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Contacts: Hayley Greene, Public Relations & Marketing Specialist
912.212.8512; 912.536.2827; hgreene@bulloch.k12.ga.us

School System Goes Google
Bulloch County Schools Pilots Google Apps for Education
at Three Schools in Preparation for District-Wide Launch

Bulloch County Schools will provide teachers and students with another valuable instructional technology tool when it pilots Google Apps for Education at three of its 16 campuses later this month. The school system will begin training William James Middle and Julia P. Bryant and Langston Chapel Elementary school faculties September 23, with student training and implementation at these locations to follow.

“The Google Apps environment affords everyone, staff and students, powerful opportunities for collaboration and sharing of documents and information in an efficient manner,” said Curriculum Director Teresa Phillips, who leads a 20-member committee of teachers, principals and information systems engineers that has been meeting and planning the pilot project for nearly five months.

“First and foremost, this is not just about email,” said Phillips. She and Data Analysis Coordinator April Beasley, co-presented to the Board of Education on Thursday, and shared how with any Bulloch County Schools technology offerings, stringent protections and filters are in place to ensure meaningful academic experiences. Phillips and Beasley also provided a list of frequently asked questions and explained that parents will be given the opportunity to opt their children out of the use of these services prior to roll out.
Google Apps is a free suite of hosted communication and collaboration software applications that are offered to schools, universities and non-profit organizations and includes the following: (1) Gmail webmail services with 7.5+ Gigabytes of email storage and no advertising; (2) Google Docs for online documents, spreadsheets, presentations, forms and sharing; (3) Google Sites for team website creation with videos, images, gadgets and document integration; (4) Google Video for secure and private video sharing; and (5) Google Calendar for shared calendaring. More than 10 million students and teachers are already using Google Apps.

"If our students are going to be college and career ready, we have to provide them with learning tools that enhance current practices and that are relevant to a twenty-first century environment," said Superintendent Charles Wilson. “Google Apps is one of those tools. Resources no longer mean just traditional textbooks and we have to adapt our learning model just as we expect our students to adapt to a changing world."

To deliver those digital resources, the school system’s technology department s experienced in offering cutting-edge software options to employees and students and supporting them with the needed training and safety. For this project, the First District Regional Education Service Agency (RESA) is also assisting with training. Google Apps is also certified by the Federal General Services Administration as meeting their stringent cyber-security requirements, and Google's spam filtering, intrusion prevention, and backup solutions are all industry standard.

Bulloch County Schools complies with the Children's Internet Protection Act, so any and all instructional technology tools provided by the system fall under the district’s Internet Safety and Internet Use Agreements. Employees, students, and parents are required annually to review either the Employee Handbook or Student Handbook and agree to follow these policies by signing the publications’ affirmation pages. Teaching faculty and students to be great digital citizens is part of all the technology tools the school system provides.

In Phillips’ presentation to the Board, she showed how Google Apps will help the school system accomplish its mission of being a state leader in academic achievement, cost effectiveness, and competitive workforce development by empowering employees and working with community stakeholders to create innovative and effective solutions for success.

These are some key benefits of using Google Apps for Education:

- It's cloud-based, so it creates a virtual 24/7 classroom where students can always have access to their work from any browser, any web–accessible device, or any software whether they are at home, school, the local library or other location
- It’s cost effective - Google Apps is a more reliable and secure way to store and back up information than most medium-sized K-12 school district can offer, and it is better protected from spam. By virtue of Google’s size and scale, they can afford to spend more on security and back-end infrastructure than a school district.
- Eliminates need for flash drives and prevents the loss of work due to damaged or lost drives
- Allows students to easily collaborate online with students from their classes on projects and to collaborate with post-secondary Google campuses like Georgia Southern University.
• Allows teachers to be more involved throughout the whole assignment process, be able to provide comments and feedback directly in the documents, and monitor participation by all group project members.
• Allows student to develop an e-portfolio of work throughout their K-12 years
• Conserves resources by reducing the need for paper and printed student agendas
• Provides students with more digital storage capacity than their current Homer Folders
• Replaces current teacher-student communication tools like Edmodo
• Provides students training in using a digital tool that is used by hundreds of colleges and universities and more than five million businesses

Friday afternoon the school system’s technology department made changes to the way all students at all schools logon to the network. This change will lay the foundation for implementing Google Apps to the three pilot schools and then later in the year to the remaining campuses. The Google Apps committee is developing a timeline for district-wide rollout.

William James Middle and Julia P. Bryant Elementary were selected as pilot sites due to their 2012 designation as Focus schools under the Georgia Department of Education’s new accountability tool, the College and Career Readiness Performance Index (CCRPI). The CCRPI, which replaced Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), cited a need for the two schools to diminish the achievement gap between its higher performing and lower performing students. As a result, each of the schools is receiving additional federal resources.

The school system received a $106,000 Title I-A School Improvement Grant for WJMS and JPBES schools in July 2013. The Board of Education approved the use of $49,471.80 of those funds to purchase Chromebooks, a product optimized for use with Google and not requiring the intensive network connectivity and support of traditional laptops. The devices are being provided to identified, at-risk students in order for them to use the applications and programs during intervention times and after school to improve their skills in collaborative work and communicate with their advisors. By providing this extra instruction, the expectation is that the scores of local and state standardized assessments will increase. Langston Chapel Elementary was selected based on the strength of its technology teacher’s knowledge of Google Apps.

In adding Google Apps, Bulloch County Schools joins secondary and post-secondary institutions within the state, like Georgia Southern University, the Georgia Institute of Technology, and Hall County Schools, who are already using the technology across their campuses. The school system has been recognized nationally for its use of technology, and this project continues that tradition. For more information, see our Google Apps Frequently Asked Questions, email your questions to webster@bulloch.k12.ga.us, contact Teresa Phillips or April Beasley at 212-3500, or speak to any Google Apps for Education Committee member: Central Office Members - Hayley Greene, Dr. Fran Stephens, Monica Lanier, Teresa Phillips, and April Beasley; Principal-Level Members - Todd Williford, Dr. Karen Doty, and Mike Yawn; School-Based Members – Lourie Owens, Robert Lindsey, Elizabeth Garvin, Shannon Robertson, Michelle Rivera, Shannon Anderson, Amy Altman, and Nancy Wiggins; Information Systems Members – Mike Townsend and Herman Metcalf. You may also visit the Google Apps for Education website.

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