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How Small Schools Move Rapidly to Hybrid Learning Environments

Three core practices you should leverage for a secure and rapid transition

Turning adversity to advantage with Cisco Webex

You'll find the small Village of Mineola tucked snuggly between its better known neighbors and a bit east of Queens in Long Island, New York. Just shy of 19,000 residents, Mineola reflects many of the characteristics of a bustling "small town" and that includes being home to a much loved small school district that serves as a key part of the community's sense of identity.

With five schools (3 elementary, 1 middle, and 1 high), the Mineola Union Free School District provides IT services for around 2,800 users every day. Like most small school districts, the need for an effective IT infrastructure is driven by their overall mission. For Mineola, the mission is inspiring students to life-long learning so that they can make a positive impact on their community. As they work towards that goal, Mineola has become recognized as one of the twenty-five most innovative school districts nationwide by the educational data analytics site Niche.com.

A recent event put that ranking, and the strategy behind achieving it, to the test. As the COVID-19 pandemic reached critical levels in the New York City area, Mineola's leaders were forced to transition staff and students to a remote learning and administrative environment virtually overnight, without knowing how long they would need to sustain the virtual environment. It could be six months or a year–or perhaps a permanent transition. In addition, Mineola faced the challenge of providing advanced cyersecurity and analytics capabilities to keep remote users (and their data) secure while meeting any government mandates–especially those related to the health and safety of their students and staff.

Three core practices

Select a proven partner
- Look to an industry-leader
- Seek innovation and reliability
- Use their real-world experience to your advantage

Leverage subscriptions
- Gain greater flexibility in deployment and budgeting
- Scale rapidly as needs change
- Adapt easily during unexpected events

Embed security and analytics
- Better understand user behaviors
- Secure users across all end-devices
- Track a variety of data to meet mandates

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Unique ways Cisco Webex helps your small school district

- Gives teachers greater flexibility in curriculum development, creative teaching options and their personal development/training.

- Lets physically at-risk or quarrantined staff stay engaged/continue duties remotely.

- Allows teachers and students to overcome remote locations and limited budgets to access curriculum, experts and unique learning from around the world.

- Allows enrichment based digital summer school, virtual field trips, special events and social gatherings to minimize contact, reduce travel times and minimize expenses.

- Enables parent-teacher meetings anytime, anywhere, increasing parent participation.

- Nurtures development of a 24/7 virtual teaching community for support and personal development.

- Helps overcome staff limitations for deployment thanks to its intuitive "plug and play" design.

- Enables video on demand for staff, small team and board meetings.

- Provides analytics to help meet state mandates based on attendance, maintain state funding and develop yearly plans.

- Documents usage levels in hybrid learning environments, via aggregate minutes of student/faculty use, to provide accountability to government agencies and parents.

Move securely and rapidly

For small school districts, the move to hybrid learning can be a challenge. Thankfully, there are three core practices they can employ to make that transition a secure and rapid one.

Select a proven partner

Mineola Union Free School District understands the importance of picking a partner that is reliable and a proven industry-leader.

By doing so, they gain access to innovative and reliable solutions that are integratable and secure. These work with their existing infrastructure to maximize efficiency in deployment and use. It also provides direct access to a team known for success in building hybrid learning environments, enabling Mineola to leverage Cisco's vast experience and creativity to directly benefit their district.

Most importantly, selecting Cisco builds a high level of trust. As the global leader for IT in Education, Cisco acts in the school district's best interest at all times.

Leverage subscriptions

Mineola also sees the value in using a subscription approach to rapidly scale and deploy advanced solutions and services.

This approach gives them immediate access to the industry's leading real-time secure collaboration and information sharing platform – Cisco Webex – that features a single app for calling, messaging and meetings.

Subscription based solutions and services also provide greater flexibility for budgeting since they can move costs from CapEx to OpEx. Subscriptions help to keep Mineola's budget in-check despite the significant pressures they face from unexpected economic shut down and a large scale emergency IT deployment.

A subscription approach also gives Mineola the ability to scale as the number of users change and as future technologies evolve. Plus, as their needs grow, or unexpected challenges arise, it embeds greater resiliency so they can maintain continuity of educational services.

Photo courtesy Mineola Schools

"Other districts took two to three weeks to scale up infrastructure, we did it in less than one day."

- Matthew Gaven, Asst. Supt. for Technology

Embed security and analytics

As a small school district, Mineola seeks to leverage advanced security and analytics capabilities that help them overcome limited staff. By embedding industry-leading security and analytics tools from Cisco, they gain a deeper understanding of user behaviors, both good and bad. This lets them better protect district and user data. Plus, an advanced analytics capability from Cisco also helps them meet state and local mandates related to student attendance, health and safety.

Next steps to hybrid learning

Find out how your small school district can successfully transition to a hybrid learning environment. Contact your Cisco representative or visit: Create hybrid learning environments.