∞ ñeverware

Resourcefulness and a strong community network allowed this rural Texas district to dramatically expand access to technology while saving taxpayer dollars.

With 6,200 students spread over eight campuses and 400 square miles of rural Texas, Rosa Ojeda, Technology Director for Waller Independent School District, is no stranger to finding ways to do more with less. "We are not typically funded for a regular hardware refresh program, so we have experimented with ways to get the most out of what we have." In addition to maintaining a mix of aging Windows laptops and desktops, Ojeda and her staff have considered Virtual Desktop Infrastructure (VDI) solutions as an option. "We evaluated a number of VDI solutions and spoke to other districts doing the same thing," she explained, "but because of performance and because of cost, they just were not realistic options."

The benefits of embracing Google
Waller ISD was quick to see the value of Google Apps for Education. In 2011 the district joined the program and deployed hundreds of Chromebooks. "We went from a tiny Windows file share for each student on an expensive storage area network, to free, unlimited cloud storage for every student and email that is accessible from every device." However, Ojeda's team found that demand for the Google Apps platform exceeded the resources available to purchase additional Chromebooks. "We quickly found that students liked Chromebooks and teachers were starting to build curriculum around them, but we just didn't have the funding to fully meet the need."

Local resources provide a game-changing opportunity
The Texas Department of Criminal Justice's (TCDJ) Huntsville branch, like many government offices and agencies, has long offered surplus computers to surrounding school districts. Ojeda was aware of the agency's standing donation offer of used hardware to anyone who requested it, but she did not consider it to be a useful or impactful resource. "Older machines take one to one and a half minutes just to load Windows 7," she explained. "In a classroom environment, that's just not useful or realistic. Technology like that becomes more of a nuisance than a benefit." After learning at a CTO conference about CloudReady's ability to make computers run like Chromebooks, Ojeda's team tested it on some of the machines TDCJ was offering. "CloudReady just worked; it worked easily and it worked well. I was like: 'Wow, here is our solution!'" By installing affordable, generic SSDs on surplus laptops from the prison, Ojeda's team was able to improve performance even further, delivering 14-second startup times on 5-year-old hardware.

∞ cloudready

WALLER ISD FAST FACTS

The challenge
Limited resources, coupled with strong demand for the Google Apps for Education platform from students and teachers.

The solution
With CloudReady, Waller can deliver a unifed experience with existing and donated laptops & desktops alongside newly purchased Chromebook hardware, putting the maximum number of high-performance computers in front of students at a fraction of the normal cost.

The results
Waller has been able to deliver a full Chromebook experience on donated and existing hardware, achieving maximum value for taxpayers and a great experience for teachers and students.

The results, she says, have been stunning. "I can put 90 fully functional CloudReady laptops with SSDs in the hands of our students for a total of $7,500, with performance that is comparable to a brand new Chromebook: the same login and management experience, comparable battery life, and cheap parts replacement. The only difference is that they have a 15" screen. We are so thrilled to offer such a high quality solution. Nothing else even comes close."

Improving access and increasing efficiency
Under Ojeda's leadership, Waller ISD deployed several hundred CloudReady laptops, followed by a series of desktops. By installing CloudReady on their five- to seven- year- old Dell OptiPlex desktops, along with affordable commodity wireless cards, Ojeda notes, "I have been able to retrofit an entire campus without spending a dime on wiring. This solution has just solved so many problems in my world. We have taken old Dell desktops that used to be on nComputing and transformed them into fast, full production machines that can do anything a Chromebook can do." By eliminating the routine burden of managing scattered Windows machines, Ojeda says her technologists "will be able to get away from maintenance and toward instructional work, which is where they should be." Waller ISD is even exploring the option of offering CloudReady computers for students to take home, leveraging the Google Admin Console to manage and track machines.

Ensuring future flexibility
According to Ojeda, "It's easy to sit back and say 'replace everything every few years,'" but fiscal responsibility is a critical component of running a school district and she views it as her job to allocate funding in the most effective and impactful way possible. She breaks it down simply: "This equipment was purchased with taxpayer dollars, and we are going to use it until it truly cannot be used anymore. CloudReady allows me to feel comfortable that I have explored every avenue to get the most from our machines. It's our job to offer our students as many options as possible. Neverware gives us options; the option to have more devices and devices with more longevity. It is both exciting and thrilling to be able to do this in such a fiscally responsible way."

Student enrollment:
6,200 over 8 campuses

Number of computers: 2,600

Pre-existing platforms:
-Windows 7
-Google Chromebooks