



Helping the School Town of Munster earn straight A's ...

... on district connectivity, so students and teachers can soar.

- **Business needs** - Munster provides devices for all students in grades 3-12 but needed robust connectivity to give all students equal access to the rich educational resources available online.
- **Networking solution** - AT&T Dedicated Internet, AT&T IP Flexible Reach, and mobility services delivered the highly reliable bandwidth, security, and advanced features the district required to support 21st century learning.
- **Business value** - The School Town of Munster (1) saved money; (2) provided internet access for virtually students, faculty, and staff; and (3) offered enhanced network security.
- **Industry focus** - K-12 School District
- **Size** - 4,133 students

About the School Town of Munster

The School Town of Munster, Indiana, is a National School District of Distinction that works to help students demonstrate academic growth and social responsibility in a supportive and intellectually challenging learning environment. It has adopted the values of the Indiana Coalition of Quality Schools, including continuous improvement, high expectations, social responsibility, and accountability. The district comprises three elementary schools, a middle school, and a high school.

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Jarek Pozdzał

Chief Technology Officer, School Town of Munster

Situation

To level the playing field for students in the economically diverse district, Munster supplies a computer for each student in grades 3-12. It needed a better way to provide connectivity that would enable each student to access the rich academic resources available online. Its current connectivity was unreliable and unable to accommodate the thousands of students who needed internet access. The district also wanted to replace its outmoded phone technology with a system that was cost-effective, offered advanced features, and was easier to maintain.

Solution

Munster replaced its overworked data and voice networks with AT&T Dedicated Internet and AT&T IP Flexible Reach. The easy-to-manage services provide reliable, highly secure connectivity with plenty of bandwidth, advanced calling features, and enhanced security for students, faculty, and staff. Bundling the services created substantial savings for the district.

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Schools that make a community proud

“School town” is the name that Lake County Indiana gives its school districts. The School Town of Munster is an excellent district in a beautiful

community in Lake County in northwest Indiana at the extreme southern tip of Lake Michigan. Located about 45 minutes from Chicago, Munster offers residents leafy neighborhoods, a thriving business district, and an excellent quality of life.

One of the central points of pride for the town is its consistently top-ranked education system. All five Munster public schools are recognized Indiana Blue Ribbon schools and have been awarded 5-star ratings.

Jarek Pozdzał is Chief Technology Officer for the School Town of Munster. A graduate of Munster High School, Pozdzał was born in Chicago but spent most of his childhood in Poland. When his family moved to Munster during his sophomore year, he set out to learn everything he could about technology.

During high school he earned certification as a computer service technician and learned basic networking technology and software development skills. He volunteered with the district’s IT department the last two years of school and was hired as a computer technician right after graduation. Since then he has been promoted to network administrator, interim technology director, and most recently to Chief Technology Officer, overseeing a full-time staff of seven and a part-time staff of four.

A device for every student

Munster’s small IT staff is challenged to keep up with managing the district’s network, its switching and routing infrastructure, 300 video surveillance cameras, and a data center. Staff also support the computers used by faculty and staff as well as the 1,500 devices the district provides to students.

“We are a one-to-one district for grades 3-12,” he said. “Students in grades 3 and 4 have Chromebooks that stay in the classroom, and those in grades 5-12 have laptops that they can take home.”

Ensuring that all students have a computer and access to the internet levels the playing field, Pozdzał said. “We have a pretty diverse population when it comes to wealth equality. Providing devices for every student allows us to establish a platform for equitable learning.”

Providing the devices and connectivity enables the district to push out applications and content to support each teacher’s curriculum and give every student the same advantages, he said.

Technology teachers can count on

Students today have much more access to technology than Pozdzał had when he was a student. “We’ve embraced technology and 21st century learning resources,” he said. “Teachers have incorporated a lot of amazing things into the curriculum.”

“There’s an enormous wealth of information on the internet, and all it takes is someone to tap into it,” he continued. “The idea is to do it right.” This involves teachers carefully curating content and the IT department providing the necessary bandwidth to handle the demand. “We can say that we’re one to one,” he said, “but if a student can’t connect to the network, or the connection keeps dropping, then teachers can’t rely on the technology.”

For years, the School Town of Munster used a 30-megabyte fiber circuit funded by the State of Indiana. While it represented a big upgrade from the

T1 lines the district previously used, it was still inadequate. “We had a lot of issues with it,” Pozdzał said. “It was not the most stable connection.” Munster needed a highly reliable connection with enough bandwidth to support the equitable learning environment it had built for its students.

New realms of possibilities

AT&T offered Munster a solution that more than tripled the district’s network capacity – for 10% less than it currently paid. AT&T Dedicated Internet service provides reliable, highly secure connectivity with excellent performance to support the demand.

“We’ve been with AT&T for 11 years now, upgrading from 100 megabytes to 2 gigabytes,” Pozdzał said. “And soon we’re moving to the next level with 10 gigabytes, which will essentially provide unlimited bandwidth and the resources to do all kinds of things.”

While bandwidth used to be a restriction, it now opens new realms of possibilities. “Our teachers can just dive in and take full advantage of this amazing resource,” he said.

High reliability

Munster also replaced its old ISDN-PRI lines with AT&T IP Flexible Reach, which consolidates the district’s voice and data traffic. The solution delivers outbound, inbound, local, and long distance calling with advanced calling features without requiring the district to replace its existing telephones.

Bundling its internet and phone services created substantial savings, Pozdzał said. “Price-wise it was

significant, because maintaining the old copper lines was expensive. So new and better networks, more bandwidth, and fresh circuits and equipment coming in on the internet side means we get more IP addresses at a better rate,” Pozdzal emphasized.

“The reliability is amazing,” he added. “The service just works. AT&T has been rock solid.” The district’s sole problem occurred when some of its equipment failed. “When that happened, I had no idea how to even call AT&T for support, because I’d never had to.”

This dependability has enabled the district IT staff to use its time more productively. “The fact that I don’t have to sit there and worry frees my time to focus on the things that need to be done,” Pozdzal said.

Enhanced school safety

AT&T IP Flexible Reach also enabled the district to replace the traditional phone line to each building that it maintained for safety. “We gained enhanced 911 capability,” Pozdzal said. “We can now tie precise location services to each phone number and provide greater detail for a 911 dispatch center to enhance school safety.”

Munster has also started switching some of its phones to FirstNet, the first responder network built and managed by AT&T to ensure that public safety forces can communicate. This is especially important during emergencies, when commercial

networks can be flooded and first responders can have difficulty communicating with one another.

As a school district, Munster is an extended primary user of FirstNet. “This lets us further enhance safety for our students, parents, and the people who work here,” Pozdzal said.

Investing district dollars to benefit students

Pozdzal said he would enthusiastically recommend AT&T to peers in other school districts. “I seriously love the services. They work, they’re very reliable, and they’re very stable. They allow us as a district to take advantage of the enhancements that AT&T has brought to the table.”

Pozdzal was also extremely pleased that AT&T was willing to amend the district’s existing contract to add the new technology. “So, even if I signed a three-year contract and our needs change, we can change the contract. This helps me save money to invest elsewhere if I have to, or potentially get more AT&T services.”

“That’s a huge plus,” he concluded. “Once you sign a contract with some places, you’re locked into the same service for years, even as technology has advanced. The fact that we can amend our contract shows that AT&T wants to help us by trying to free up money to do the things that matter and invest it where it’s supposed to go: to our students.”