



Customer story

Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District



Sprawling Alaskan school district brings the latest edtech to its rural schools

The Matanuska-Susitna Borough, in Southcentral Alaska, sits in a valley bounded by three mountain ranges, with vast stretches of public land and thousands of glacial lakes. If you pull it up on Google Maps, most of your screen will be green. The Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District (MSBSD) covers a geographic area larger than West Virginia, and its 46 schools range in size from 17 students to more than 1,000. Given all that, having technology that serves students and teachers, without fail, is vital.

These are some of the factors MSBSD decision-makers took into consideration as they began looking at options to replace aging classroom interactive displays about seven years ago. Initially, the district didn't think new interactive displays would be in its budget. But in the summer of 2021, Mat-Su, as it's commonly called, installed more than 700 Promethean ActivPanels across the district. Another 325 older ActivPanel versions will be refreshed in the future.

A process of deep consideration, a period of testing, and a strong partner relationship with Promethean and STS Education led to this success story, aided by a CRRSAA / ESSER II federal relief funding package that helped the district get exactly the solution it wanted.

"We had reviewed and evaluated some other options," said Justin Michaud, Senior Program Manager in the IT department, "but nothing stood toe-to-toe with Promethean."

Pilot testers get excited about ActivPanel features

The district provides a Chromebook to each of its 19,000+ students, and ensuring those devices were up-to-date was technology priority #1. Over the years, when the budget allowed, the district had purchased different generations of classroom displays,

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meaning it had a variety of touch- and non-touch screens of varying ages. By 2020, the older displays and projectors were hitting the 10- or even 15-year mark, and were becoming less useful. Implementing temporary solutions, Michaud said, "we limped along." But as teachers struggled more and more with the displays, they became resistant to using them. Their reaction was understandable. "When you've got a classroom of kids," he said, "you want it to work."

The IT team understood the budget constraints, but decided to be proactive even before funding was in place. With the support of administrators, the team

began exploring different options. As a long-time customer, the district had older Promethean boards in some classrooms, so they considered purchasing the latest Promethean ActivPanels. They ran a pilot, testing non-touch displays in certain classrooms and also investigated a number of different interactive display brands. In the process, they concluded that Promethean's product design focus on K-12 education, and its professional development training, along with the resources offered on [Learn Promethean](#), meant the Promethean technology solution with ActivPanel was best suited for MSBSD's needs. It wasn't just a wireless display screen; it did the best job of "integrating the students into the solution," Michaud said.

Some of the features that stood out for both teachers and decision-makers: Using the Promethean interactive whiteboard feature, teachers can utilize an infinite learning canvas and save all of their notes for students to refer to later. The 20 simultaneous touch points and simple user interface turned out to be fun, useful in the classroom, and easy to interact with for both students and teachers. Promethean Screen Share lets students seamlessly share, display, and take ownership of their projects within the classroom. Not only that, there are built-in safeguards that allow teachers to better manage what's displayed—preventing students from hijacking the classroom display remotely. (It's happened with other devices.)

In addition, given the geography of the school district, the ability to remotely manage and troubleshoot the Promethean devices was a key factor in allowing the district to be efficient with tech support and IT staff.

They knew they wanted Promethean ActivPanels in each classroom. The hurdle was financing.

In early 2021, they came up with a partial solution: they would buy 342 ActivPanels, enough to cover the K-3 classrooms and some higher-level math and science classes. The remaining classrooms would unfortunately have to continue with the aging technology, that due to updates, were losing interactive functionality.

But good news arrived that spring, when additional federal relief funding became available. The school board acted quickly to take advantage of the opportunity. In March, they approved acceptance of funds, which allowed MSBSD to purchase 734 ActivPanels, ensuring that all classrooms would benefit from the new technology.

Partners make it happen-fast

Michaud says both Promethean and STS Education, a Promethean partner, made the entire purchasing and implementation process fast and seamless. With both companies aware of MSBSD's needs and challenges, they were able to jump into action once funding was in place. Both helped the district figure out which features best fit its needs, assisted with planning and logistics for the delivery, and also helped outline a plan for training even before the boxes were on the trucks. "The wheels were moving ahead of time," Michaud said.

Charles "Chappy" Chapman, the district's Customer Support Supervisor, was in charge of installation. When the boxes arrived, his team of workers fanned out across the district, installing all of the ActivPanels within 19 work days after delivery.

Meanwhile, John Notestine and Tomas Andersen, from the district's Educational Technology team that

supports training and integration of technology into the classrooms, had been working with Promethean to develop training curriculum.

Before school started in August 2021, MSBSD offered training to Chapman's IT Support Specialist, as well as MSBSD's Digital First Responders (DFRs) – a team that provides professional development training and Tier I tech support to educators across the district. The day-long session included in-person instruction from the district's Promethean Education Consultant, and material from the Learn Promethean video library.

"People were engaged and really excited," Andersen said. They were ready to take that information back to their school, providing training and support, to assist teachers as needed.

Edtech team levels up teacher adoption

To create an incentive for teachers to explore the ActivPanel's wide capabilities, the district offered continuing education credits for attending the newly developed training.

Initially, Chapman wasn't sure all of the features would be utilized, including Screen Share. But, he said, "Happily, it turned out I was wrong!" Visiting one 5th grade classroom to get the teacher started with the app, he saw a student's face light up when, with the press of a few buttons, her project was up on the big screen for all her classmates to see.

"All eyes were focused on her project," he said. "She was just so excited that she could share her work." Plus, teachers can be more mobile within their classroom, as they can cast to the ActivPanel while moving about the room.



Andersen, who was a 4th- and 5th-grade teacher before joining the Educational Technology team, said the whole package serves both teachers and students. "It's really evolved into an amazing tool," he said. "It's hard to imagine teaching in a modern classroom without it."



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