

[Home](#) > [Feature](#) > Windows 8 in Schools

## FEATURE

# Windows 8 in Schools

## A new platform for mobile devices.

By Dawn Reiss — District Administration, Feb 2013



Helen Gooch, middle, the instructional technology coordinator for Clarksville-Montgomery (Tenn.) School District, is with two technology integration coaches at the Kilobyte training lab at Greenwood Technology Center, getting quick tips for using Windows 8.

**T**he Windows 8 operating system, which splashed on the market in October 2012, is changing the landscape of Microsoft-based computers. The once traditional PC operating system is making the move toward a more mobile, tablet-based environment in schools. With it comes a drastic change that will affect how educators interact with computers in a Windows-based system. The last major change in Windows OS was in 1995, says Cameron Evans, Microsoft's chief technology officer for U.S. education. "The world has changed," Evans says. "And now we need technologies to support that mobile lifestyle that students have and teachers have."

Some, like technology market research firm Gartner, say Windows 8 is a way for Microsoft to stay relevant in the rapidly mobile-based society. When the PC dominated computing by providing messaging, internet access, gaming, and productivity, Windows was a "powerhouse" for Microsoft, says Michael Silver, vice president and distinguished analyst at Gartner.

“However, smartphones and tablets, led by the iPhone and iPad, have changed the way people work, making the PC just one of several devices people use.”

## More Continuity

In a Tennessee military-based district, Windows 8 is the biggest change that Helen Gooch, the instructional technology coordinator for Clarksville–Montgomery (Tenn.) School District, has seen in her 12 years at the district of 32,000 students. “There is more continuity now between using a PC, tablet, and phone,” Gooch says. The district began using Windows 8 on educators’ computers after its launch. and by June, all student computers will have Windows 8. So far, fewer than 100 teachers are using Windows 8-based devices, such as Dell Optiplex 9010 with touch screens. Gooch says she expects to buy more laptops in the next year with fewer desktops being purchased.

“Change is always hard, but if you use a smartphone or tablet, this is very easy to migrate over,” Gooch adds.

Gooch says the key is gradually bringing in new technology, converting teachers as their upgrades come due. But the cost of converting to Window 8 varies for schools depending on their licensing agreements. The district, which has 37 schools, went from a \$6 million operating budget to \$2.5 million this school year, Gooch says. And this means “we are focusing on what needs to be replaced” and “looking for the best product for our dollars,” Gooch adds.

And because of the district’s proximity to Fort Campbell Army base, Gooch says there is a turnover rate of up to 300 new teachers each year who are moving with their military families, and that means constantly retraining new educators to keep them updated with new technology.

## Changing Landscape

Evans and Gooch agree that the computer OS landscape for public schools in coming months will change depending on the size of the school system, the health of the district operating budget and the manpower of the technology department.

Some schools in the Clarksville district are still running Windows XP on Apple computers, Gooch says. And educators are working under three operating systems because of the time, training, and expense it takes to upgrade technology. Over 15,000 elementary students use Apple and, depending on the age of the computer, are running Mac OS X 10.6 Snow Leopard or the 10.8 version. Middle and high school students work off PCs running XP or Windows 7, depending on the age of the computer. “It will be a hodge podge,” Gooch says. “That is just the nature of the beast.”



## Another Early Adopter

Cincinnati Country Day School, a pre-K12 school, has always been an early adopter of technology, says Greg Martin, the school's academic dean, teacher, and technology leader. Nearly two months before Windows 8 became public, Martin says his school was the first in the nation to have access to it. In late September 2012, the school, which has 350 students in its upper school, had 250 tablet PCs with Windows 8. Each device costs \$2,000 per loaner computer to pay for software licenses and a four-year extended warranty service agreement. Martin says it's essential in a 1:1 ratio that they learn more mobile, tablet-based technology. For example, using Windows 8, students can handwrite their math equations, diagram a sentence, handwrite a note or create a piece of art all electronically. Having the option of turning a traditional computer into a flat tablet screen is another plus, he says because it creates less of a physical barrier between teachers trying to connect with their students. The ability to connect multiple monitors to touch screens and easily run multiple programs simultaneously allows for great flexibility, Martin says, and "unimaginable uses we are only starting to discover at this time."

## Considerations

The first desktop operating system that supports mobile computing has pros and cons. The interface is the primary reason administrators will either love or hate Windows 8. The traditional start menu and button are gone, replaced by a start screen within a hybrid touch screen and keyboard and mouse interface. Everything on the operating system is built around using full screen apps and finger swiping movements common to using an iPad, iPhone or iPod touch.

The traditional start menu is not on the main screen. By swiping on the right side, charms, or small icons, pop up for shortcuts that show graphics to search on your PC or in an app, share information via email or social channels, change settings, find devices, and use the start menu, which is now a separate screen. A colorful tiled screen with apps gives students and teachers instant access from their main screen to social networking sites and allows for instant notifications on grades or assignments and administrators to quickly communicate with staff.

The tiles are either shortcuts to standard applications or apps and are constantly streaming and updating in real time. Schools can tailor their devices to decide which tiles they want to have their students use on the main screen.

Instead of a traditional split screen, a snap mode allows teachers to run side-by-side programs, either multiple apps, or an app next to an open Microsoft Word or Excel document. This allows students and teachers to watch streaming videos, like a lesson on Kahn Academy's free site, while using Microsoft's OneNote to take notes by typing, using their finger or stylus.

With Windows 8, the start time is less than 10 seconds—twice as fast as Windows 7. "We are certainly excited about what's possible with Windows 8 for teaching and learning—and especially the support it will bring as schools continue to move from print to digital," says Jon Phillips, Dell's global education director. "For schools considering Windows 8, we see that it is also spurring on valuable conversations about what they are first trying to achieve with a technology solution and then determining the best solution to help support the need, whether in curriculum integration or streamlining their IT infrastructure."

## On the Go

Just like the operating system, the Windows 8 phone is geared toward social networking in a mobile environment. People Hub gathers all email contacts and people from social networking groups like Facebook and Twitter together in one location. iPhone users can be invited into a room to sync up with calendar events, which can help teachers coordinate schedules.

There's also Windows To Go, a portable version of Windows 8, which can be added to a removable device like a USB drive. Older computers can be easily upgraded if a USB with Windows to Go is plugged into the machine, a low-cost option for districts, Evans says. And it's more cost-effective for IT departments to replace a USB drive if a student loses the USB device.

In unsafe neighborhoods, that also means students can put a USB in their pocket, making it less likely they will get robbed when walking to and from school, than carrying an expensive computer, Evans says. "In the game of being mobile, that gives every student equity," he says.

## **A California District Waits**

Georges Khairallah, a network specialist in the Chino Valley (Calif.) Unified School District, is not diving into using Windows 8 just yet. "Windows 8 is a paradigm shift, everything is moving toward mobile and tablets," he says.

Even though Khairallah says he thinks Windows 8 can potentially be easier to use than Windows 7, his district isn't converting to Windows 8 now. The district still runs an older Active Directory infrastructure, from 2003, and even though that would work fine with Windows 8, the priority is to upgrade the infrastructure before moving into upgrading workstations, Khairallah says. And Windows 7, which the district is using for half its computer technology, is still a viable solution, and users are just starting to get used to it. Most districts are understaffed and under-budgeted, making it hard to keep up, he says.

Still Khairallah says he has personally used Windows 8, but for traditional PC users who are trying to use a mouse, it may take new users a while to learn. "There are multiple ways to do things as there has always been," says Khairallah, about using command keys and swiping techniques on a PC to run programs.

For now, Khairallah wants to wait until Windows 8 becomes mainstream where most people are using the program at home. "We are going to wait to see what bugs come out," he says. "As much as I'd like to be a trailblazer, I'd like to have others in the community find those problems first." DA

*Dawn Reiss is a freelance writer based in Chicago.*

### **Taxonomy:**

[Classroom Integration](#)

[Infrastructure](#)

[Mobile](#)

[Networks](#)

[Virtual](#)

[technology](#)

### **More content like this:**

[Steps to Achieving Successful Digital Programs](#)

[The 10 Barriers to Technology Adoption](#)