Charter Business Case Study
Eagle Mountain-Saginaw Independent School District

Charter Business

Case Study

The Eagle Mountain-Saginaw Independent School District serves 25 campuses, with about 17,000 students and 2,300 employees encompassing 73 square miles in the northwest corner of Tarrant County, Texas, adjoining Fort Worth. The district is one of the fastest growing school districts in the area, and its increasing need for a reliable, flexible, high-speed network reflects that growth.

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-Kirk Murdock,
Director of Technology Services
Eagle Mountain-Saginaw Independent School District

The Challenge

Eagle Mountain-Saginaw Independent School District (EM-S ISD) was growing, both in terms of additional campuses and students, and as a result, its demand was increasing for internet use and high-speed data transmission. The increased demand caused bottlenecks that slowed work, sometimes disconnecting projects in progress. The existing service was a 100/Mbps point-to-point fiber and coaxial connection linking all campuses to the administration building, which meant that if the network was interrupted for any reason, that location was completely cut off from service; and if the administrative office went down, the entire school district was left high and dry without any connectivity.

The solution

As the existing contract with a telco came up for renewal in early 2010, Charter Business submitted a bid. The Charter Business proposal included more bandwidth, faster speeds with scalability for growth, and a redesigned architecture that would provide redundancy. "The Charter Business option was, hands down, far better than what we were currently getting for roughly the same price," said Director of Technology Services Kirk Murdock.

New architecture provides redundancy

First, the Charter Business engineering team took a hard look at the needs of the district and recommended building an Optical Ethernet Gigabit wide-area network (WAN). The design also called for creating three core sites that connect closed campuses through multiple paths. The result is that if there is a cut line or a problem of any type with one fiber path, there

is a seamless alternate route that can be used while repairs are made. "We experienced the benefits of this new architecture this fall when certain areas went down," said Murdock. "It worked just like we were promised, with no disruption for our staff or students."

Dedicated fiber improves reliability

Unlike many providers who lease fiber from other companies, Charter Business built the school's Ethernet and maintains it, which means there's never any delay or question about how to keep the network running smoothly. Charter Business continually monitors the entire network to make sure it is in excellent working order. "The dependability has been great," said Murdock. "Users have come to rely on this network and know they don't have to worry and don't have to wait."

More capacity and faster speeds

EM-S ISD also needed more bandwidth and faster speeds to serve its growing needs, particularly in Internet research, streaming video and audio and video courses conducted between the two high schools. "To have to keep increasing bandwidth is a great problem to have," said Murdock. "We trained students and staff in different ways to use technology and they're embracing these new options. Technology continually increases and in order to stay current and be able to take advantage of all the educational resources, a fast, responsive network is critical."

The new network incorporates a gigabit connection to all closed campuses and a 10Gbps connection between core sites. The network is scalable, and EM-S ISD can easily upgrade bandwidth and speed when they need to without costly construction or lengthy waits.

Prompt response to requests and problems

Not only does Charter Business provide a lightning-fast high-speed network, the professional team also moves at record speed. "From the time we signed the initial contract, it only took about three months to complete construction and get installed," said Murdock. "That kind of speed with quality work was very impressive. Even after construction, when we've sent an e-mail asking for a change of some type, our Charter Business team initiates the configuration changes immediately. With other providers a similar request would take a month to get reviewed and approved at all the various levels; Charter Business gets it done in a few days!" Similarly, when any problem arises, regardless of the type, Charter Business is also immediately on task fixing it. Murdock recounts that there have been a couple times when Charter Business called to alert him about a problem before the schools even realized there was one.

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Consistent team supports school district

"One refreshing aspect was that from the time Charter Business responded to our RFP [request for proposal] to today, I've worked with the same team of Charter Business professionals," said Murdock. "The engineers and account manager we began working with know almost as much about our system as we do. That's invaluable when you don't have to start from scratch explaining things to new players." Murdock also expressed pleasant surprise that even once the network was up and running, the Charter Business team has remained in touch with him to make sure everything is going well and seeing if there's anything else they can do to help.

The bottom line

A dependable, responsive network is not something that is desirable for the school district, it's critical. "Any downtime, for any reason, is now a huge problem, and Charter's performance has been impressive," said Murdock. "We've been extremely pleased with Charter's service, reliability and price. Price wasn't our number one consideration, but it was very important, because we are stewards of taxpayer dollars. Charter Business provided us with outstanding value for the cost."

Eagle Mountain-Saginaw Independent School District continues to grow. The district is currently working to increase bandwidth and is exploring other Charter Business services, such as e-mail hosting. "We've had a great relationship with Charter Business from start to finish. The bottom line is that our partnership helps us achieve our main goal of educating and enriching our students," concluded Murdock.

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