

Innovative Clarkstown Central School District helps Google create its newest product, Classroom



About Clarkstown Central School District

- A public, suburban school district
- Serves approximately 8,600 students
- Located 25 miles northwest of New York City
- [Website](#)

Goals

- In a mutually respectful partnership with the community, and within a secure, caring environment, meet the unique needs of students
- Motivate and enable students to be life-long learners and productive, ethical contributors to an ever-changing global society

Context

- Early adopters of new technology
- One of the first districts to use Google Apps for Education and Chromebooks
- Used and gave feedback to improve the new product, Classroom

District

Clarkstown Central School District (CCSD) serves approximately 8,600 students in southern New York. Clarkstown prides itself on fostering a small school climate, community involvement, and a focus on the individual. The district has ten elementary schools, one middle school, two high schools, and one K-12 alternative education center.

The district offers innovative programs to its students through web-based technology and was one of the first to adopt Google Apps for Education as well as many other innovative tools. Even in times of tight budgets, the district finds ways to get the right tools to its faculty and students.

The introduction of Classroom

Since the Google education team was familiar with the great work of educators at Clarkstown, Google approached CCSD in late 2013 about whether they would want to use a brand-new product in development, Classroom. Classroom is a new tool in Google Apps for Education that lets teachers create and organize assignments quickly, provide feedback efficiently, and communicate with their classes with ease.

John Krouskoff, Toni Ann Piscitelli, and their colleagues in the Instructional Technology team liked what they heard. They had offered teachers similar products in the past, but none had been a perfect fit. Piscitelli explained, "Sometimes they were cumbersome or too expensive. Sometimes they were overwhelming. Classroom looked like a great solution and it kept things in the Google suite."

Soon a few educators became part of the "alpha and beta tests." They included Paul Lepore, 8th grade Social Studies teacher, and Heidi Bernasconi, 12th grade Marine Biology teacher, as well as Paul Diamond, Nicole Buchanan, and Joseph Gallo. Both Lepore and Bernasconi had put a lot of effort into improving the assignment and communication processes in their classes, so they were perfect candidates to use Classroom and give feedback to Google.

Benefits

After they had used Classroom for a few months, educators and the IT team pointed to two main benefits: increased student engagement and improved organization for the classroom.





Google Apps for Education

Google Apps for Education is a suite of communication and collaboration tools offered to schools for free and without ads. Products in the suite include Email, Calendar, and Documents. Google Apps for Education can be accessed from any device, at any time.

Learn more

Classroom is coming later in 2014. To gain access to Classroom, a school must have Google Apps for Education.

- Administrators – sign up for Google Apps for Education for free at google.com/apps/edu.
 - Teachers – read more and express interest in getting an early preview of Classroom at google.com/edu/classroom.
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Student engagement

In describing Classroom, Bernasconi says that “It serves as an extension of the class.” She likes that it allows her to contact individual students about their assignments. She found that students have done more work with Classroom, and that they have fewer questions about their grades and less confusion about assignments.

Lepore has seen how Classroom has increased student collaboration, too. For example, one morning a student posted a comment into the Classroom stream asking for help. Nearly seven hours later, Lepore watched in real time as another student answered the question posed by his classmate in the morning. It turns out that the student had completed some extra research to help out.

Lepore went as far as to say that Classroom has helped him improve his teaching: “I really think that Google has changed my craft as a teacher for the better. The products are easy to use and allow teachers the autonomy and flexibility they need to engage students in dynamic and constructive learning activities.”

“Teachers are able to assign work to their students in a flash, therefore maximizing student learning in the classroom.”

—Paul Lepore, 8th grade Social Studies, Felix Festa Middle School.

Classroom organization

Classroom has also made it faster for Clarkstown educators to share links, documents, and videos with students. They can post an assignment with Classroom, and the product automatically sends it to students, organizing each assignment into folders.

Bernasconi explained that even though she had been using Google Docs, commenting is now easier: “With Classroom all the students’ assignments are in one spot for commenting. This is more seamless than if I had just shared a Google folder with all the same resources.” She found that giving students immediate feedback made them more responsible about signing on and checking Classroom for their grade and any comments she had left them personally.

And it made grading faster for Bernasconi too: “The first assignment took a very short time to grade. I was even able to grade and return assignments before the due date (something I can’t really do with other tools).”

Lepore has also enjoyed using the assignment flow of Classroom, including the grading input features. “I was grading these projects and I had an ‘aha’ moment—I will never use a Google Form as a ‘turn-it-in-form’ again. Classroom is really a faster way of grading. Teachers will really appreciate this.”

“It’s very efficient and makes it really easy to share study notes; before only one of us had the paper copy, but now we all can use the same resources to study.”

—Lindsey, 8th grade student

Next steps

Clarkstown intends to make Classroom widely available to teachers for the 2014/15 school year. Piscitelli says, “This latest addition to the Google Apps for Education suite underscores Google’s commitment to providing schools with tools that fit seamlessly into the instructional landscape. And, at no cost for the product and no anticipated cost for training, this product fits seamlessly into our budget.”