

Cisco Partner Matrix Controls Spiraling Communications Costs; Unifies Voice and Data for Scott County School District

Scott County School District #2 is located in Scottsburg, Indiana. Its 2900 students are educated in four elementary schools, one middle school, one high school, and an alternative high school. Over the years phone systems were added and upgraded as needed, and this has resulted in multiple legacy systems and communications costs that Scott Borden, director of technology for the school district, describes as “out of control.”

“Communication between our locations was difficult and expensive,” he says. “Also, moves, adds, and changes were costly, and we could not add phones in a classroom without a major upgrade in hardware and cabling.” Borden’s biggest concern was that the district was out of phone ports, so each school could only have 10 or 12 phones. Not having a phone in each classroom was a safety concern. With new school construction being planned, Borden wanted a better solution available that could be deployed in the new buildings as well as in existing facilities.

Borden and the district’s IT staff were looking into IP telephony, but not many schools were implementing it at the time, and the school board had never even heard of the technology. Borden reached out to a number of vendors and local partner companies in order to have a variety of recommendations and bids to review.

“I had a lot of people bidding on this project,” says Borden. “Some bid just on a phone solution, others bid on replacing or upgrading the network. But Matrix’s bid recommended a converged solution that would put the phone system and our data on one network that would be in the same department.”

Matrix Integration is a Cisco® Premier Certified Partner with headquarters in Jasper, Indiana, and additional offices in Indianapolis, Illinois, Kentucky, and Ohio.

“Matrix Integration prides itself in providing valuable services to our clients, not merely supplying parts,” says Erik Mosier, K-12 account manager for Matrix Integration. “Our practice has three distinct service phases to maximize our service to our customers.” A Matrix team first consults closely with each customer to fully understand their business and operations, so it can help them reach technology and business goals. Only then does it move into the design phase, and when deployment starts, Matrix provides project management as needed for implementation.

For the Scott County School District implementation, Matrix Integration and Cisco helped Borden promote IP telephony to the school board by demonstrating the cost savings and added features that come with a Cisco Unified Communications solution. Additionally, the district’s existing WAN could be leveraged to tie the schools together, preserving that investment.

“I think that showing how all of the schools would run on one system had the biggest impact on the school board,” says Mosier. “We explained how the existing phone

solution was outdated and had reached capacity. With a converged network solution from Cisco, they would save money on communications costs, have features that would facilitate better communications, provide a phone for every teacher, and have a system that could be managed in-house rather than paying a phone technician.” With the old system, the district was paying several hundred dollars a year per school just to handle moves, adds, and changes.

The school board approved the purchase, and the teams moved ahead with a Matrix Integration-recommended implementation of Cisco network infrastructure and a platform to support Cisco Unified Communications. Initial deployment went to the newly constructed middle school, and occurred during the summer months so as not to disturb student instruction. Subsequent deployments were prioritized based on which building had the most out-dated phones, and which buildings were completely out of ports. The new Cisco Unified Communications system will eventually reach out to every one of the district’s staff of 340 employees.

“The three- and four-digit dialing helps increase productivity and unifies all of our facilities,” says Borden. “All of those calls between schools used to be toll calls, and now they just run across our WAN. The toll savings, along with the fact that we can manage this system ourselves, represent huge savings for the district.” The biggest benefit is one of safety: now every teacher in every classroom has a phone. And with that comes improved parent/teacher communication, because parents can now leave voicemails for any teacher at any time. And if teachers move to another classroom, no re-wiring needs to be done, nor do they need to have a new number or extension assigned. They simply unplug their phone, and plug it back in at their new room.

“The cost savings have exceeded my expectations, and the staff continually finds ways to improve their productivity by utilizing the features of the Cisco Unified IP Phones,” says Borden.

As an account manager specializing in K-12 education, Mosier is extremely tuned in to that market’s unique needs.

“The continued focus on communications and safety, along with growing trend of long-distance learning, has more customers looking at unified solutions,” he says. “School districts are looking to people like Scott to keep more things running with less money. With a unified communications system, schools can converge their phone and data networks, and offer things like video services and Web-based learning all under one system that they can self-manage. It is very powerful.”