

Westlake Charter Schools Use Google Tools to Create Positive Learning Environment



About Westlake Charter School

- <https://westlakecharter.com>
- Free Public K-8 Charter School
- Serves 900+ students
- Located in Sacramento, California

What they wanted to do

- Create an interactive and personalized learning environment
- Save on costs and maintenance of technology
- Provide a positive learning environment

What they did

- Introduced [Chromebooks](#), [Google Classroom](#) and [Google Apps](#)
- Trained faculty and staff to use Google Apps exclusively

What they accomplished

- Inspired students to go above and beyond their given assignments
- Saved on technology costs and provided easy-to-use devices
- Created a more positive learning environment by protecting student autonomy



Organization

[Westlake Charter Schools](#), located in Sacramento, Ca, was founded in 2005 by a group of parents and teachers in the community to create a school that promotes hands-on learning, small class sizes, cultural diversity and foreign language acquisition. Much like a Silicon Valley startup, Westlake was launched in 2005 in a living room by a group of passionate and entrepreneurial teachers and parents. Westlake now spans two campuses, with 900+ students in grades K-8th and 40+ teachers.

Challenge

John Eick, executive director at Westlake Schools, wanted a technology solution that would reflect the schools' entrepreneurial roots but could still be managed with a limited budget. The Westlake administrative team believes that giving every student access to a computer, WiFi and the cloud creates a more independent and interactive learning environment. Students would have more access to information, be able to collaborate more and learn the important technological skills they'd need in the workplace. The schools also wanted to use technology to protect student autonomy when communicating sensitive information, such as student support referrals, over electronically.

"At Westlake, we believe that student engagement is quintessential to learning and technology like Google for Education helps us in our mission to create a joyful and engaging learning environment."

— John Eick, Executive Director at Westlake Charter Schools

Solution

For Eick, it was clear from the beginning that [Google for Education](#) was the best solution for Westlake. While he assessed other solutions and devices, such as iPads and Microsoft Office, none of these options were as easy for students and teachers to use as Google for Education products. In 2014, the schools launched [Chromebooks](#), [Google Classroom](#) and [Google Apps](#) across both campuses. To spur adoption, the administrative staff took the lead by using Google Apps exclusively for email, document sharing and calendaring. This way, teachers were able to quickly become familiar with Apps before using them in the classroom.

Benefits

Inspiring students to go beyond the assignment

Developing interactive and personalized curriculum is a priority at Westlake Charter Schools and the administrative team hoped that with Google this would be even easier for teachers to do. What surprised the administrative staff and faculty was how students began to lead the charge by going beyond the given curriculum to further their learning. For example, in one history class the



teacher assigned the students to chart the progress of Manifest Destiny in 1800s America by dropping pins in [Google Maps](#). The students then suggested taking the assignment a step further and showed the teacher how they could use layers in Maps to outline the 1803 Louisiana Purchase — creating a historical, interactive map of America.

Saving costs on devices, maintenance and paper

“Before, our schools went through 120 cases of paper a year on average — that’s over a million pieces of paper,” says Eick. In just one year with Google, the school has decreased paper usage by 1/3, saving them thousands of dollars. In addition, Westlake had previously spent thousands of dollars on iPads, but the screens often cracked and bluetooth keyboards often broke. Because Chromebooks are so sturdy, the school not only saved on the initial cost, but also the maintenance costs. Chromebooks are increasingly [helping schools](#), like Westlake Charter save money while providing more students access to computers.

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Creating a positive learning environment

Every teacher’s least favorite part of the job is writing support referrals for students to visit the principal’s office when they break a rule or need to see a counselor. Every student in class knows something is wrong when they see a teacher fill out a paper referral form, which can be embarrassing for the student involved. Westlake decided to replace the paper-based referral process with Google Forms and mobile devices. Now, teachers can discreetly take out their mobile phones, pull up the [Google Form](#) for student support referrals, and submit all necessary information to the administrative office — all while looking like they’re simply sending a text message. Using technology for this process protects student autonomy and keeps the classroom a positive place for students to feel confident and empowered to learn.

“At Westlake, we believe that student engagement is quintessential to learning, and technology like Google for Education helps us in our mission to create a joyful and engaging learning environment,” says Eick.

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.

