-based instead of internally installed. This makes the devices inexpensive, easy to update, more secure and fast. Chromebooks start up in less than 10 seconds and utilize Google Apps in place of Microsoft Office.

Planning for the Chromebook rollout began this past spring. The devices were ordered in May and 970 shipped to the high school by mid-June. During the summer, the Technology Department prepared the high school and middle school networks for the increased wireless traffic with new networking equipment. Next, some of the existing laptops were reallocated from the high school to the middle school to increase the number of available computers for students in grades 6 and 7. The Chromebooks were then prepared for the incoming students. The devices were unboxed, registered to Plainville schools, and inventoried. Each Chromebook was placed in a personalized case and ultimately grouped for distribution by homeroom classes in each school. This preparation process was completed by the Technology staff with the assistance of two Plainville High School students over the summer.

In addition to preparing the Chromebook devices, support for faculty and staff was also developed. Bi-weekly professional development sessions are held for staff with a focus on the various Google applications. One application, Hapara, will be used to help facilitate the use of Google Apps to share information and keep student documents in order. Faculty members were also able to become "Google qualified" over the summer via online lessons and testing from Google. The "Google qualified" teachers are now also available as peer trainers for colleagues during professional development sessions.

Since the start of school this year, excitement from staff and students about the ways technology is being used in class continues to build. From science classes conducting research in collaborative groups, to world language classes preparing presentations about places around the world, students now have expanded access to a multitude of information when it is needed and under the supervision of the teacher. Classes now have access to digital textbooks for math, social studies and more. These online textbooks include video, audio and online support. Teachers are also creating their own lessons with digital resources to meet the needs of Plainville students and extend learning.

While the Chromebook distribution this year has been a great success, we are just beginning our journey to discover all that we can do with the Chromebooks and digital resources, and how we will use them going forward. It is a very exciting time for Plainville Community Schools with only more innovation to come.