

LIBERTY-EYLAU INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

CUSTOMER PROFILE

HOW A SMALLER DISTRICT IMPLEMENTED A LARGER VISION

For many school districts in rural areas, dealing with day-to-day education issues, socioeconomic concerns, and budget cuts can take up most, if not all, available resources. Upgrading to a state of the art network to meet today's communications and education challenges can seem like a pipe dream.

Yet recently, one rural district, the Liberty-Eylau Independent School District (LEISD), successfully replaced its legacy phone system with a Cisco Systems® converged IP infrastructure. This has given LEISD improved voice and data communications, greater security, increased productivity, and reduced costs.

How was this small district able to take such a significant step? Much of the credit goes to LEISD's former Superintendent of Schools, the late Donald L. Rader, Jr. "A lot of the technology vision that we have implemented was his," notes Dan

Dutton, Director of Technology for LEISD. "Mr. Rader was a teacher, not a nuts-and-bolts technology person, but he understood what technology could do. He wanted students who graduated from our school district to have the tools they needed to be effective in the workforce. He worked with our school board to ensure that school districts of our size, located where we are, had no barriers to technology."

Challenges

LEISD is located in southwest Texarkana, in Texas near the Arkansas border. The district serves the education needs of 2,800 students from pre-K through 12, and employs roughly 350 teachers in 6 campuses:

- One pre-K school
- One elementary school
- One middle school
- One high school
- One alternative campus
- One juvenile detention center

What is LEISD's mission? "I want our students to have the skills to compete, the attitude to compete, the work ethic to compete, and the morals and ethics to compete, wherever they are, and to be confident that they can be successful in life," says Scott Niven, Superintendent of Schools for LEISD.





Like many rural districts, LEISD serves an economically disparate community, with 76 percent of its students on free or reduced lunch. Additionally, the district must comply with the No Child Left Behind Act and other federal and state education mandates at a time when funding for many existing programs has been drastically cut.

In the early 1990s, LEISD deployed a data network for dialup Internet access, which it outgrew in a year. A local telecommunications company provided leased telephony equipment, which had limited capabilities and no voice mail. The district was also paying for more than 90 separate leased telephone lines, many of which were unused. Each classroom had an intercom system but no phone, and the district was running a multitude of different phone systems.

Improving school and district communications became a top priority for then-Superintendent Rader. “In one of our meetings, Mr. Rader said, ‘I want a phone in every teacher’s classroom, you figure out how to do it,’” recalls Dutton. “If there was an issue in the classroom, he wanted the teacher to be able to call a parent immediately.”

The district’s telephone equipment lease was due to expire in January 2003—just a few months—so Dutton and his IT team looked into updating the existing data infrastructure. They saw that a new IP network would support an IP telephony system and improve communications between teachers, administrators, and the community. This new network would provide cost savings and could also support:

- Improved security
- IP applications, for productivity
- Message broadcasting
- Distance learning and e-learning

Solutions

“Once we defined what we wanted, we contacted vendors and they started bringing in solutions,” recalls Dutton. Knowing that other school districts had had success with Cisco, LEISD inquired about a Cisco IP network. “Cisco provided a package for us that was attractive in function and in price. We performed an analysis to see what our return on investment would be, and Cisco provided the best ‘bang for the buck’ for the wants and needs of our school district. And knowing that Cisco has the resources to support us made our decision very easy.”

“When the school board put the pencil to the paper, they found that this was an economical solution compared to what we were doing,” adds Niven. “We could use the same funds to upgrade our system tremendously.”

Since the project would require local funds, Cisco was asked to show the technology to the school board. The demonstration included two IP applications—AAC’s PhoneTop Attendance Manager (which automates attendance taking) and Berbee’s InformaCast (which broadcasts audio and text messages to IP phones). “Cisco went above and beyond the call of duty, and really enabled the board to understand the technology and how their investment would have a positive impact on productivity,” says Dutton.

Cisco was chosen to deploy the new IP network and the IP telephony system that would run over it. A complete upgrade of the old network was soon initiated. “We yanked every router, switch, and hub we had and replaced it all with Cisco equipment,” recalls Dutton. Knowing that the district was operating under a funding cap, Cisco helped locate additional funding sources, and also provided incentives and programs that kept costs down.

Results

The cutover to the new Cisco IP network was accomplished during the 2002-2003 winter break. SEE-com, a Cisco Gold Implementation Partner, deployed Cisco Call Manager call processing software and Cisco Unity™ unified messaging. Additionally, 350 IP phones were installed, with an IP phone in every classroom in each of the district’s six campuses. Soon, LEISD was gaining the benefits of:

- **Better day-to-day communications**—The new, high-functioning IP phones with voice mail improve communication between parents, teachers, students, and staff. “It gives our teachers the ability to make contact with parents, which is especially important in high-poverty schools, since contact and positive communication builds trust for the school system,” says Niven.
- **Tighter security for students, teachers, and staff**—In-class phones enable a teacher to remain with students in the classroom when making a call. “Having communications with the central office provides a safety blanket for our teachers, especially those in isolated areas of the district,” notes Dutton.



“He wanted students who graduated from our school district to have all the tools available for them to be **effective in the workforce.**”

- **Significant cost savings**—The district was able to eliminate 50 leased telephone lines, saving \$2,000 per month, with anticipated savings of \$100,000 in the first year. “This was the first major ‘bleeder’ we took care of to recoup our ROI,” recalls Dutton.
- **Improved productivity**—The network runs IP applications that take attendance and automate time-consuming back-office systems. “We’re about to use AAC’s PhoneTop,” says Dutton. “Teachers will be able to take attendance on their phones in a quick, efficient manner, instead of having to send a student to the office, take hand rolls, or take the time to write it. This will increase their productivity quite a bit.”
- **Advanced broadcasting and paging capabilities**—The system runs Berbee’s InformaCast, an application that enables IP phones to be used as an intercom system, saving money over a traditional system. “We’ve used it for announcements, fire alarms, emergencies, and lockdowns,” notes Dutton. “In this part of Texas we have a large number of tornadoes. So, during tornado

season, we’ve used it to broadcast that severe weather is out there, and that’s a capability we didn’t have before. We hooked it up to external speakers in hallways and cafeterias, and our fire marshal was impressed. I see us actually replacing our old intercom systems with this system in the next year.”

- **Greater mobility**—The network supports a wireless infrastructure. “We had some mobile carts in place before we upgraded the network,” recalls Dutton. “We want to put more computers in the classroom, so we’re connecting some of our old PCs wirelessly. The wireless infrastructure allows us to do this more cheaply and efficiently, and enables us to use our old machines with the carts.”
- **Enhanced e-learning**—Faster Internet access and performance improves the online experience for students.

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Outlook

With the new Cisco IP network and IP telephony system up and running, LEISD is poised to take advantage of numerous advanced capabilities and applications. “The solution we selected provides the foundation and a platform for the future,” states Niven. The district is currently evaluating:

- **Greater use of the wireless network**, including wireless IP phones connected to wireless zones within the district, such as bus loading and unloading zones.
- **Video over IP**, which can provide video on demand, enable distance learning, and improve curricula. “Most people are visual learners and that includes students and staff,” says Dutton. “They really enjoy seeing video, and the different things it can do in an instructional format.”
- **IP video surveillance**, allowing security personnel and administrative staff to keep a watchful eye on common areas in the district. “We’re working on a project right now that will let us use our network to put cameras in the classrooms for better security for our staff and our students,” says Dutton.

LEISD also anticipates improving on the excellent ROI that was achieved by eliminating so many leased lines. “Within two years we’ll completely pay for this system and we’ll actually be into a savings mode,” says Niven. “And with the productivity in the

classrooms, giving the teachers communication with the office, access to information, better communication with parents; these are intangibles that we don’t draw into our equation, and we should, because they really can improve the educational process for a student.”

Dutton shares Niven’s enthusiasm about what the network has done—and what it can do—for education. “It provides more time to our staff so they can provide more educational content during their instructional periods. What we hope for the future is to continuously feed our technology program, which, in turn, feeds our education program. We’re only scratching the surface of this technology and what it’s able to do.”

The new IP communications system would turn out to be one of the final accomplishments of then-Superintendent Rader’s long and distinguished career at LEISD. Sadly, he passed away on April 15, 2003, two and a half months before his scheduled retirement. “Mr. Rader left a legacy not only as a teacher, as an administrator, and as a superintendent, but he left a technology legacy, too,” says Dutton. “If it weren’t for his vision, we wouldn’t have the network and the IP telephony solution we have in our district today. He felt very strongly about technology and how it could be an enabling force for a student.”



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