

Lowell Area Schools

By leveraging a number of Linux-based OpenText solutions, Lowell Area Schools has built a highly stable, proactive IT infrastructure to support the ever-changing learning needs of its students and staff.



Overview

Lowell Area Schools (LAS) is one of the best performing school districts in the State of Michigan. A growing school district, LAS comprises eight schools spanning grades K–12.

Challenge

As the school system faced a major network upgrade, LAS was intent on selecting a platform that would serve its needs for the long term. “When you’re using taxpayer money, you have to look at all the alternatives to make sure you’re making a prudent decision and investing their money wisely,” said Eric Stanek, network administrator for Lowell Area Schools.

Like many public schools, LAS needed a flexible and reliable enterprise-level platform

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ERIC STANEK
Network Administrator
Lowell Area Schools

amidst a limited budget and labor force. “We need a platform that requires minimal attention from IT staff,” said Stanek. “In return, we can focus more attention on delivering the right technology to our students and teachers.”

Solution

After carefully evaluating all options, including Apple and Microsoft, LAS was confident that OpenText™ was the best choice for its environment. “Other solutions couldn’t measure up to what we could achieve with a combination of [...] Open Enterprise Server and SUSE Linux Enterprise,” said Stanek. “The performance, reliability and total cost of ownership were huge factors in our decision. We get the best of both worlds: the strength of Linux, which offers superior performance and flexibility, along with Novell’s (now part of OpenText) strong track record.”

The school system now runs a plethora of applications, including OpenText™ GroupWise, GWAVA, NetIQ eDirectory by OpenText™ and open source solutions like FreeRADIUS, Squid and SquidGuard on a six-node cluster of OpenText™ Open Enterprise Server and SUSE Linux Enterprise Server. The school leverages Xen to run several Windows-based applications as virtual guests on SUSE Linux Enterprise Server-based machines. The school



At a Glance

- **Industry**
Education
- **Location**
United States
- **Challenge**
With a limited budget and labor force, the school needed a reliable, flexible enterprise-level platform.
- **Products and Services**
ZENworks
GroupWise
- **Success Highlights**
 - + Migrated to Linux with no disruption to users
 - + Consolidated servers, saving nearly US\$50,000
 - + Reduced software costs by leveraging open source technology
 - + Improved system reliability and uptime
 - + Freed up IT staff to focus on higher value initiatives

“ZENworks continues to pay for itself every day. It provides a huge impact to our users, increasing uptime while reducing administrative costs.”

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uses the OpenText™ iPrint capabilities in Open Enterprise Server to improve the accessibility of printers across the school system.

LAS makes extensive use of OpenText™ ZENworks to centrally manage 2,000 endpoints across its eight campuses. “With ZENworks, we can quickly see if a user is having an issue, even before they report it,” said Stanek. “We can remotely log into their machine to see exactly what’s occurring. And if we can’t resolve the problem quickly, we just reimagine the machine and get them back up and running swiftly. Because we spend less time in the field and more time on higher-value tasks, we can be more proactive in a reactive environment.”

The application distribution features have proven especially helpful in the school system’s computer lab environment. “A user just double clicks and the application installs and configures itself,” said Stanek. “It’s that easy.”

The school system also relies on ZENworks identity-based capabilities to manage user rights. “Regardless of whether a student or teacher is logging in from the classroom, the lab or home, they’ll see the same environment, based on their role,” said Stanek.

To prevent users from engaging in behavior that could put the network at risk, LAS also uses the policy-driven automation capabilities in ZENworks. “We welcome community members to use our computing resources, but we need to ensure they aren’t downloading rogue applications,” said Stanek. “We lockdown workstations to prevent these problems.”

The school system also leverages ZENworks to understand software and hardware utilization as it plans its next replacement rotation cycle.

Results

Since migrating to a Linux-based solution, the school system has a more flexible, reliable platform to support users’ computing needs. “On a budgetary level, our Novell (now part of OpenText) environment is one of the lowest cost budget items, yet it provides the greatest impact on our users,” said Stanek.

The school system has maintained the reliability users were accustomed to while vastly reducing costs. “Our network has been extremely stable,” said Stanek. “It’s like a rock. And because Open Enterprise Server and SUSE Linux Enterprise Server enabled us to consolidate from 20 servers to just six, we’ve saved roughly US\$50,000.”

“We now have a readiness for the future,” said Stanek. “We’re ahead of the curve when it comes to exposing students to open source applications. Our environment is easily extensible so we can continue to support new applications to enhance the classroom experience.”

ZENworks has also proved to be extremely beneficial, enabling the school to increase uptime while significantly reducing administrative costs. “ZENworks continues to pay for itself every day,” said Stanek. “It also provides a huge impact to our users, increasing uptime while reducing administrative costs. I think is the right choice for any school district looking to enhance reliability within a tight budget. ZENworks is truly in a class by itself.”

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