Colorado Department of Corrections Modernizes Learning Management Platform to Help Reduce Recidivism

The State of Colorado's Department of Corrections (DOC) had about 500 Chromebooks in use for people in prison to further their education while incarcerated. The devices were set up as workstations from which students could access learning websites or programs. However, the lack of email capabilities had become an obstacle for incarcerated individuals who wanted to apply to universities or licensing programs online. Additionally, the Chromebooks had no access to any word processing programs, diminishing the quality of work students writing papers could produce.

Colorado DOC had a vision of making their corrections education system more modern to adequately prepare inmates for successful reintegration, maintain security throughout an ever-changing technology landscape, and enable teachers and students to be more self-sufficient in their current environment.
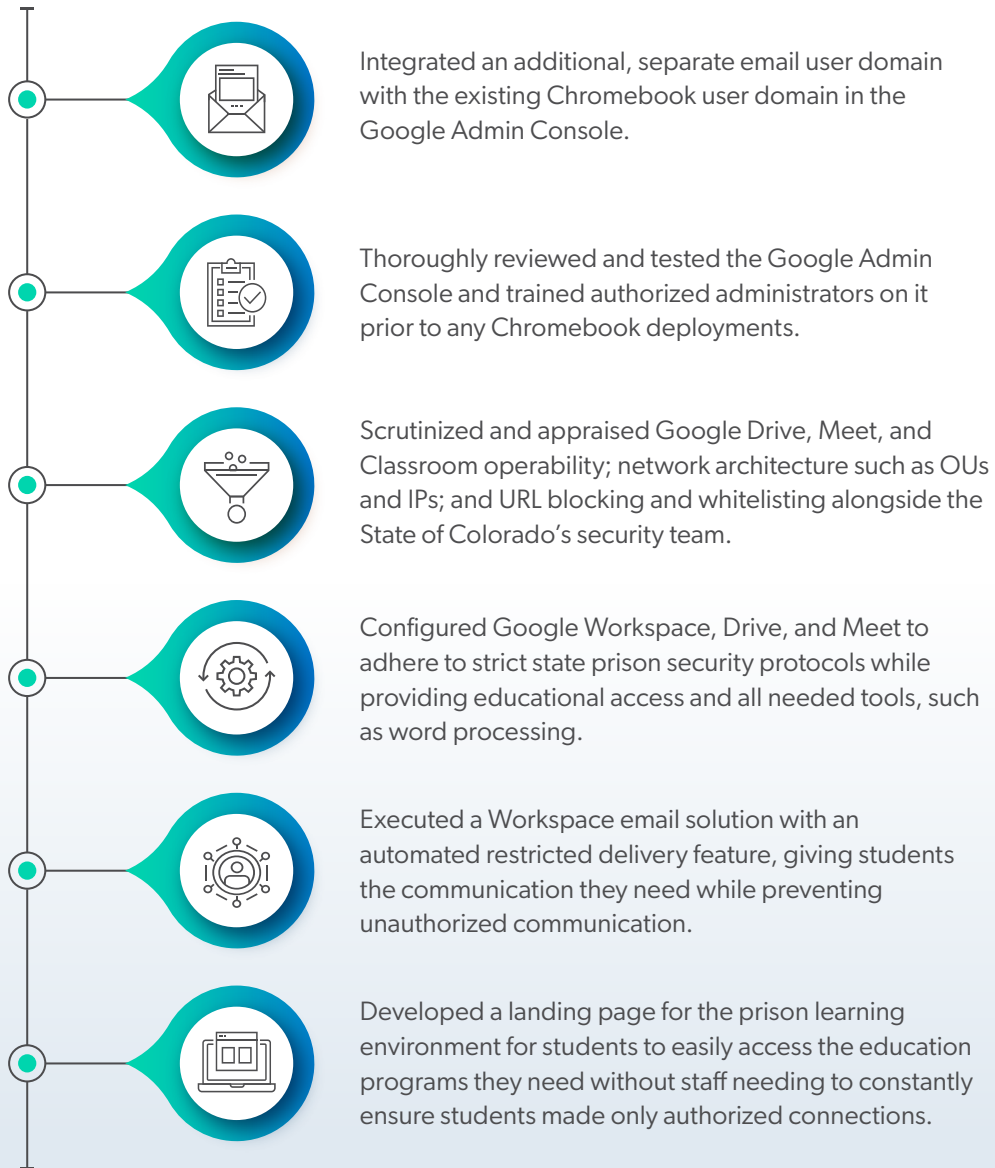
We partnered with Colorado in a year-long project to deploy the Google Learning Management Platform to all corrections education programs throughout the state prison system.

An Emory University study revealed the strong connection between education in prison and recidivism: The more education a person participates in while incarcerated, the less their likelihood of returning to prison. Nationally, recidivism rates are around 70%.

- **Vocational training cuts recidivism to approximately 30 percent.**

- **An associate degree drops the rate to 13.7 percent.**

- **A bachelor's degree reduces it to 5.6 percent.**

- **A master's degree brings recidivism to 0 percent.**

Thinking outside the box provides access while ensuring security.

Giving incarcerated learners the access they need to further their education and training without compromising strict prison security protocols requires meticulous planning and execution, including very specific decisions about where to enable collaboration and where to restrict it. Maintaining security guided our work, which included the following:

Integrated an additional, separate email user domain with the existing Chromebook user domain in the Google Admin Console.

Thoroughly reviewed and tested the Google Admin Console and trained authorized administrators on it prior to any Chromebook deployments.

Scrutinized and appraised Google Drive, Meet, and Classroom operability; network architecture such as OUs and IPs; and URL blocking and whitelisting alongside the State of Colorado's security team.

Configured Google Workspace, Drive, and Meet to adhere to strict state prison security protocols while providing educational access and all needed tools, such as word processing.

Executed a Workspace email solution with an automated restricted delivery feature, giving students the communication they need while preventing unauthorized communication.

Developed a landing page for the prison learning environment for students to easily access the education programs they need without staff needing to constantly ensure students made only authorized connections.

Technology helps inmates prepare for employment upon release.

The Google Workspace implementation wasn't only about email, though that was the first capability the DOC sought. Access to a word processing application—something even a fourth-grader takes for granted—makes a big difference to incarcerated learners.

Google Workspace Engineer Drew Boone said, "Before, students were writing papers in Notes without formatting or grammar or spell check. Putting word processing in their hands really helps them produce better work."

Colorado continues to operate on the Google platform and has plans of expanding in the future. Feedback from Colorado DOC indicates students found the landing page easy to navigate and instructors found training helpful and easy to follow. Staff feel confident in the technical security aspect of the entire system and network.

About Colorado Department of Corrections

Colorado Department of Corrections houses more than 17,000 inmates and employs over 6,000 staff in 21 facilities. Their mission is to protect the citizens of Colorado by holding offenders accountable and engaging them in opportunities to make positive behavioral changes and become law-abiding citizens.

"I sat in a class at Denver Women's Correctional Facility, and the students were thrilled with the Google suite. They were in a creative writing class and using spell check, able to pick up easily where they left off the previous session. They said, 'We feel like real students.' That is exactly what I was hoping to build in them."

— LEIGH BURROWS
Assistant Director of Prison Programs

"The Resultant team rose to the occasion. The four-year institution we work with is super happy with the format as it allows them to teach virtually, communicate with the students, and not feel like they have to spend more time babysitting their own systems."

— PHILLIP GOMEZ
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