

CASE STUDY

Virginia Beach City Public Schools World Languages Department



Virginia Beach City Public Schools (VBCPS) is a large school district located in southeastern Virginia.

The district's robust and flourishing World Language program features nine different languages of study: American Sign Language (ASL), Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Japanese, Latin, Russian, and Spanish. As part of the district's initiative to promote global citizenship and multicultural student bodies, the Global Studies & World Languages Academies were founded to promote community service, study abroad programs, and intercultural exchange. These programs now have around 125 students participating at each level and are the home to the largest group of Extempore users in the district.

Extempore at Virginia Beach

After learning about Extempore in 2019, the district, which has a one-to-one Chromebook program, began to integrate the platform into classrooms of the nascent Global Studies program in 2020, at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. This pilot program commenced as part of a larger initiative to evaluate various digital language lab platforms for designing and administering activities and assessments both in and out of the classroom, as well as semester exams and placement tests.

Since its introduction, Extempore has now seen widespread usage across the district.

I love that [Extempore] is extremely user friendly.

Courses in both the Global Studies program and schools across the district used audio, video, text, and image prompts for a wide variety of activities and assessments, allowing teachers to streamline assessments and save time in the process. As one language teacher put it, "Recording responses gives me back instructional time and reduces behavior problems in the classroom since I no longer have to meet with students individually over several class periods." Another instructor commented on how "It has allowed me to offer another way for students to demonstrate what they have learned. Students can provide responses, self correct, and continue as they develop fluency in the target language." In and out of the classroom, students have had many more authentic opportunities to practice all four skills (reading, writing, listening, and speaking) in new and different ways. Based on the overwhelmingly positive piloting experience, the VBCPS language department looks forward to continuing with Extempore during the 2021–2022 school year.

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Extempore Activities

In courses ranging from level 1 through AP®, teachers at VBCPS have adopted, adapted, and created a wide range of activities and assessments which take full advantage of all of Extempore's features. One of the language instructors explained, "Feedback and grading has been by far the best part. I love using my rubrics and then adding feedback all together. The written feedback section is really easy to use, and it almost feels casual. It reminds me of a social media layout." Another language teacher mentioned that her students "like the simplicity of the platform for the writing and individual audio recording prompts." The limitless opportunities for customizing language practice and assessments provide teachers and students with an invaluable tool in Extempore, while at the same time keeping things fresh for teachers and students.

Several colleagues across all levels and across all languages remarked on how much they and their students enjoyed using the feedback feature, noting its helpfulness, benefits to students, and overall ease of use.

Rollout Process

Because VBCPS has a 1:1 laptop program, and because all students, faculty, and staff have a G Suite for Education account, the rollout

process was extraordinarily simple, and particularly simple when compared to running and maintaining a physical language lab. All teachers in the department have individual instructor accounts, and all students sign in via Google single sign-on to both create and access their student accounts. This means that there are no passwords to create, remember, or recover, making for a user-friendly experience for teachers and instructors.

[Extempore] made it easy enough to make my interpersonal/presentational writing and presentational speaking assessments computer friendly. I love extempore for writing assignments, and I will likely keep that when we go back in person.



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Future Development Plans

As teachers continue to try out new and different ways of using Extempore for individual activities and assessments, they will also focus our efforts on becoming more adept at using the platform for synchronous group activities and assessments, too, from spontaneous speaking practice and listening comprehension exercises to practice and review for new vocabulary and grammar. AP® teachers are especially eager to make full use of the platform in preparation for next year's exams.

Student Perception of Extempore

In survey data collected from across the district, students lauded the Extempore platform and their experience using it during the pilot. One teacher shared how students "enjoy having conversations with a partner and being able to go back and listen to it," while another teacher noted that "students like the ease of Extempore [and] are more confident to speak when they can record instead of present in front of the classroom."

Future Development Requests

VBCPS is excited to continue to use Extempore next year and beyond, particularly in the growing Global Studies & World Languages Academies. Teachers and students look forward to seeing a more advanced grading process including more detailed rubrics for feedback and scoring.

