

Cisco Energizes School System with Distance Learning Technology



Grants Services Team enables Putnam County School System to implement content sharing across multiple campuses.

Executive Summary

Putnam County School System

- **Industry:** K-12 Education, Higher Education
- **Location:** Cookeville, TN
- **School County Size:** Over 10,500 students and over 1400 faculty and staff

CHALLENGE

- Maintain and expand school system initiatives with limited funding, limited personnel
- Equally distribute advanced teaching and learning resources
- Create dynamic classroom collaboration among multiple campuses

SOLUTION

- Engage Cisco Grants Services team to secure supplemental funding
- Utilize Cisco platform to accommodate customized video conferencing needs
- Integrate families, extracurricular ventures into virtual education program

RESULTS

- Achieved improved test scores across multiple campuses
- Provided higher-level learning opportunities to students statewide
- Expanded video conferencing, virtual learning initiatives to different counties

Challenge

The Putnam County School System (PCSS) in Tennessee serves elementary, middle, and high school students across 17 campuses, including three elementary schools that have distance learning portable units. This wide physical distribution of students among multiple classrooms throughout the state presents challenges for sustaining IT and teaching resources, managing personnel, and providing appropriate opportunities for advanced learners.

To address these needs in the face of budget and personnel limitations, PCSS decided to expand its financial resources and explore distance-learning opportunities by implementing a comprehensive grant initiative to bridge the distance gap between the state's classrooms. PCSS began working with the Cisco® Grants Services Team and was able to learn about grant opportunities, obtain funding, and implement numerous projects, while also accomplishing their primary goal of providing a high-quality education to all of their students.

Dr. Kathleen M. Airhart, Tennessee deputy commissioner of education, says, "By sharing resources between schools and districts, comparable coursework may be offered to every student regardless of physical location. Expanding... the learning experience for all students in Tennessee is a goal of...the Department of Education."

Solution

Sharon K. Anderson, PCSS virtual learning coordinator, was introduced to Cisco products and services through Mike Lay, PCS education sales consultant, when they both attended a technologies conference. Anderson saw the potential of distance learning through video conferencing technologies as a unique solution for the geographic and resource challenges that faced PCSS.

With a full-time grant specialist on-staff, PCSS has captured local, state, and federal grants to initiate education programs that would have otherwise never been available in the state. However, when PCSS applied for more complicated grant programs, such as the USDA Rural Development grants, it benefitted from the seasoned Cisco Grants Services Team. Anderson says, "If not for the support and guidance provided by the Cisco grants team, I do not believe distance learning would be a reality for our students, our teachers, and our community...working with Cisco was a match made in Heaven, and we have yet to capitalize on the impact it will have for future generations."

The Cisco Grants Services Team and a seasoned grant writer quickly identified USDA/DLT grants that fit the criteria and fell within reach. The Cisco team worked in close collaboration with PCSS officials, guiding them through the application

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Sharon K. Anderson
Virtual Learning Coordinator, PCSS

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Tennessee deputy commissioner of education

process, and challenging the education professionals to think globally. Stretching far beyond their comfort zone, the PCSS team welcomed this perspective and, together with the Cisco Grants team, crafted two outstanding grant proposals. The USDA/DLT Project in 2009 for \$496,454 and the USDA/DLT Project in 2010 for \$732,942, were both invested in distance learning and video conferencing technologies and training. Working with the Cisco Grants Services Team, PCSS is now providing students in rural Putnam County, Tennessee with opportunities to network with fellow students throughout the state, as well as bright minds across the globe.

Shrinking the gap between necessity and desire, Cisco TelePresence™ was compatible with existing technologies at PCSS and was so intuitive that teachers were able to conduct trainings less than a year after the integration of the technology. Also, by avoiding a top-down instructional approach, the school system was able to immediately involve teachers, thereby building internal capacity and support that sustained the deployment process.

In the resulting dynamic environment, users accessed academic programs available at select PCSS campuses, enjoyed instantaneous connecting power, attended virtual field trips, shared educational content, and more. Herbert Leftwich, principal at Upperman High School says, “Distance learning ... enables [PCSS] to utilize all resources throughout the county, providing our students with more curriculum opportunities and quality instruction, [while] providing curriculum enhancement, credit advancement, student ownership of learning, and ease of scheduling.”

Jason Summers, a distance learning teacher at Avery Trace Middle School, says, “In the past, middle school students [travelled] to Cookeville High School or to Avery Trace Middle School to take advanced courses...[now] students can still take those courses without the added expense and loss of time of travelling.”

Results

Utilizing Cisco technologies and leveraging the expertise of the Cisco Grants Team yielded one immediate and significant result: connectivity. Faced with an ever-shrinking pool of personnel and classroom resources, PCSS officials knew they would need to maximize their efficiency.

Beyond the immediate increases in content sharing and student access to advanced classroom environments, PCSS also integrated Cisco video conferencing technologies into school board and administrative team meetings; this optimized the utility of the investment. The need for teachers and students to drive across the county to administer, and sit through, classes not offered at their respective institutions was essentially eliminated. The ability of more experienced teachers to be virtually present in classrooms has also established a collection of “virtual mentors,” who will provide long-term benefits to improving overall teacher quality across the county.

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Product List

VIDEO

- Cisco Telepresence Movi
- Cisco Telepresence Room Systems
- Cisco Telepresence Desktop systems
- Cisco Telepresence Synch
- Cisco Telepresence Management Suite
- Cisco Telepresence Content Servers
- Cisco Multipoint Control Units

On customized education access, Anderson says, “A combination of asynchronous online classes and classes delivered synchronously with our Cisco IVC equipment has made [course offering equity] possible. Now students have equal access to a wider variety of courses as well as higher level courses that are not financially feasible to offer at our smaller schools.”

As partnerships with other counties in Tennessee continue to form, PCSS continues to serve in a mentoring capacity for their counterparts learning to optimize the video technologies. Currently, requests are pending from five other counties that are interested in deploying the technology. PCSS will be working with the Cisco Grants Services Team again to assist in obtaining funding to sustain growth and explore additional partnership opportunities.

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Herbert Leftwich

Principal, Upperman High School

