

Council Bluffs Community School District

Read&Write enhances learning experience by enabling all students

Background

The Council Bluffs Community School District serves families in Carter Lake, Crescent and Council Bluffs in Iowa. More than 9,000 students attend two high schools (grades 9 to 12), two middle schools (grades 6 to 8) and 11 elementary schools (pre-school to 5th grade). All incoming students and students new to the schools in the district are invited to attend with their parents a brief orientation session about Project Connect, the District's 1:1 portable computing initiative. The school district welcomes a wide range of students with all ages, levels and socioeconomic backgrounds represented in the student body. The district caters for special educational needs learners with a series of specially-designed programmes that offer rigorous academic discipline as well as a supplementary extracurricular offering.

Council Bluffs has been utilizing G Suite for Education (GSFE) for five years, and was one of the first districts to beta test Google Chromebooks in the classroom. The district increased their technology offering gradually, looking to fulfil its 1:1 aspiration and so far has about 8,000 of its more than 9,000 students at 1:1.

Challenge

In 2013 Council Bluffs experienced a vital and substantial problem facing its school community. With special education students grouped into the same classrooms as general education students, the district observed that special education students would rarely participate in class if the lessons or assignments involved reading or writing. This not only stymied the lesson progress of the special education students, but had a knock-on negative effect on the students' confidence and willingness to engage in lessons.

Solution

Educational practitioners at Council Bluffs saw a demonstration of Texthelp's Read&Write for Google at an assistive technology conference and after listening to customer testimonials

and seeing the tools in person they believed in its ability to close the learning gap online. Kelly Dufek, Assistive Technology Facilitator and Tech Instructional Coach for special education and general education, said “the biggest benefit and immediate draw of the software was its ability to level the playing field instantly for anything that required the program’s speech to text functionality, as well as its dictionary capability. There was a remarkable elimination of work needed to attend to special needs students, a huge benefit that was perceptible straightaway. The added benefit of students being able to hear what their work sounded like with Texthelp’s Read&Write for Google text to speech functionality allowed students to easily revisit their work and make adjustments as needed.”

Capabilities

Through the use of Texthelp’s Read&Write for Google, students can type and collaborate with no worry about spelling or saying the wrong thing and getting embarrassed. Kelly especially noted that the students “are more confident in what they are doing instead of raising their hand for teachers to come. They don’t want to feel different. It’s really helped them grow in the classroom.” The cumulative effect of having Read&Write for Google in the classroom has really enhanced the learning experience, letting students participate, collaborate and grow in terms of their self-esteem.