



Corrections educators talk tech at OYA’s Google summit



James Waterman, Google’s West Region Manager for State, Local and Education Markets, delivers the keynote address.

By [Sarah Evans](#), OYA Communications
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What do you do when you’ve allowed incarcerated youth to access the internet for research and online classes, but you discover they’ve secretly visited inappropriate sites? Or they emailed someone they weren’t allowed to contact? Or they traded information electronically to cheat for a test?

What you don’t do is panic, says Mike Riggan, superintendent at Oak Creek Youth Correctional Facility in Albany, the Oregon Youth Authority’s sole female facility.

“Kids will test stuff. You know what we call that? We call it ‘normal,’” he told a roomful of corrections educators and partners at the Google in Oregon Corrections Education Summit, hosted by OYA at the Hillsboro Public Library April 22. “We have to be open to learning and not lose our minds over this stuff. They’re going to screw up, and we’re going to help them figure out how to fix it and not screw up so much next time.”

These ideas may not seem too radical in regular public schools. It’s a different story in corrections-based



A panel on Security and Digital Management, presented by, left to right: Gary Westoby, OYA’s Statewide PbS Coordinator; Eden Nelson, Cascade Tech; Todd Broceus, Soft Link; and Frank Martin, OYA’s Education Coordinator.

schools, where security and safety concerns typically ban people in custody from using the internet or technology.

But technology can play a unique role in educating offenders, as nearly 50 people from Oregon, Washington, California, and Ohio heard at the April summit. As technology connects incarcerated people with more educational and vocational opportunities, the students gain skills to help them find work and succeed when they leave custody — and make them less likely to commit new crimes.

A variety of educators who work in OYA’s facility-based schools presented at the conference, their stories often exemplifying a quote from Google co-founder Larry Page that was projected on a screen at the beginning of the event: “Always work hard on something uncomfortably exciting.”

“In this day and age, we have such a unique opportunity to go back and rethink how we serve and

empower these children,” said James Waterman, Google’s West Region Manager for State, Local and Education Markets, who delivered the keynote address. “How do we rethink? We focus on them.”

OYA education leaders hosted the conference partly to share the expertise they’ve gained from the agency’s recently-formed partnerships with Google and Intel. The partnerships have led to many incarcerated youth in Oregon using Google Chromebooks for schoolwork and accessing websites and other educational content on [Intel’s stand-alone Content Access Point devices](#).

Topics at the summit included everything from navigating the Pell Grant process with students in custody, to creating layers of online security, to running an online community college within a correctional facility, to dealing with “youth shenanigans” as users attempt to game the system.

Panelists shared the challenges they’ve navigated, but also the positive results they’ve seen: more student engagement, greater opportunities to learn about and participate in college, and better preparation for using tech in the community.

As OYA Director Fariborz Pakseresht told the crowd, technology is too important in people’s everyday lives to deny it to those who are incarcerated.

“When a youth loses five or six years in custody, with the technology that’s in place, they lose a lifetime,” he said. “We need to improve opportunities for youth to return to our community, get living-wage jobs, and contribute.”

At the end of the day, participants seemed energized with new ideas. That included Rondale Cooper, principal of Juvenile Hall, the largest juvenile detention facility in Los Angeles.

“It is unique and profound what you’ve been able to do with the population you serve,” he said. “I’ll be taking many of your ideas back with me.”

Want to watch the Google in Corrections Education sessions? Go to OYA’s YouTube channel:
www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLmydaJITYK3XoEefMLteAvjMGGlif1w_p.



Frank Martin, OYA’s Education Coordinator, emceed the event.



Savannah Hannaford, who teaches at Oak Creek Youth Correctional Facility through the Multnomah Education Service District, shares how her students have engaged with technology.