Carroll School helps students overcome learning disabilities with Google for Education

Background
Carroll School is located in Lincoln and Waltham, Massachusetts, and was founded in 1967 by a group of neurologists who wanted to help children with language-based disabilities, like dyslexia, succeed and thrive in learning environments. Today, with over 400 students, 150 teachers, and 50 staff members, Carroll School is dedicated to empowering students to become confident, lifelong learners.

Challenge
Margaret Kuzmicz, director of technology at Carroll School, wanted to give students access to technology that inspired them to learn, rather than discouraging them. Unfortunately, the Windows devices the school had at the time were clunky, slow, and difficult for students to use. Further, the frequent technical issues related to their Windows environment made it a challenge for the IT team to maintain. "Managing a Windows environment had many challenges, to the point where I needed to hire temps in order to get the devices ready each year," says Kuzmicz. Since many students with language-based disabilities struggle with traditional reading and writing strategies, Carroll School wanted to provide intuitive technology that would help their students excel in the classroom. In thinking of a better solution for their students, the school realized that touchscreen devices would be easier for all to use, especially for their youngest students.

Solution
In 2014, Kuzmicz partnered with multiple departments within the school, including both the Administration and the Cognitive Intervention and Research teams, to find a solution that would best fit Carroll School's unique needs. "We chose Google Apps for Education, Classroom, and Chromebooks because they deliver the type of experience that our students need and deserve," says Kuzmicz. All students now use touchscreen Chromebooks in the classroom for their day to day work, as well as for testing. Chromebooks have been so popular that this year, the faculty at Carroll School is piloting 40 devices of their own with a plan to eventually have all 100 teachers using Chromebooks in the classroom.

Benefits
Increasing educational access for students with language-based disabilities
Carroll School relies on cognitive testing software to assess student progress. Students originally used Windows tablets to take tests, but the lag time was so poor that the test results, which measure how fast a student responds to a question, were rarely on par with how fast a student could actually respond. The old technology, therefore, was harming students' test performance. Today, the touchscreens on the Chromebooks make it easy for students to instantly respond to questions on a cognitive test, eliminative lag time completely.
“Google Apps for Education has become a resource for Carroll School,” says Kuzmicz. Chrome add-ons improve students’ learning experiences even more: Google Read & Write, for example, allows students both to hear words that they select read aloud, and to dictate writing assignments into written form in a Google Doc. Tools like this give students with language-based disabilities a new opportunity to engage with learning material, one that isn't available with other platforms.

Empowering students to succeed with real-time support
Students with language-based disabilities experience more difficulty with schoolwork than the average student. “This puts them at risk for becoming discouraged with school even though many of our students are incredibly smart and creative,” Kuzmicz says. Google Docs has helped Carroll School students overcome this issue. Today, students can complete an assignment in Google Docs, share it with their teacher, and get instant feedback, which makes them feel more supported and confident in their abilities.

Students also regularly practice communication and writing skills with Gmail, Classroom, and Docs, sharing their work and leaving comments for their teachers and fellow classmates. “They're in continual, and often live, contact with their teacher and other students. This connection helps students become more productive because they are able to overcome obstacles that would've previously left them paralyzed, without support,” says Kuzmicz.

Reducing maintenance, support time, and costs
By switching to Google Apps for Education and Chromebooks, Carroll School saves money on both the base cost and ongoing management of the technology. With these savings, the school is able to provide more financial aid to students in need, a result they view as a key benefit of going Google.

“Google Apps for Education is a major conduit for communication, collaboration and productivity between teachers and students.”
— Todd Bearson, project based learning department head and faculty member

“Google has also completely changed the lives of the tech support staff here at Carroll School. Our help desk tickets have been reduced by about one-third compared to the previous year.”
— Margaret Kuzmicz, director of technology at Carroll School

Google for Education
A solution built for learning and designed for the classroom that includes easy-to-manage affordable devices like Chromebooks and tablets, a “mission control” for class through Google Classroom, a powerful suite of productivity tools with Google Apps for Education, and new ways to engage students like Google Expeditions. Together these tools help teachers save time, increase collaboration, and inspire curiosity while students discover and learn together on any device, from anywhere.