

NEW YORK SCHOOL DISTRICT TAKES WIRELESS LEARNING INTO 21ST CENTURY

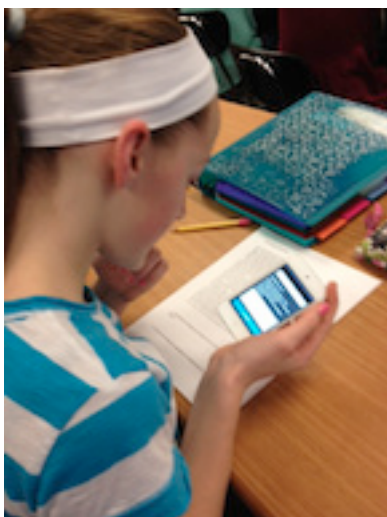


Located in Onondaga County, the Westhill Central School District (CSD) is proud to be one of Central New York's highest performing school districts. The district comprises two elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school.

Tasked with educating students, the district uses laptops in every classroom, not to mention one or more labs of 25+ computers per school. All told, it hosts more than 600 devices on its wireless network—which, with the state migrating to computerized student achievement testing, was overdue for a refresh.

Deric Tallman, the district's Director of Technology, understands the importance of preparing students for the increased use of mobile devices, such as tablets and smartphones. "Our infrastructure needed to be designed so these new devices could be used by students and teachers, and managed appropriately," said Tallman.

Westhill's old network, which was a layer two, flat network, was redesigned to a layer-three routed network to improve network management, security, and network efficiency of data packet flow.



According to Tallman, converting to a layer three network provided a strong foundation to build a wireless network. After the layer-three network was built, the new Aruba wireless network allowed school community members to use wireless devices. Laptops, eReaders, iPads, iPod Touches, Nooks, and other wireless devices can be used for learning and for school operations.

"The new wireless network also needed to support a wide range of policy levels, helping kids as well as teachers collaborate," Tallman added, "however, no educational IT solution purchase makes sense if there's a steep learning curve or a high degree of maintenance required."

To determine which wireless solution made the most sense for the district, the Westhill CSD technology team compared two wireless solutions: Cisco and Aruba.

They discovered that the Aruba solution was easier to implement in their Apple-driven environment than Cisco's, and Aruba's solution offered equivalent functionality with better policy and management flexibility.

Based on their testing and user experience of both wireless solutions, they discovered that Aruba's solutions outperformed Cisco's in many aspects. The district now has a new wireless network comprising of two wireless controllers, 140 access points, and the Aruba ClearPass platform to securely support access.



ORGANIZATION OVERVIEW

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"The Central New York Regional Information Center – a nonprofit organization that oversees school IT services – was very helpful and supportive of our initiative," Tallman says, adding that the Aruba purchase was an indicator of the effort to look at new wireless solutions in order to support the district's initiatives.

The Westhill Central School District is pleased with the results and has seen a big boost in collaboration among teachers and students. Wireless has changed the behavior of learning and teaching for the better. Before the wireless network was implemented, jack-tethered laptops forced students to work in isolation at the high school library; now, students collaborate around large tables.

Aruba's wireless solution has energized teachers in using problem-based inquiry learning, an effective teaching strategy that leans heavily on student collaboration via cloud computing. The Aruba wireless network also positions the district well to respond as New York State moves rapidly toward computer-based testing implementation.



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*– Deric Tallman,
Director of Technology,
Westhill Central School District*



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