

Special Report

More Time to Learn:

Boost teacher productivity and free up more learning time with SynchronEyes classroom management software

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More Time to Learn

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Introduction

This report presents the results of a recent survey showing that SynchronEyes™ classroom management software saves teachers significant amounts of administrative overhead.

In presenting the results of the survey, the report also shows what classroom management software is and how it improves teacher productivity.

On average, SynchronEyes software was found to save teachers 14 minutes of class time per typical 50-minute class.

For teachers, having more teaching time leads to higher productivity, better time management, reduced stress and greater job satisfaction. For students, less class downtime leads to enhanced and increased learning time, higher engagement levels and the sense of having learned more in classes. Both groups can benefit from improved learning outcomes.

- Walking around the class to make sure students stay on task
- Getting students' attention during class
- Launching applications on every student device
- Getting students to type the correct URLs into their browsers
- Sending files to students
- Helping students who need assistance
- Receiving assignments electronically from students
- Showing exemplary student work to the whole class
- Logging students off

Figure 1:
Typical
administrative
chores

The Challenge: More Computers = More Chaos

Computers have become an integral part of every student's studies. Today, every school has at least one computer-enabled classroom, and most media centers now include computers that students can access.

In fact, the average number of computers per public school more than doubled during the decade preceding 2005, from 72 per school to 154 (Snyder & Hoffman, 2008, p. 607). During the same period, the number of students per computer fell by two-thirds. In 1995, there was an average of one computer for every 12.1 students. By 2005, there was one for every 3.8 students (Wells & Lewis, 2006, p. 6).

What this means is more students are getting their hands on more computers at more schools every year, which is preparing them for their lives in a connected world.

But every teacher knows about the serious downside to this proliferation of computers – the administrative overhead required to effectively manage the technology in these classes.

As listed in Figure 1, this overhead includes tasks such as sending files to students, getting students' attention during class and even walking around the room to make sure students aren't distracted.

From start to finish, computer-enabled classrooms make relentless demands on teachers to perform chores that add little or nothing to the teaching process. These chores eat up many precious minutes of every class and significantly undermine teacher productivity.

In fact, some teachers have even adopted a phrase to describe what happens in many computer-enabled classrooms. They call it "computer-lab chaos."

Teachers in computer-based environments are sometimes so harried that they resort to systems such as "computer stoplights," in which a green, a yellow and a red paper cup are stacked on top of each monitor. If students are on track, they keep the green cup on top. If they get stuck but can do something else, they put the yellow cup on top. And if they're totally stuck and need the teacher's help, they put the red cup on top (Steigerwalt, 2007).

Surely, in the 21st century we can do better than paper cups, can't we?

The Solution: Classroom Management Software

Fortunately, a category of software has been created to boost teacher productivity in computer-enabled classrooms. Previously called lab instruction software or computer lab software, it is now most widely referred to as classroom management software.

How does it work?

In essence, classroom management software uses computer networking functionality to put control of classroom computers back in the hands of teachers.

Some of the key features of classroom management software are listed in Figure 2.

- See thumbnails of all student screens
- Lock student screens
- Take over student computers
- Launch an application on all computers
- Restrict applications students can use
- Take snapshots of student screens
- Broadcast teacher's screen to all students
- Broadcast one student's screen to the whole class
- Restrict Internet access
- Launch a website on all computers
- Send files to student computers
- Receive files from students
- Teacher-student chat
- Student group chat
- Voting
- Log off or shut down student computers

Figure 2:
Key features
of classroom
management
software

These features can add up to significant time savings on teachers' administrative chores, especially if the software is easy to learn and intuitive to use.

Survey Confirms Major Time Savings

One of the leading examples of classroom management software, with over 30,000 successful installations since 1999, is SynchronEyes classroom management software from SMART Technologies.

Already renowned for being easy to learn and to use, the time-saving benefits of this software have now been confirmed as well.

* For information on the survey methodology, see Appendix A.

A recent survey of 348 users of SynchronEyes software concluded that, on average, the software saves teachers 14 minutes per typical 50-minute class, or 28 percent of total class time*.

Imagine what an extra 14 minutes of teaching time per class would mean for teacher productivity and student results.

Consider the calculations shown in Figure 3, which add up to an impressive seven hours of additional teaching time per class, per term. And this is just for a single computer-enabled classroom.

Fill in your own numbers in the blank column to do your own calculations. If your district has more than one classroom of this type, the savings end up being even higher.

These numbers provide a powerful rationale for adopting classroom management software in your district.

Figure 3: Calculator for total time savings with SynchronEyes software

Time Savings in a Typical Class Per Term	Time Savings in Your Class Per Term
50 minutes per class x 28% average time savings = 14 minutes saved per class	___ minutes per class x 28% average time savings = ___ minutes saved per class
14 minutes x 2 classes a week = 28 minutes saved per week	___ minutes x ___ classes a week = ___ minutes saved per week
28 minutes x 15 weeks per term = 420 minutes or 7 hours saved per class per term	___ minutes x ___ weeks per term = ___ minutes or ___ hours saved per class per term

Detailed Survey Results on Administrative Overhead

As shown in Figure 4, the survey confirmed significant time savings for each of the chores performed most often by teachers. On average, SynchronEyes software reduced the time required to complete these activities by 70 percent.

Let's look in more detail at how these time savings are being achieved by teachers in hundreds of different school districts across the country.

Walking around the classroom to make sure students stay on task: 72 percent less time

Before In a classroom with student and teacher computers, students are easily distracted by the temptations of the digital world at their fingertips. With countless distractions from which to choose, they might instant message, check e-mail, browse Facebook, MySpace and YouTube or play games. If left unsupervised, they often do anything except the lesson-related work they are expected to do.

This is why teachers frequently spend a significant portion of every class walking around the room, peeking over students' shoulders and reminding them to stay on track.

With SynchronEyes software Order reigns supreme. The software shows the teacher thumbnails of all student screens, so he or she can see at all times what everyone is doing.

For quick reference, most teachers have these thumbnails set up to match the physical layout of the computers in the classroom. And any thumbnail can be enlarged to full-screen size with a single click.

If students are off task, teachers have a number of options to help nudge them back on. They can lock students out of the program they are using, send them instant messages, blank their screens or even assume full control of their computers.

Of course, teachers still need to walk around the classroom to maintain a physical presence and help students who need assistance. But the task of "policing" the classroom can now be done much more efficiently and tactfully through classroom management software.

Survey results With SynchronEyes software, teachers spend 72 percent less time walking around the classroom to make sure students are on task.

Teacher comments “The greatest benefit of SynchronEyes is not needing to constantly walk around the room to keep an eye on the students,” says Jeffrey Stone, system administrator and computer teacher with Notre Dame High School in Fairfield, Connecticut. “Being able to spend less time observing and more time helping and teaching is a great improvement.”

“With this software I no longer feel like I’m patrolling – I’m teaching,” states Holly Loganbill, library media specialist with Indian River School in Canaan, New Haven.

Time Saved with SynchronEyes	Administrative Chores in Computer-Enabled Classrooms
72%	Walking around the classroom to make sure students stay on task
77%	Getting students’ attention during class
85%	Launching applications on every student device
82%	Getting students to enter the correct URLs into their browsers
80%	Sending files to students
45%	Helping students who need assistance
76%	Receiving assignments electronically from students
64%	Showing exemplary student work to the whole class
84%	Logging students off
Average time savings per 50-minute class: 14 minutes (28% of class time)	

Figure 4:
Time saved on administrative chores with SynchronEyes software

Getting students' attention during class: 77 percent less time

Before Classes equipped with student computers are often chaotic. Some students may be engaged in their work, while others are talking to their neighbors or just daydreaming. For a teacher, the task of getting everyone's attention for a few seconds to communicate something to the whole class can be exhausting and time consuming.

With SynchronEyes software With one click, the teacher can lock all student screens and display a message, such as "Eyes to the front, please." Almost instantly, the students settle down and the teacher gains full control of the classroom.

The teacher can do this at any point in the class when he or she wants to say something to the whole class.

Survey results With SynchronEyes software, teachers take 77 percent less time to get their students' attention during class.

Teacher comments "SynchronEyes allows me to lock students' computers and gain their full attention," says Stacey Fike, computer applications teacher with Irving Middle School in Norman, OK. "This has made such a difference in all areas of class, from impact on student learning, to my own sanity!"

Launching applications on every student device: 85 percent less time

Before Many teachers start a computer class by asking all students to open the same application. Most students do this readily enough. But there are usually one or two who have trouble getting started and slow the whole class down. The teacher often has to go to their stations and help them get going while the rest of the class must wait.

With SynchronEyes software The teacher can launch any chosen application on every student device in the classroom within seconds.

Survey results With SynchronEyes software, teachers spend 85 percent less time getting all students to open a specific application.

Teacher comments "Before SynchronEyes, I used to do everything manually. There are things I can do now which I could not attempt without the software, such as launching applications quickly," says Jim Konugres, technology trainer and teacher with San Marcos Unified School District in California.

Getting students to type the correct URLs into their browsers: 82 percent less time

Before The Web can be a powerful learning resource, and many teachers preview websites for their students to visit.

But whenever a teacher directs the class to a long URL, many students misspell it as they type it into their browsers. It can take several minutes to make sure every student ends up on the right page.

With SynchronEyes software The teacher simply opens the desired page in a Web browser and clicks Send to Students in the SynchronEyes toolbar to send every student in class to the same webpage.

Survey results With SynchronEyes software, teachers spend 82 percent less time getting students to the right webpages.

Teacher comments “The single greatest benefit of SynchronEyes for me has been the ability to send all students to the correct website with a single click,” says Billy Compton, technology director with St. Patrick School in Dallas, TX.

“With this software, I spend more time focused on instruction and less time getting students to where they need to be,” echoes Ron Milliner, technology coordinator with Owensboro Public Schools in Owensboro, Kentucky.

Sending files to students: 80 percent less time

Before Another common event in any computer class is to send every student a file with an assignment, exercise, background or, perhaps, a graphic or spreadsheet the teacher wants them to work with.

One way to do this is to load the file in a shared location on a network server and tell students where to access it. But some students always have trouble finding the file.

Another way is to e-mail the file to every student and ask them to start their e-mail program, download the file and then open it.

Again, a few students have trouble, forgetting their passwords or for some other reason needing individual attention from the teacher that takes time from the whole class.

With SynchronEyes software The teacher sends the file to every student device in the classroom, where it automatically opens in the associated application within seconds.

Survey results With SynchronEyes software, teachers spend 80 percent less time sending files to students.

Teacher comments “The greatest benefit I have received from SynchronEyes software is the ability to send files to students,” says Dianna Ritter, business education teacher with Northeastern Randolph Middle School in Liberty, North Carolina. “I do not have to stand in line waiting on the copy machine. I also save paper by sending files to students, and it saves time for them to open the document.”

Helping students who need assistance: 45 percent less time

Before In every class, some students have questions or need extra help – that’s the nature of teaching. Unfortunately, not every computer lab is set up in a space that enhances this process.

To simply get to a student asking for help, a teacher often has to pass by an entire row of other students, sometimes disrupting their work and even asking them to move their chairs out of the way.

Meanwhile, everyone else in the class knows which students ask for special help, which can make them targets of peer pressure and unwanted attention.

With SynchronEyes software The teacher can provide help to students more discreetly and efficiently. For example, students can use the chat feature to pose questions to the teacher and get quick answers without their classmates ever knowing.

Or, a teacher can take over individual students’ computers remotely, and show them what to do and where to click without even having to physically reach them.

Survey results With SynchronEyes software, teachers can give just as much help to just as many students in 45 percent less time than they could without the software.

Teacher comments “With SynchronEyes, students are more focused and less frustrated, since I can assist more of them during the class time,” says Sandra Horton, librarian and webmaster with Aberdeen High School in Aberdeen, Washington.

“Many times, students are afraid to approach the teacher, for fear of being made fun of by their peers,” agrees Jerry Walker, technology teacher with Eastern High School in Louisville, KY. “SynchronEyes provides a secretive way to ask questions that may sometimes not be asked for fear of group pressure.”

Receiving assignments electronically from students: 76 percent less time

Before Many teachers appreciate working with electronic files and saving paper. But not all computer classrooms make this easy.

In some classrooms, teachers have to physically go from computer to computer with a USB flash drive to collect files from each student.

In others, teachers ask students to e-mail their work to a specific address, or to save their files to a specific folder in a network server.

As you can imagine, any of these procedures can cause numerous delays.

With SynchronEyes software Every student can upload an assignment in a couple of seconds. All of the files are automatically placed in a specified folder with the student's name and a date stamp included in each filename. No matter what each student calls their assignment, the teacher can quickly find it.

Survey results With SynchronEyes software, teachers spend 76 percent less time receiving assignments from students.

Teacher comments "Being able to send files to students and receive files has saved an incredible amount of time," says Patricia Berning, computer teacher with the Ascension Catholic School in Kansas City, KS. "I no longer have to use jump drives to manually download the files."

Showing exemplary student work to the whole class: 64 percent less time

Before A teacher sometimes wants to show one student's good work to the entire class. The traditional way of doing this is to hold up a hard copy for everyone else to see, or to project it onto a screen at the front of the classroom. Either way, it is a time-consuming process that does not show the other students much detail.

With SynchronEyes software When teachers see that students have created great drawings or written wonderful passages, they can give the students some positive reinforcement through chat, and then broadcast their screens at full size to everyone else in the class.

Students feel great to be chosen for this kind of recognition. It helps motivate them, encourages teamwork and promotes better comprehension of the material.

Survey results With SynchronEyes software, it takes teachers 64 percent less time to show exemplary student work to the rest of the class.

Teacher comments “I like being able to show the other students in the class someone’s work that is done correctly. They enjoy seeing their work projected on the other students’ screens,” says Kathye Blackburn, MOS master instructor with Bossier Parish Technical School in Shreveport, LA.

“This program gives me a fabulous way to work on student writing, because I can grab an awesome example of a student’s writing and project it to everyone in the room to show them as an example,” agrees Eric Denney of City College of San Francisco.

Logging students off: 84 percent less time

Before In a computer-enabled classroom with no classroom management software, logging students off after every class and shutting down all computers at the end of the day are two big chores.

To do this, the teacher must physically move from one computer to the next, checking that every student has properly logged off. And generally, there are always a few who forgot to do so.

With SynchronEyes software This chore is totally automated. A teacher can log every student’s computer off with a couple of clicks at the end of class. When students arrive for the next class, their machines are ready for them to log on to their own accounts. At the end of the school day, the teacher can shut down all student computers just as easily.

Survey results With SynchronEyes software, teachers spend 84 percent less time logging students off and shutting down computers.

Teacher comments “SynchronEyes is a lifesaver in my computer classroom. I can log off or shut down my entire lab with a couple of mouse clicks, which is a great timesaver,” says Jon Lehman, computer teacher with Hope Christian School in Albuquerque, NM.

What Do These Time Savings Mean?

Reducing administrative overhead by 70 percent and freeing up an extra seven hours per class per term sounds great. But what does that actually mean?

Benefits to teachers

Having more teaching time per class means that a teacher can accomplish more in the same amount of time, leading to greater productivity.

It also means that teachers are less likely to run out of time before they complete their lessons, promoting better time management.

Giving teachers more time to teach means they can cover material in greater depth and spend more time making sure that all students understand it. They can answer more questions and give students more exercises with more time to complete them. All this ensures better learning outcomes.

With less time wasted on non-value-added administrative tasks and more time devoted to useful activities, teaching becomes less stressful, leading to greater job satisfaction.

The bottom line is that extra hours per class help teachers do a better job and feel better about their work.

Benefits to students

With class downtime reduced by 70 percent, students have less time in which to become bored or distracted, leading to their greater engagement during lessons.

With more time for teachers to go over topics and more time for students to ask questions or seek extra help, students gain better understanding and retention of the material.

More engaged students – with improved understanding and retention – leads to students getting more out of class time.

The resulting improved learning outcomes are exactly what administrators and parents want, too.

The Key Factor: Ease of Use

Finding classroom management software that is easy use is a key way to help your school or district gain similar benefits.

In that respect, SynchronEyes software stands above the competition, with a unique combination of powerful features wrapped in an easy-to-learn, simple-to-use interface. This interface has been continuously improved over nearly 10 years by refinements based on real-world feedback from teachers and technology coordinators.

An overwhelming number of survey responses focused on precisely this strength of the software. Here is one typical comment:

“SynchronEyes has a simple, intuitive interface which makes it easy for teachers to start using it with little to no training. This software changed the way I teach. I cannot even imagine teaching without it ever again, ever.”

Jim Konugres

Technology trainer and teacher with San Marcos Unified School District in San Marcos, California

Conclusion

As shown in this report, survey results prove that SynchronEyes classroom management software saves time by reducing administrative overhead for teachers.

“SynchronEyes software has doubled my productivity, while cutting in half the amount of time spent on manual tasks,” says Kara Norris, technology coordinator and teacher with Bishop Flaget School in Chillicothe, OH.

On average, SynchronEyes software saves 14 minutes out of every 50-minute class, or 28 percent of total class time. On average, the software saves 70 percent of the time it takes to perform each non-value-adding administrative task.

By freeing up more classroom time, SynchronEyes software helps teachers achieve improved productivity, time management and learning outcomes. It also helps them reduce their stress levels and enjoy greater job satisfaction.

To find out more about how SynchronEyes classroom management software can increase your teachers' productivity, visit smarttech.com/sync, where you can see a short product demo.

You can also download a free 30-day trial of the software and test drive it for yourself.

Appendix A: About the Survey Methodology

From October 1 to 24, 2008, an electronic survey was completed by 348 educational organizations across North America. The responses were analyzed by a statistics specialist who processed the raw data and produced an official report.

The margin of accuracy for the aggregate results is ± 4.9 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.

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