

PPS Technology Times

A Publication of the Portage Public Schools Technology Department

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Technology Integration SharePoint: <https://sharepoint2.portageps.org/Curriculum/TechIntegration/default.aspx>

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Chromebook Pilot at a Glance

Advantages

- Ability to structure lessons to specifically focus on the varying levels of need each student demonstrates = Seamless differentiation.
- Students become well-versed in technology
- Students are actively engaged in learning
- Ability to quickly formatively assess students' knowledge before, during, and after a lesson.
- Easy to share Chromebooks because each one is customized when the student logs in with their Google Apps ID.
- Tech Specs: Long battery life, durability, quick login, lightweight
- Integration with Google Apps provides flexibility

Disadvantages

- Only web-based programs run on the Chrome OS. Certain applications like Lexia or Office that require an install will not work.

3 Top Favorite Tools

- Socrative.com - Formative Assessments for Differentiating Instruction
- Google Docs - Document creation, Presentations, Spreadsheets with the ability to Share for easy grading and peer collaboration and review.
- Google Drive - Passing out and turning in documents in an organized manner.

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One-to-One Computing: Google Chromebooks Transforming the Way We Teach and Learn

We are now well into our third month of the Google Chromebook pilot in Todd Chappa's third grade classroom at Lake Center Elementary and it is amazing how much can change in just three short months. Todd and his students have completely embraced this new way of learning and teaching in a one-to-one environment.

The Chromebook computers are never far from the students' fingertips. Whether they are practicing their geography with Place the State on <http://www.sheppardsoftware.com>, taking a quick formative assessment on Socrative (www.socrative.com), typing up a report or presentation in Google Docs, or practicing their math skills with their

online math textbook or ScootPad (www.scootpad.com), the students are always engaged and learning.

One of the first things anyone who walks into the classroom will notice is how the Chromebooks have completely transformed the teaching and learning in the classroom. "I feel that one of the most immediate benefits has been the amount of time saved for myself and for the students. With these devices, I am able to overlap multiple content areas during a single activity such as combining keyboarding, math and presenting. Physical textbooks and print sources have become somewhat obsolete as my students use the online book for their math curriculum in addition to using various apps in place of work-

sheets. Teaching has become more effective as catering lessons based on individualized student needs is seamless. Further, I am able to utilize a multitude of websites to bolster areas students lack and provide real challenges for those needing enrichment while simultaneously stimulating interests." ~ Todd Chappa

Thanks to Mr. Chappa completely embracing these new devices and putting them through their paces, we are discovering each day the strengths and limitations of the Chromebooks.

If you would like to see the Chromebooks in action, check out this short video: <http://animoto.com/play/twkzrM-wpricPHb0IJGC7cQ>



Web Filtering in Portage Public Schools - An Overview

Several times a year, both staff and parents inquire as to why certain websites are blocked while others are not. These questions often lead to more general questions regarding how our web filter works and how reliable it is. What follows is a brief overview of web-filtering methodologies along with some specifics as it applies to Portage.

The Challenge

It has been estimated that the World Wide Web has over a trillion individual pages (no one knows the exact amount for sure). It is also estimated that more than 150,000 web pages are added each day. Given the ever changing content of existing pages and the constant addition of new ones, maintaining an accurate catalog of pages and their content is simply impossible. Any filtering strategy must acknowledge this fact and adapt as best it can. The three strategies most commonly used are content screening, whitelisting and blacklisting.

Content Screening

In this strategy, web-content is screened in real time as pages are requested. Should certain keywords or other specific patterns of data appear within the page, the filter prevents the page from loading. This is the least reliable method. For example, the filter might be set to block pages that mention the word 'breast'. While this might

block some pornographic web pages, it would also block access to medical information and poultry-based recipes. This strategy is also mostly ineffective in evaluating multi-media content. On the whole, this strategy is rarely used.

Whitelisting

In a whitelisting strategy, a list of appropriate websites is maintained by the filter, and only pages appearing on the list are accessible on the network. This is the most foolproof method, as access to any site must be preapproved by the filter's administrator - although one should remember it is not completely foolproof as nothing prevents the owner of a pre-approved site from adding inappropriate content to said site. In practice, whitelists are impractical to maintain - there is far too much content on the web for a central source to screen and approve. As with content-based filters, whitelisting also tends to block access to many useful sources of information. As such, whitelisting also isn't used very often. Some applications include workplace computers intended for use with only a few sites (kiosks, point of sale terminals, data entry terminals) and filtering for personal devices assigned to younger learners.

Blacklisting

In a blacklisting strategy, the filter al-

lows access to any site except for those specifically listed on a 'do not allow' list. This strategy offers the best balance of access versus filtering out inappropriate content and as such is the most commonly deployed filtering strategy in work and school environments. Should an inappropriate site not appear on the blacklist, the filter's administrator can quickly append it to the list, making the filter agile in the ever-changing internet environment.

Portage's Strategy

In Portage, we use a blacklisting strategy. We subscribe to a content screening service that provides the bulk of our listing of sites to block. From there, based on feedback from our staff, we have customized the list to add some sites back in and blacklist several others. We have different tiers of filtering for staff and students. We also will exclude some sites to protect our internet bandwidth for instructional use. We routinely inspect our access logs to ensure that the filter is working the way it should, finding approximately two or three sites a year that need to be manually added to our list.

In summary, no system is fool-proof. But, we are confident in our filtering implementation and the safety and security it provides.

Students' Email Accounts

Did you know that PPS provides an email account to each student? This email account is intended to support PPS instructional activities as well as a safe conduit for electronic communication between students and teachers.

Student email accounts have the form of firstname.lastname@portageps.org (ex. john.smith@portageps.org). Students may send or receive email only to other portageps.org email addresses, or to a limited number of PPS approved educa-

tional content or service providers (such as turnitin.com or prezi.com). Students cannot use their PPS email addresses with Facebook or other social media sites. All student email is permanently logged/archived so any allegation of misuse can be investigated.

When PPS staff want to communicate with students via email, the student's PPS email address is the safest, best address to use.

If any student (or you) would like instructions on how students access the

email system, please feel free to contact the help desk, help@portageps.org



Students have email accounts through our Google Apps

The eBoard Transition

In our district, when someone mentions eBoards everyone knows what is being talked about. From parents to students to teachers, everyone is on the same page. We have been making use of eBoards in some form or another for about a decade. That's a long time to get used to how something looks, feels, and functions.

EBoards came about in a time when we were looking for a quick and easy way to communicate electronically with our students and parents. We wanted an online portal to provide assignments and information directly from our classrooms while making it easy for teachers. Building your own website in those days just was not easy. A user had to understand the HTML web programming language and even that knowledge didn't make it easy or convenient for a teacher to quickly post information to the web. But with today's online tools everyone,

from child to adult, can easily maintain a presence on the internet.

The future of eBoards in Portage Public schools comes down to two main decision points. The first pertains to the functionality of eBoards. In the decade that we have used this tool it has not changed at all. Eboards are very limited in function and in their ability to provide a high level of interactivity. In this media-rich age, our end users require a greater level of media and access than what eBoards currently provide. The second issue comes down to dollars and cents. We simply can no longer justify the use of a limited, subscription service when so many feature-rich, no-cost options are available to us. Teachers may now choose to use the free web tools included in our Google Apps accounts such as Google Sites or Google Blogger, or a number of other services to meet the needs of their classrooms.

We understand that change is difficult, especially when we are moving away from a tool that so many of you have embraced wholeheartedly and used for a long time. Therefore, we are committed to helping any and all of you who need to make the switch from eBoards in any way that we feasibly can. We will do all we can to provide you with the tools you need in order to make your transition successful.

Many of you have asked when eBoards will be officially unavailable. Eboards will cease to function at the end of this, 2012-2013, school year.

Please look for upcoming trainings for some of the options available to help you with the transition and/or contact your Technology Integration Specialists, Jessica (jwinstanley@portageps.org) and Paul (pmurray@portageps.org), for assistance.

"Any change, even a change for the better, is always accompanied by drawbacks and discomforts." ~Arnold Bennett

Google Chrome to Become Default Browser

Internet Explorer (IE) was one of the first web browsers we all began using as we stepped into the information age. (Of course, it doesn't hurt that it comes integrated and installed as the default browser in Windows.) And for many years, Internet Explorer was also the best web browser available. However, in recent years Internet Explorer has bloated to the point where it is slow and also a security risk. Microsoft has not kept up with recent trends which have allowed other companies, namely Google, to take control of much of the market, providing a far superior product.

What does all of this mean to you?

This means that the use of Internet Explorer on your workstations should be

limited to only those web services that absolutely require its use. Otherwise, all internet activity should run through the district supported browser, Google Chrome. If you haven't made the switch already, please do so as soon as possible. Once you do, you will be happy you did. Chrome provides a level of portability and security that far exceeds anything else. As long as you sign-in to Chrome using your district email and network password, all of your information stored there will follow you everywhere you access the internet. Chrome is also available on your tablets and cellphones, meaning you will always have access to your bookmarks and browsing history regardless of your device or location.

What action will the technology department take to protect the network?

In order to increase and protect the security of our internet and network, we will be setting the default web browser on all

Portage computers as Google Chrome. This means that every web link you click on will launch in Chrome, not IE. You will continue to have the use of IE, but you will have to manually open that program to access the internet with it. This change to Chrome as the default web browser will take effect immediately following spring break. When you return to your school or the office, Google Chrome will launch when you access the internet.

How will the technology department support you?

As always, if you feel you would like some assistance with this transition or if you run into some difficulties, both our building techs and integration specialists will be available to support you. The fastest way to receive any type of assistance is to email the help desk at help@portageps.org. Additionally, you do not have to wait! If you would like to start making this change now, we can start today!



Meet the Tech Staff: Special Edition

New Building Techs: Joshua Enos, Michael Frey, and Diane Gottschalk

This Fall/Winter we are welcoming three new building techs to our ranks.

- **Joshua Enos:** Woodland Elementary and West Middle School
- **Michael Frey:** Central Elementary and Central Middle School
- **Diane Gottschalk:** Portage Northern High School and Community High

Spotlight: Joshua Enos



Joshua's prior employer was a retail computer shop, where he did hardware and software repairs on PCs, Macs, and various electronic gear. He was the lead technician, in charge of two other techs, and tasked with keeping the repair queue running smoothly and efficiently. He also has experience in the performing arts as a stage manager and technical director for two local orchestras, and his first career was a 13 year stint installing car audio systems in everything from \$100 beaters to Ferraris and private limousines. Prior to his computer career, Joshua received an Associate's Degree in computer technology from KVCC in 2012, and a Bachelor's degree in Industrial Design from Arizona State University.

Joshua is looking forward to the breadth and depth of experiences he will be exposed to in this position, as well as helping others learn new technology skills.

When asked to tell us a bit about himself, Joshua states that, "I am happily married with one stepson (5th grade at Angling Elementary!), my wife is a musician and arts administrator. My favorite pastimes are shopping with my wife, traveling, car shows, and video gaming. When the weather warms, my automotive genes kick in and you will see me driving my 1965 Cadillac Sedan DeVille to work as often as I can!"

Spotlight: Michael Frey



Before joining us here at PPS, Michael has worked at Sams Club right here in Portage. He held many different positions at Sams Club, the last one being selling Cell Phones. He enjoyed working retail and helping the customers with their phones, and any other electronic questions they had while in the electronics department. During the summer of 2011, Michael decided to create his own Computer Repair Business. The company is called CompuAID. Michael attended KVCC and WMU where he earned his CIS degree.

Michael is looking forward to the opportunity to help the faculty and staff with technology, and better the classroom experience for the kids. "I am already in awe how much technology is being used in classrooms today compared to when I was in school."

Michael is a big fan of soccer, and mountain biking. "I play indoor soccer every Thursday night at soccer-zone. Every Saturday or Sunday morning I'll be at home watching Liverpool FC play. I like to head over to the Al-Sabo trail and Mountain Bike, and if I feel like driving I'll head over to Fort Custer. I'm also a big fan of Discgolf; it's like regular golf but with a Frisbee and a basket as the hole." Michael has two nieces under two-years old that keep him entertained. One thing that a lot of people don't know about him is that he has a twin brother. His other siblings consist of his sister, and a brother who lives in Florida.

Spotlight: Diane Gottschalk



Before coming to work for the schools, Diane spent 12 years in the Civil Engineering field. Her last employer in this field was the City of Sacramento, Design Department as a Designer. During that time, computers began transforming the way she prepared project plans and she was in charge of leading this transition from ink on mylar to CAD. After moving to Michigan, she worked for Mattawan Consolidated Schools for eleven years where her last seven years were with the IT department as building computer technician. During this time, she serviced the technology needs of two elementary buildings at Mattawan.

Diane is looking forward to getting to know the staff and students at Portage Northern and CEC. She enjoys learning and supporting the technology being used in the education environment. "This position requires me to learn different equipment and system management which will make me a stronger technician."

Diane and her husband, Bill, have two children. Their daughter is a high school special education teacher in Maryland and their son is studying physics at Michigan State. Diane enjoys Michigan summers and finds working in her yard relaxing. She likes to travel and a great day would consist of racing down a river on her waverunner.

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Meet the Tech Staff: Special Edition

New Building Techs: Joshua Enos, Michael Frey, and Diane Gottschalk

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Tech Tips:

From Joshua:

Use the Google home page to convert almost any units. Type in the regular search box in this format: *xx.xx inches in meters*. For example: 1 inch in centimeters.

From Michael:

"One Tech Tip I would like to teach all our users is just to simply restart the computer and see if that fixes the problem."

From Diane:

Right mouse click, RMC, is your friend. When trying to figure out how to do almost anything in a Windows based software, RMC reveals many commands.

We are very fortunate to be welcoming such high caliber techs to our staff! Thank you to all the PPS staff for your patience as we worked to fill these positions with individuals who would be the perfect fit for our schools and our needs. Make sure you say hello to your new building tech the next time you see them in the hallways.

February/March After School Technology Trainings

Are you interested in honing your technology skills during our afterschool classes? If so, check out the complete list of trainings, learn more about the classes, view the training calendar, and download the training handouts, by going to: <http://techtraining.site.portageps.org>. Secondary Trainings begin at 3:15 and Elementary at 4:15 for each date listed. All trainings are about 60 minutes long and you will receive Professional Development time for attending. Sign up on KALPA (Course numbers are provided below for each class) – Simply click on the number link in front of the class you wish to attend. Input your username and password and click register. You should then be all set! If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to let Paul Murray (pmurray@portageps.org) or Jessica Winstanley (jwinstanley@portageps.org) know.

Intro to Google Docs – Have you heard about Google Docs and want to learn more about this great free online office suite? Do you want to learn how students can easily share documents and presentations with each other for peer editing and group projects? Do you want to learn how many teachers are cutting down on the paper in their classroom? Come check out Google Docs. To learn more, check out this short video: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eRqUE6IHTEA>

February 6, 2013: [433732](#) – 3:15-4:15 pm, Secondary

[433733](#) – 4:15-5:15 pm, Elementary

Open Lab Time - Come get help on whatever project/program you are currently working on.

February 13, 2013: [433737](#) – 4:15-5:15 pm, Elementary

February 20, 2013: [433739](#) – 3:15-4:15 pm, Secondary

March 12, 2013: [433742](#) – 3:15-4:15 pm, Secondary

[433744](#) – 4:15-5:15 pm, Elementary

Google Blogger: Create a Teacher Webpage - Looking for a new way to communicate with students and parents? Want an eboard replacement? Come to Google Blogger training and begin creating your own classroom blog. Blogger works best for teachers who have one class, like elementary teachers. Blogger is like an online journal you can share with your parents and students. If you primarily have links on you eBoard this could be the way to go for you.

February 26, 2013: [433746](#) – 3:15-4:15 pm, Secondary

[433747](#) – 4:15-5:15 pm, Elementary

Google Sites: Create a Teacher Webpage - Have you ever wanted a better way to communicate with your parents and students? Have you heard eBoards are going away and want to learn the alternative? Come to Google Sites training and begin creating your own classroom web presence. Google sites are ideal for secondary teachers with multiple preps and for teams of teachers at the elementary level. Individual elementary teachers may also find this a great tool to use. Perfect if you have a lot of files you wish to upload and share.

February 28, 2013: [433749](#) – 3:15-4:15 pm, Secondary

[433752](#) – 4:15-5:15 pm, Elementary

Blogging with Students – Would you like to learn about some great ways to use Blogger with your students? Do you want a way to help students improve their writing in a real world way? Come to Blogging with Students.

March 6, 2013: [433754](#) – 3:15-4:15 pm, Secondary

[433755](#) – 4:15-5:15 pm, Elementary

Projects with Google Docs – Google docs are a great resource for students. Have you been using Google Docs with your students and want to share some ideas? Come learn about projects you can try with your students and enjoy this collaborative experience.

March 26, 2013: [433757](#) – 3:15-4:15 pm, Secondary

[433758](#) – 4:15-5:15 pm, Elementary