



Garnett Unified School District 365 improves systems management



Customer profile



Company	Garnett Unified School District 365
Industry	Education
Country	United States
Students	1,100
Employees	144
Web site	usd365.org

Challenge

Faced with a declining technology budget, a backlog of support tickets and only two full-time IT staff members, Garnett Unified School District 365 (Garnett USD) needed to improve management efficiency without adding staff.

Solution

The district deployed the Dell KACE™ Family of Systems Management Appliances to automate and streamline systems management and deployment.

Benefits

- 24-hour response window for all support requests
- 1-2 day average resolution time
- Minutes to deploy new systems (vs. hours previously)

Application areas

- Connected Classroom
- Dell Systems Management
- Desktop Computing
- Mobile Computing
- Services
- Workstations

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Preston Peine, Computer Network Administrator, Garnett USD 365

When it comes to technology, school districts have a choice: plan for success, or stay mired in an endless cycle of break-fix and reactive management. Yes, budgets are tight, but it takes more than money to execute an effective IT strategy that will improve educational opportunities for students and get teachers the technology they need.

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Brad Miller, Technology Services Coordinator, Garnett USD 365

Here’s the story of a small public school district in Kansas that’s dramatically improving IT services—without adding IT staff, and while facing a declining technology budget.

2 guys, 800 computers to manage

Until recently, Garnett Unified School District 365 in Garnett, Kansas, was struggling with outdated systems and a huge backlog of support tickets. There was no centralized management for the district’s 800 computers, and no integrated network directory.

“When I first started here, we were literally years behind on responding to tech support requests,” recalls Preston Peine, computer network administrator. “We have seven locations to support, and there was no remote access to computers. Any problem had to be solved at the individual desktop level, which usually involved driving. There was no time for strategy, and no visibility into inventory. It got to the point where we had to shut off the faucet instead of just mopping up the water.”

Hiring additional IT staff was not an option, says Technology Services Coordinator Brad Miller, the only other full-time IT employee at Garnett USD. “Due to a continuously shrinking operational budget, what we needed was a solution that would automate as much as possible to allow Preston and me to be more efficient,” Miller observes.

Wanted: a cross-platform management solution

Adding to the complexity was the fact that the district planned to move away from a purely Apple-based hardware

Technology at work

Solutions

Dell KACE™ K1000 Management Appliance

Dell KACE K2000 Deployment Appliance

Services

Dell Deployment Services

Dell Support

Hardware

Dell Latitude™ 2120 netbooks with Intel® Atom™ processors

Dell Mobile Computing Stations

Dell OptiPlex™ 780 ultra-small form factor desktop PCs with Intel Core™ 2 processors

Dell PowerEdge™ 2950 server with Intel Xeon® processors

Dell Precision™ T3500 workstations with Intel Xeon processors

Dell S500wi Interactive Ultra Short Throw Projectors

Software

INTERWRITE® Workspace from eInstruction®

Pearson PowerSchool® student information system

Promethean ActivInspire

Windows Server® 2008 R2

Windows® 7



infrastructure, as administrators worried that students would not have sufficient experience with PC-based business computing upon graduation.

"We had discovered through experience that Apple is not as robust as Windows as an enterprise platform, and we wanted to reduce costs by expanding our hardware options," says Peine. "But we knew that having both Apple and Windows-based machines could potentially make management more complex, so we began searching for a management solution that could handle the multi-platform environment that we were moving toward."

Catching up fast

Miller and Peine evaluated software-based management solutions from Symantec and Microsoft, along with the Dell KACE Family of Systems Management Appliances. "We liked right away that Dell KACE was an appliance," says Peine. "You plug it in, and it just works—you don't have to worry about the hardware side of things, so time from installation to functional use is minimal. That mattered a lot to us, because we were in a huge rush to catch up."

The choice ended up being easy, Peine adds. "Ultimately we decided to deploy both the Dell KACE K1000 Management Appliance and the Dell KACE K2000 Deployment Appliance, because the time to value and overall ROI were superior to the other solutions we evaluated," he says. "We have easily recovered our initial invest in the first year and expect to see significant ROI over annual maintenance costs well into the future."

The two-man team began working through the backlog of support tickets using the service desk feature of the Dell KACE K1000 Management Appliance, which provides incident management as user or system problems arise and automates common tasks for quick repetition. "As soon as we turned on the K1000 Management Appliance, we were able to process tickets at a very rapid rate,"

says Miller. "We're now able to respond to every request within 24 hours, and our average resolution time is one to two days. We're providing much better service, minimizing downtime and maximizing learning time, and we didn't have to hire any additional IT staff."

Improved security, higher availability

The service desk is fully integrated with the K1000's asset and configuration management capabilities, including software distribution and patch management. "Both Apple and Microsoft offer applications that allow you to manage updates within your own network to save time and bandwidth," Peine explains. "But we're able to improve security by automating patch management involving third-party patches beyond those two. Many of the critical threats that we've seen over the last 24 months have actually been through applications like Firefox, Adobe Reader and Flash, so having the ability to automate patch management for third-party applications has been monumentally beneficial for us." The school district also relishes in the fact that DELL KACE Appliances can effectively manage across different platforms.

The ability to label and group machines and push patches to a test group before deploying them throughout the district has increased uptime for Garnett USD's Pearson PowerSchool student information system, which runs on a Dell PowerEdge server. "PowerSchool used to break every six months or so because of some automated Java™ update," says Peine. "Now we can avoid those interruptions by first deploying updates to a select group of people who are aware that they are part of a frontline group, and they report any issues back to us."

Deploying in minutes, not hours

For administrative staff computing, the district is transitioning to Dell OptiPlex 780 ultra-small form factor desktop PCs with all-in-one monitor stands "to condense the hardware footprint as much as possible," says Peine. The team

"If we had continued to purchase Apple laptops, we would not be able to do anything but trade out some of the older ones that we have. We're able to put twice as many computers in students' hands by switching to Dell netbooks."

*Preston Peine,
Computer Network Administrator,
Garnett USD 365*



began imaging computers immediately using the Dell KACE K2000 Deployment Appliance, which provides all the tools necessary to automate OS deployment via computer inventory scanning and assessment, network OS install, disk imaging, user state migration, remote site management, and system repair and recovery.

"Deploying a new system would have taken us hours before," says Miller. "The ability to do an automated, scripted install of Windows 7 in minutes with the Dell KACE K2000 Deployment Appliance has been a tremendous help in getting new equipment in place."

Remediation time is also greatly reduced. "If we have a problem with a system that is taking us more than 15 minutes to fix, we just reimaged the machine," says Peine. "Overall, we're saving an estimated 16 hours a week of IT staff time."

Fast, efficient remote imaging

Miller and Peine can quickly deploy images to remote sites without consuming WAN bandwidth, driving or requiring assistance from on-site staff, using the K2000 virtual remote appliances. "The K2000 includes a virtual machine that can be installed on pretty much any hardware that you already have," explains Peine. "We push all the images and installs to a server at each site so that when we want to image computers at each school, they don't have to come all the way back to our data center to fetch that very large image—they can pull it from a local server. It saves time, conserves bandwidth, and it was part of the appliance purchase. We didn't have to buy added licenses to be able to deploy to each of our remote sites. And we're saving about \$2,000 a year on gas and transportation expenses."

Shifting the focus to strategy

A primary benefit of centralized, automated management and deployment is the

ability to focus on strategy and improve IT throughout the district. Garnett USD crafted a three-year technology plan with help from Dell that will include Dell PowerEdge servers running Windows Server 2008 R2 in the data center. Two elementary schools will get mobile computer labs consisting of Dell Latitude 2120 netbooks with Dell Mobile Computing Stations, which provide docking for the netbooks and can be easily transported between classrooms.

"Given the current economic situation, we were unable to do a forklift technology upgrade district wide, but the Dell netbooks were cost-effective enough that we're able to equip two entire elementary schools with new computers," says Peine. "Next year, we'll outfit two more schools. If we had continued to purchase the Apple laptops, we would not be able to do anything but trade out some of the older ones that we have. We're able to put twice as many new computers in students' hands by switching to Dell netbooks."

Connecting the classrooms

The ability to source a wide variety of solutions and services through Dell is helpful, says Miller. High school students already use Dell Precision workstations with Intel Xeon processors to run design applications such as AutoCAD. At the elementary schools receiving the Dell netbooks, teachers will soon use the netbooks in conjunction with Dell S500wi Interactive Ultra Short Throw Projectors, which can project an approximate 80-inch diagonal image from just 20 inches away. Dell Deployment Services will install the complete Connected Classroom solution.

Each projector is controlled by INTERWRITE Workspace software from eInstruction and Promethean ActivInspire. "We're able to offer a higher quality interactive solution for our teachers because we purchased a Promethean software license for each Dell projector," says Peine. "That allowed us to cover twice as many classrooms, because

we were able to avoid buying costly interactive whiteboards."

To get the best use and fastest time to value out of its Dell Connected Classroom solution, Garnett USD plans to engage Dell Professional Learning Services. "Moving from Apple to a Windows environment is going to be a major shift for some of our staff," says Peine. "We really like Dell's Connected Classroom approach to using technology in K-12 education, and it's good to know that Dell Professional Learning Services will be able to provide hands-on training on how to use the new equipment and incorporate it into lesson plans."

15-fold faster turnaround for repairs

Support and warranty service have also improved with Dell. "Turnaround times have gone from 30-90 days down to 48 hours or less," says Miller. "We used to ship our equipment back to a third-party vendor for service, and sometimes they had to send it somewhere else. It amounted to a lot of lost computing time for the students."

The district was also paying around \$18,000 a year to fix equipment that was out of warranty. "That number will shrink over the next few years until it's gone, because we'll be able to keep all of the Dell equipment under warranty," says Peine.

Ready for the future

Miller and Peine agree that Garnett USD is now in a much better position to meet the technology needs of teachers and students. "I am confident that what we're doing today will help us meet the standards of the future," Peine concludes. "And to be able to make a transition like this while our budgets shrink by 10 to 15 percent annually is absolutely monumental. We've been able to develop a better technology department than we had in less challenging economic times by partnering with Dell."

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