

FORSYTH COUNTY SCHOOL SYSTEM

HP solutions help stretch school's budget



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—Mark Klingler, Director of Technology Services, Forsyth County School System

HP customer case study: Standardizing on HP business desktop and notebook PCs simplifies IT management, reduces cost for fast-growing school system

Industry: Education

Objective:

Maximize use of technology budget

Approach:

The Forsyth County School System has standardized on HP business desktop and notebook PCs leased through HP Financial Services

IT improvements:

- Standardization reduces IT staff requirements
- As an HP self-maintainer, Forsyth County can perform warranty work in-house
- Guaranteed refresh cycle through leasing

Business benefits:

- Lower costs for deployment, ongoing maintenance
- Consistency in the user experience
- Growing availability through use of HP notebooks on mobile carts

Like school districts nationwide, the Forsyth County School System in Georgia is doing its best to stretch technology dollars to serve as many students as possible. It's doing so in part by standardizing on HP business desktop and notebook PCs.

“Once we found a family of computers that we were happy with, we stuck with it, and that family is HP,” notes Mark Klingler, Director of Technology Services with the Forsyth County School System in north metro Atlanta. “Standardization is one way you can keep the total cost of ownership down.”

The system also uses financing through HP Financial Services to eliminate the need for intermittent large financial outlays, and instead, build technology acquisitions—and regular technology refreshes—right into the annual budget.



Rapid growth requires growing PC base

The Forsyth County School System is one of the fastest growing districts in the nation, Klingler says. It currently has 31 schools, with four opening last year and another five due to open this year. The district serves some 31,000 students. "Keeping up with growth is one of our biggest challenges," Klingler says.

The district first developed a roadmap for technology back in 1994. It started with a simple goal: to get a single computer in each classroom. Now, the district averages four to five PCs per classroom, and has mobile carts available when teachers want to equip an entire class for a certain project or subject lesson.

The district's most recent purchase was 5500 HP Compaq dc5800 Small Form Factor PCs, which refreshed much of the classroom technology throughout the district. "The dc5800 is a reliable workhorse product that serves most students' needs—Internet research, word processing, e-mail, creating presentations—quite well at an attractive price point," Klingler says. He notes that the district tends to favor PCs with AMD processors because they offer a price advantage without a significant difference in performance.

The mobile carts—one per every six to eight classrooms—are each equipped with 10 HP Compaq nx6325 or nx6715 notebook. Some 1,300 nx6715 notebooks were added just this year. All district Teachers have been provided with their own HP notebook for over 10 years. All are equipped with wireless capability to facilitate everyone's access to the Internet for research.¹

"The significant challenge with Wi-Fi has been the unique density issues faced by a school system," Klingler notes. "The move to WiFi has been a major push for the past two years. We have finally settled on a solution that will allow us to not only address the connectivity issues of a large inventory of wireless student notebooks but also will help us to leverage student owned computing devices that they bring to school. Teachers can take advantage of the notebook computers, UMPCS, smart phones, and other handhelds so that we reach that 1:1 environment more quickly."

The desktops and notebooks both run genuine Windows® XP. Application software includes Microsoft® Office Professional (though the district is transitioning to Open Office), and programs such as Inspiration, Kidspiration, ActivStudio, Pixie and ImageBlender, among others.

"We've standardized on hardware, and also on specific software in order to keep everything manageable," Klingler says. "Classes in different schools all need to use the same tools. It gets to be a real problem and not sustainable if everybody is doing their own thing."

While HP desktop and notebook PCs are primarily used to run local applications, the district also broadens the resources to students through its own servers: Safari Montage enables students to view assets in a video library, Discovery United Streaming, the History Channel online resources, Atomic Learning, Brain Pop and Geometers Sketchpad bring additional learning opportunities. Access to those programs and

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Customer solution at a glance

Primary applications

K-12 educational support

Primary hardware

- HP Compaq dc5800 Business Desktop PCs
- HP Compaq nx6715 Business Notebook PCs
- HP Compaq nx6325 Business Notebook PCs
- HP ProLiant DL385 Servers

HP Services

- HP Financial Services

Primary software

- Genuine Windows Vista® Business with downgrade to Windows XP Professional custom-installed*+
- Microsoft Office
- ANGEL LMS
- Inspiration
- Kidspiration
- ActivStudio
- Pixie
- ImageBlender
- Atomic Learning
- NetTrekker
- Brain Pop
- Geometers Sketchpad
- United Streaming
- Safari Montage

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Mark Klingler, Director of Technology Services, Forsyth County School System

resources is also provided through a Citrix gateway linked to HP ProLiant DL385 servers. This solution gives students who have a PC at home access from outside the school to log in to applications and their personal school files. HP technology helps the school extend learning past the class day.

Klingler notes that the district has interactive white boards in all of its classrooms, and that drives a new classroom dynamic. “The white boards have proven to be a real catalyst in terms of getting teachers to make greater use of resources available through the HP computer and have helped tremendously with engaging students.”

Moving toward student-centered education

Computers, he argues, are making instruction more individualized for each student. “Education should be student-centered, not all about the talking head at the front of the classroom,” he notes. “HP PCs allow students to access information that gives them insight into real-world issues. Being able to go out and gather their own information is an important step for students.”

The district is an HP certified Self-Maintainer and performs its own warranty service in-house. That applies to everything from desktops to servers. And maintenance isn’t just conducted by the school system’s employee technicians (some of whom are contractors from HP Services), but also by students.

“We have a high school apprenticeship program where students completing the computer systems class can do work and become HP certified as they work through their apprenticeship program with us.”

Most of the district’s HP desktops and notebooks are acquired on a three-year lease program through HP Financial Services. “Leasing with HP Financial Services is an easy way to make sure that we maintain a regular refresh cycle,” Klingler notes.

Building technology costs into the annual budget

It also helps the district build technology costs right into the annual budget. “Before we started leasing, we had to pass a special purpose tax or float a bond each time we needed to make a significant technology purchase. Then one year, we were facing significant economic issues so we couldn’t go out for special public financing,” explains Klingler.

As the PCs in place back then aged and became technologically outdated, the situation reinforced Klingler’s resolve to find an alternative way to ensure regular technology refresh in the future. He had been making a case to the Board of Education over several years about the continuing need to upgrade technology. The idea of building a lease into the annual budget became quite appealing to the school system’s leaders.

Now, facing a period of economic uncertainty, Klingler is especially glad to have made the transition to leasing. He says the Forsyth County School System has implemented a complete hiring freeze, and all departments have been told to cut their budgets by 10 percent. “In this environment, I think refreshing a lease is less likely to get cut than a major technology purchase,” he says.

Another benefit of leasing, he notes, is that typically the cost of computers comes down each year. “So when we present the figures on a new lease, I can generally tell the board we have a payment that’s a little bit less per system than it was before.”

Finally, at the end of the lease, the district offers computers for sale to local parents and students at the residual value as specified by the lease, Klingler says—following a file sanitizer wipe² of the hard drive and installation of a new software image with open source applications. “So now we have a growing



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portion of our community with computers who might not otherwise be able to afford one. And when a family buys an HP notebook, the student can bring it back to the school and use it every day."

Achieving 1:1 access

Ultimately, Klingler says, the growth of family ownership of HP notebook PCs will do what most school districts have been unable to do: achieve 1:1 access to technology in the schools.

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Mark Klingler, Director of Technology Services, Forsyth County School System

"For years, the question has been, 'How are we going to get to 1:1 computing in the schools? And the funding for it?' The reality is that it's going to happen

regardless of what the school system does. In the next few years, many students will have their own computing devices and the school's challenge will be to level the playing field by providing computers for students who don't have one."

In the meantime, he's considering how to stretch the district's funding even further. One option, he notes, is to consider the "mini" notebooks, like the new HP 2133 Mini-Note PC. "There are advantages to the functionality of the desktop PCs we've provided, but they have a very attractive price point and the flexibility that you get with complete mobility," he notes.

Klingler notes that the school system's relationship with HP, developed over more than a dozen years, is based both on quality products and support the district can count on. "HP is a partner for us," Klingler says. "They listen to our needs, are responsive when we have an issue, and are willing to work with us to resolve problems. We know that whatever we need, HP will devote the resources to come up with a solution."

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¹Wireless access point and Internet service required and sold separately. Availability of public wireless access points limited. Wireless broadband requires separately purchased service contract.

²For the use cases outlined in the DOD 5220.22-M Supplement.

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*Windows Vista Business disk also included for future upgrade if desired. To qualify for this downgrade, an end user must be a business (including governmental or education institutions) and is expected to order at 25 customer systems with the same custom image.

+Certain Windows Vista product features require advanced or additional hardware. See

<http://www.microsoft.com/windowsvista/getready/hardwarereqs.mspx> and

<http://www.microsoft.com/windowsvista/getready/capable.mspx> for details. Windows Vista Upgrade Advisor can help you determine which features of Windows Vista will run on your computer. To download the tool, visit www.windowsvista.com/upgradeadvisor.

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