

Illinois Cloud Reduces IT Costs for School Districts



IlliniCloud deploys Cisco UCS to increase service offerings to local school districts while reducing cost of services.

Executive Summary

IlliniCloud

- **Industry:** Education (K-12)
- **Location:** Illinois
- **Number of School Districts:** 210

CHALLENGE

- Offer scalable, secure services to school districts
- Provide new services hosted in cloud
- Reduce cost of services

SOLUTION

- Virtualize data center to increase scalability
- Update data center technology to enhance services

RESULTS

- Increased number of services offered
- Reduced cost of services for end users
- Improved security of cloud environments

“Schools need infrastructure. We provide low-cost virtual servers, so that schools don’t have to worry about maintaining it.”

Jim Peterson,
Chief Technology Officer, IlliniCloud

Challenge

IlliniCloud provides public school districts in Illinois with access to virtual services (on-demand virtual machines), online storage, and high-speed network conductivity. The company has found that these solutions work for school districts and save them money. More than 200 school districts in the state use its services; that is one-quarter of all school districts in Illinois. IlliniCloud strives to solve many problems related to public school K-12 technology, including:

- Creating a model of computing where districts rely not on capital expenditures but on operating expenditures
- Using economy-of-scale to provide state-of-the-art computing storage and network resources to all districts regardless of size
- Helping enable districts with the ability to provide existing resources more efficiently, with little overhead and expense for expansion of additional resources.

With 860 school districts in Illinois, IlliniCloud could not understand why each school district was building its own IT infrastructure when they are all required to provide the same services and curriculum applications.

With budgets already stretched and a growing demand for technology, school district chief technology officers (CTOs) met and began discussing collocations and other options and started looking at their IT and how to begin sharing it with other schools. With the advent of virtualization, much changed in regard to information sharing. The CTOs figured out a way to work with state officials to get the data centers to build a “community” cloud and then offer shared services.

For years, cooperative buying of paper supplies, diesel gas for buses, and even sporting facilities has helped school districts cut costs. IlliniCloud performs a similar function in regards to IT. Every school district has to create report cards, keep tests scores, maintain lunch and student attendance records, and perform myriad other functions, so data center consolidation and shared services were natural extensions to a cooperative buying approach.

Solution

To begin offering services to many school districts, IlliniCloud needed a platform upon which it could expand and diversify offerings all in a virtual environment. To do this, the company looked to Cisco Unified Computing System™ (UCS®) and Cisco Nexus® data center products as compared to other server and network vendors.

As a unified data center system, Cisco UCS integrates industry-standard x86 blade servers, access and storage networking, virtualization, and management into a single system, eliminating redundant devices and layers of management complexity. A single management interface controls multiple chassis and thousands of virtual machines,

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Product List

DATA CENTER

- Cisco Nexus 7010
- Cisco Unified Computing System Blade Chassis and B Series Blade Servers

For More Information

Find out more about the Cisco Unified Data Center platform at <http://www.cisco.com/go/datacenter> or Cisco UCS servers at <http://www.cisco.com/go/UCS>.

Cisco Nexus at <http://www.cisco.com/go/nexus>.

reducing the complexity of highly-virtualized environments and thus increasing agility, scalability, and employee productivity. The efficient design of Cisco UCS also accelerates and simplifies application deployment with greater reliability and security.

And for unified networking in the data center, the Cisco Nexus 7000 Series offers a comprehensive one-platform solution for the data center core network. It also offers aggregation, high density, and end-of-row and top-of-rack server connectivity. For campus core deployments, it provides a scalable, highly resilient, high-performance, interconnected solution.

“We wanted to work with vendors that are already providing services to schools and then put those services in the cloud and begin renegotiating the price as it is much cheaper to offer services in the cloud,” says Jim Peterson, chief technology officer, IlliniCloud. “It was critical that we establish trust in the cloud. Our end users needed autonomy and need to know that their information is secure.”

Results

Today, IlliniCloud is able to provide three main services as a result of its new data center:

- Disaster recovery: In a situation such as the May 2011 tornado in Joplin, Mo., having computer file storage off-site is an insurance policy.
- Infrastructure as a Service (IaaS): With off-site equipment, districts do not have to worry about maintaining or purchasing servers.
- Software as a Service (SaaS): It provides opportunities for online lectures and content, as well as data analysis programs to help students, also saving money and increasing resources.

IlliniCloud’s efforts allow school districts to put money into instruction instead of infrastructure. Each school district that joins IlliniCloud can potentially reduce its spending on IT by 30 to 50 percent. These cost savings are critical for school districts facing drastic budget cuts.

“Schools need infrastructure. We provide low-cost virtual servers, so that schools don’t have to worry about maintaining it,” says Peterson. “IlliniCloud has been a model for sustainability and cost savings with other states building similar platforms. As a result of our success, we are looking to expand service offerings into higher education institutions and state and local governments.”

