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Northwestern Community Unit School District No. 2 — Case Study

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NORTHWESTERN COMMUNITY UNIT SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 2 CHOOSES
FRONTIER ETHERNET TO MEET INCREASING BANDWIDTH NEEDS

Northwestern Community Unit School District No. 2 in Palmyra, Ill., is small in student numbers (just 350 total in Pre-Kindergarten through 12th grade) and large in the geo-graphic area it serves (140 square miles in the northwestern part of Macoupin County). In addition, 50 percent of its students are from low-income households, many without computers. Despite these challenges, Northwestern has seen an increase in student engagement and a decrease in discipline problems, thanks in large part to the addition of hundreds of tablets and laptops.

Connected Classrooms Foster Learning

Matthew Phillips, IT Director and Bookkeeper, explains, "In 2010, Northwestern received a big technology grant that spurred interest in buying devices for the schools. In 2012, we began a one-to-one initiative, which provided tablets or laptops to our students with the goal of using technology to foster learning. We purchased an iPad for every K-3rd grade student to use at school, a Macbook Pro for every 4th-6th grade student to use at school, and a Macbook Pro for every 7th-12th grade student to use at school as well as take home. All teachers were given a Macbook Pro and an iPad to broaden their options for classroom activities."

The results of this one-to-one initiative are impressive. "Our teachers are now doing more interactive online lessons and taking advantage of educational videos on YouTube. The kids are streaming content and getting news updates related to classes. But the most exciting part is that our students are now more engaged in learning. We've also noticed a drop in discipline problems. The kids know that if they act up with their device, they lose it; this is a big incen-tive for them to behave at school," says Phillips.

More Devices Mean More Bandwidth

Not surprising, the use of all these Internet-connected devices in Northwestern's two school buildings — one for Pre-K through 6th grade plus the district office and the other for the Junior and Senior High School — dramatically increased bandwidth requirements.

Janice Elliott, Frontier Medium Account Executive, works closely with Northwestern to meet its growing communications needs. Elliott notes, "Northwestern has been a customer of Frontier's Internet and local telephone service for years now. The school district used to have two Frontier T1 lines but with the explosion in Internet usage, especially with the one-to-one initiative, this was no longer going to be adequate in terms of bandwidth. So Frontier offered to bring Ethernet service to Northwestern, along with the local Frontier supervisors/technicians to support this product."

Phillips recalls this period and says, "Northwestern looked into other providers in the area, including cable companies, but nobody but Frontier was able to bring enough bandwidth to our campus. Frontier was the only provider willing to consider bringing a dedicated circuit to this school district to support our technology program with the necessary bandwidth. Frontier brought us a speed of about 30 Mbps initially, which was awesome, and this was increased to 100 Mbps in July 2014. I greatly appreciate the fact that Frontier is addressing both our current and future bandwidth needs."

He adds, "The transition from the T1s to Frontier Ethernet was very easy. We started with the paperwork and quotes from Frontier, then went to our board for approval. They were 100 percent behind it; our board feels strongly that technology is a good investment for our kids. The Ethernet was to be installed before the school year began and Frontier met that deadline, even calling in out-of-state workers to make it happen."

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> — MATTHEW PHILLIPS, IT DIRECTOR AND BOOKKEEPER, TECHNOLOGY, NORTHWESTERN COMMUNITY UNIT SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 2

Moving Forward at 100 Mbps

What's ahead for Northwestern? Phillips replies, "We are a Google for Education school district and are using Google Apps for Education. So now everything is automatically saved in the cloud and can be accessed from almost any device. Starting with the 2014/2015 school year, our 4th-6th grade students will be getting a Google Chromebook rather than a Macbook Pro. We're also buying Apple TVs and putting a Promethean interactive white board and projector in every classroom. With these devices and the new 100 Mbps Internet, Northwestern's staff, teachers and students will all be enjoying expanded education possibilities."

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