A School District Expands Student Horizons . . . With Help from the Cisco Partner Ecosystem

ConvergeOne, a Cisco Gold Certified Partner, has a long history working with schools. So it already knows to expect that every school system will have its own unique needs.

But even so, Montebello Unified School District stood out as a special challenge.

Montebello is part of Los Angeles County. Ten miles away is a thriving downtown that is renowned worldwide as a hub of innovation, influence, and wealth. But for many of the students in Montebello USD, those ten miles could just as easily be a thousand. They live in households that don't have computers or Internet access; and although the school system strives to fill the technology gap, it has come up short.

Way short.

When the district turned to ConvergeOne—an established leader in matching technology to pedagogy—the solution provider approached the challenge by beginning where it always begins. It set out to get a full picture of the problem.

"We start with a Right Foundations assessment," explains Robert Redd, ConvergeOne's Director of Public Sector. "This is our opportunity to level-set. We go closet to closet and classroom to classroom to understand the customer's environment, the gaps, the limitations, what's already in place."

What they found was a network that was badly antiquated, with servers that couldn't be repaired and Internet connections that couldn't be activated.

"This district was basically thirty years behind," says Lani Cupchoy, President of the Montebello Board of Education.

"We had twenty different servers in our data center," says Anthony Martinez, district superintendent. "Five of them were hand built. The rest were so outdated that we couldn't even contract for maintenance on them."

Establishing meaningful metrics on the district's capacity and equipment was only the first step of the Right Foundations assessment. Just as important was a series of meetings with the district's stakeholders, to understand and help clarify goals and vision for the future.

"We believe in a consultative approach to technology," says Redd, "so we need to understand the long-term vision that they're driving towards—the outcomes that they want their students and their teachers to experience."

"And then our job is to close the gap between the vision and the reality."

The educators at MUSD had no trouble envisioning what they wanted to deliver their students. In today's global economy, they saw technology as the crucial tool their students needed in order to overcome disadvantage and compete successfully in the labor force.

"Our students are so full of potential," says Cupchoy. "They have an incredible drive to succeed. What's holding them back is the technology."

As Oscar Michel, a teacher in the district, put it, "To be relevant in society, to be able to compete, to be able to collaborate, these students need technology access."

Over the course of its meetings, ConvergeOne drew on its long experience in the field to help guide the schools' leadership towards an effective solution—a strategy for using technology to achieve their educational goals, that would meet the needs of students and teachers for years to come.

It would be a comprehensive, integrated solution, tailor-fit to Montebello's needs. It encompassed data center, networking, and security, and would be built on Cisco infrastructure, software, and services, including Cisco HyperFlex in the datacenter

and Cisco ISE for security. Ultimately, it would modernize the resources available to 30,000 students in 28 schools.

And it was much more than ConvergeOne could ever do on its own.

Which was no surprise. "When we look at K–12 districts today, and everything they're trying to achieve with technology," explains Redd, "we believe that the work is simply too big for any single organization to design, architect, consult on, implement, and manage over the long term."

"That's why we rely on partnerships. As a market leader we know our strengths. We also know the strengths of those around us in the marketplace, and we have strong partnerships across many manufacturers and thought leaders in the Cisco Partner Ecosystem."

So ConvergeOne pulled together a team of nine Cisco partners whose specializations and expertise would combine to deliver every element in an end-to-end solution.

Ecosystem Partners Involved in the Solution led by ConvergeOne	
Cisco	Hyperflex, Nexus 9K, UCS, Cat Switching, Cisco ONE, UCS, 3850's, APIC EM and Cisco ONE (Prime and ISE)
F5	Load Balancing
iBoss	Content Filtering
VMware	Virtualization
APC	Power and Cooling
Microsoft	Microsoft 365
Quantum	Backup
Dell	Chromebooks
Veeam	Virtualization Management

With a road map in place and the team members lined up, progress has been fast.

"We've already accomplished a great deal," says Martinez. "We've got our data center taken care of. We have built 27 computer labs and installed over 1,200 all-in-one desktops."

"The next step is fiber optic connectivity to each and every school site. We're changing out the switches and we're putting wi-fi in every single classroom in the district."

Taken together, the many elements in this comprehensive solution add up to more than just a one-time deal. For the nine companies involved, the work they are doing at Montebello represents a repeatable business strategy, with a repeatable constellation of partners—a win-win outcome, where working together yields better solutions for customers, and more business down the road.

And for the students? "The technology we're putting in place here," says Redd, "will be impacting student lives for years to come. And that's very exciting for us."

"We're investing in our leaders right now," says Cupchoy. "We may have scientists. We may have painters and artists. Whatever it is they want to be, the technology is empowering them to get there."

"We are putting the tools in their hands."