

Laptops made for teachers: Hillsborough's Blueprint for a Successful Chromebook Plus Deployment

About Hillsborough Township Public Schools

Hillsborough Township Public Schools (HTPS) serves the largest municipality in Somerset County, New Jersey. The district has about 780 staff and 7,300 students spread over six elementary schools, one intermediate school, one middle school, and one high school.

Choosing a device for teachers in the modern classroom

Just as students benefit from technology that helps deepen learning, teachers reap advantages from devices and solutions that support their teaching. But teachers' technology needs are vastly different from their students'. Their to-do list ranges from curriculum and grading, to professional development, and administrative tasks—that requires higher-powered devices.

The district uses a four-year financing plan to provide new devices to its staff every four years. As teacher Windows laptops approached their fourth year, the tech team initiated a refresh process. As repurchasing new Windows devices was deemed very costly, and considering the district's existing investment in Chromebooks and Google tools for K-12 students, leaders decided to explore Chromebook Plus for their teachers. Investigating Chromebook Plus as a teacher solution had several advantages, including equipping teachers with devices that mirrored the operating system and features of the student laptops.



Every four years, a different fleet gets refreshed, and we structure our financing so that every year we're paying for a quarter of the devices. It's created this continuous flatline budget. That's how we've been able to afford the one-to-one deployment over such a long period. We've been very strategic about it.

Joel Handler

District Assistant Superintendent
of Instructional Technology

Chromebook Plus are powerful devices easily meeting the pace and volume of a teacher's workday. Built for video conferencing and multitasking, these laptops use AI to enhance the user experience. Key features include adaptive charging, which adjusts charging speeds to improve battery health and longevity, and Gemini on the web or in the OS, for an AI-powered assistant to help teachers with any task, at any point in their workflow.

Chromebook Plus hardware comes in a variety of flexible options like touchscreens with stylus and detachable keyboards, allowing teachers to easily move around the class during lessons, enabling more 1:1 direction with students. Running on ChromeOS, Chromebook Plus benefits from the same industry leading security protections that are built into all Chromebooks, including zero successful reported ransomware attacks on Chromebooks, ever.

A hands-on experience with Chromebook Plus helps create champions

Hillsborough Township schools commonly use pilot programs to choose new devices. The testing process for Chromebook Plus included a large group of teachers spanning grade levels and subjects. Hillsborough expected resistance from some of the cohort, given the district's long-standing familiarity with Windows and the perception amongst some teachers that Chromebooks are a student solution. William Gibson, Senior Systems Engineer at HTPS used the pilot to ensure smooth adoption "We wanted to know about any problems out there before we committed to a big rollout."

To put Chromebook Plus to the test, the district used the following steps:

Step 1

Tech department device evaluation

“We started with an internal evaluation of the devices,” explains Amy Mele, District Tech Coach. “We looked at a bunch of different devices that were on the market, and everybody on our team had the opportunity to weigh in on them and use their expertise to evaluate how they would work.” To give teachers more freedom to move around the classroom, the team chose the Acer Spin Chromebook Plus after a thorough evaluation. It’s powerful performance and multi-mode flexibility as a laptop, tablet, and display make it the ideal device for dynamic, hands-on instruction.

Step 2

“Work with the willing” and initial data collection

Once the tech team decided on Chromebook Plus to test (step 1), they gave 30 devices to teachers to test for two weeks. They then rotated the devices to another 30 users for two weeks, and so on through the winter and spring of 2024.

“We started with people who had expressed an interest in helping out with our pilot,” says Amy Mele, District Tech Coach. These early adopters—in other words, the “willing” pilot participants—could share their experiences with a larger group of testers (see step 3), some of whom might be more adversarial about using new devices.

“We had a good mixture of people—varied years in the district, years in teaching, and subject areas—to make sure that Chromebook Plus would make the grade for everyone and that we got feedback from every possible source,” Mele says. The tech team purchased more devices so they could broaden the pilot program and ask more teachers for feedback.

Step 3

Larger pilot sample size

The next phase involved giving even more teachers hands-on time with Chromebook Plus. The district’s tech leaders knew change could be a challenge for teachers, as they would have to set aside time that’s often scarce to learn how to use a new device and operating system. The tech leaders provided training at this stage to set up the early-adopter teachers for success.

Fortunately, there was overwhelmingly positive feedback from participants about features like fast startup speed, larger screens, and the reduced tech support needed for us to feel confident in onboarding devices.

Step 4

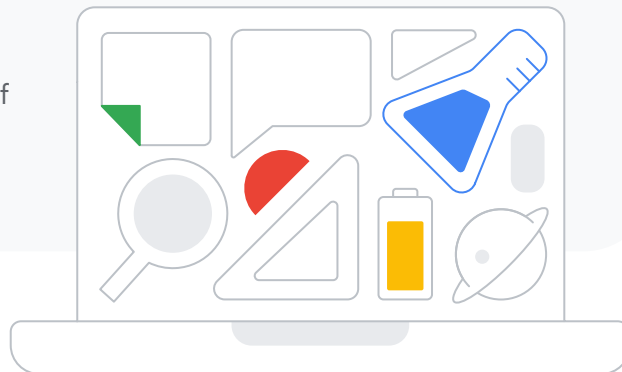
Final testing by IT team

Based on teacher feedback, Hillsborough tech leaders narrowed down their choice of Chromebook Plus model to the Lenovo Flex5I, which was singled out for its sensitive touchscreens and easy-to-use stylus. IT teams were also prepped on their role in the transition to Chromebook Plus.

Step 5

Summer training and staff device deployment

With IT issues addressed and managed, tech leaders created a Chromebook Plus Quick Start Guide for all staff, and offered an hour of training on the new Chromebook Plus, during educators’ summer professional development days.



Cost comparisons show the true value of Chromebook Plus

After the tech team gathered positive feedback and realized they could easily resolve teacher concerns with Chromebook Plus, it was time to talk about the budget. A proposed state budget cut added urgency to the conversations, especially since the tech leaders already determined that new Windows devices would be too costly to purchase.

When comparing various options, adding new Chromebook Plus proved to offer a savings of more than \$93,000 a year over 4 years for 800 devices. The district then decided to purchase Chromebook Plus laptops. Chromebook Plus also offered longer battery life compared to the previous laptops, and brand new warranties, saving on costs for new batteries and warranties.

“Chromebooks give us a lot of savings in terms of security software and licenses that we’d no longer need to buy,” says Handler.

Preparing teachers for change

The tech team felt confident that Chromebook Plus would meet teachers’ exacting standards for an advanced yet easy-to-use computer, both in and out of the classroom.

“What really made our pilot such a success was the buzz of positive rumors started by the early testers,” says Tech Coach Daniel Cyckowski. The pitch to teachers was that this wasn’t just an equipment switchout: It was an upgrade, even down to the devices’ sleek look.

Thanks to summer training sessions and [Quick Start Guide](#), teachers were well-prepared to embrace the change to Chromebook Plus. Likewise, the tech team appreciated the easy management and rapid deployment for Chromebook Plus.

With Chromebook Plus matching the environment of student devices, Hillsborough Township teachers were ready to create new learning experiences for the new school year.



Teachers tell us that it’s easier for them to support their students because they’re on the same platform. It’s much easier for people to demonstrate a lesson and then ask the kids to do exactly what they’re telling them to do, rather than trying to make it look the same.

Amy Mele

District Tech Coach

