CASE STUDY ›

EDUCATION: WINSTON-SALEM/FORSYTH COUNTY SCHOOL

The Winston-Salem/Forsyth County School (WS/FCS) school district had more than 50,000 students enrolled in their system with no way to accurately and sufficiently back up their data.

This was a serious problem. With permanent records, grades, emails, etc. from all 80 of their school sites, the district had to come up with a solution, fast.

The school district was formed in 1963 when the individual Winston-Salem and Forsyth school systems merged together to become one of North Carolina's largest K-12 educational institutions. With 42 elementary schools, 16 middle schools, 11 high schools and 11 special schools, WS/FCS is the fifth largest school system in North Carolina and the 85th largest school system in the nation.

The Challenge:

To put it simply, a lot of students and teachers means a lot of data. It is the responsibility of the district's Information Systems department to ensure that all data, ranging from emails to financial information to legal and other confidential data from its students, staff and other users, is safe.

"With the number of students enrolled in our schools, the data we have to keep up with is astronomical," said Kevin Sherrill, director of information systems for Winston-Salem/Forsyth Schools. "The system we were previously attempting to use was making it incredibly difficult to restore data. It wasn't reliable and we didn't have the capability for online backups. Considering the amount of data we were dealing with and the number of individual people dealing with it, we knew we needed a top-of-the-line, easy-to-use and manage solution."

The Solution:

An Authorized STORServer Reseller introduced Sherrill to the STORServer Enterprise Backup Appliance (EBA).

Each STORServer EBA is a fully integrated solution that includes industry-leading hardware, intuitive backup software and robust data protection technology. Each solution is built to specifications that not only meet organizations' current data protection demands, but are also scalable to meet their ever-changing back up, archive and disaster recovery (DR) requirements.

The EBA opened many new avenues of convenience for the Winston-Salem/Forsyth School district, including the option of a 30-day capacity for online backups. Previously, they had to move all 30-day backups to tapes.

Sherrill and his staff had four goals in mind when switching to STORServer's EBA. They wanted capacity. With so many students in their district, they required a solution that could back up the large amounts of data that a district their size houses. They needed reliability of backups and restore points, which was where their old system failed them. They also wanted ease-of-use for online backup to disk as opposed to removable media. Last, but not least, they wanted to be able to restore their servers in a timely fashion.

Results:

With STORServer, the school system's RTO (Recovery Time Objective) has been greatly decreased. In addition, data is immediately available and no tape retrieval is required.

The WS/FCS system currently backs up 80 different sites with the STORServer EBA. This includes the central district office along with 80 school sites and maintenance facility warehouses. There are a total of 140 servers being backed by STORServer. Sherrill and his team have saved an exceptional amount of time since having installed this system. They only switch tapes once a week, instead of once a day which was required by the old system.

"The number is infinite in terms of time savings we've achieved since turning to STORServer," said Buddy Martin, systems administrator for the Winston-Salem/Forsyth school district. "And, the cost savings is tremendous. When doing restorations before, it felt like a huge guessing game. The reassurance and confidence I feel now that we are utilizing the STORServer EBA is something you can't put a price tag on."

The first real test of the STORServer Enterprise Backup Appliance came when one of the district's high schools had a system crash. STORServer had them back up within a couple of hours.

Additionally, with the STORServer EBA, the school system can store all of their files online and return to them at a moments notice. They can have requests addressed within minutes. All versions of files, current and old, are located in the online pool and are available for immediate restoration with no operator intervention required. They also have an increase in retention rate and improved reliability.

On average, the school district performs backups of 1,160 GB of data using the STORServer EBA. According to Sherrill, the most important aspect of the utilizing the EBA is the trust and reassurance it provides. Backups and restores that used to be quite cumbersome are now incredibly easy. In addition, STORServer is always readily available when the school system needs them for help.

In the coming months, Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools will be moving its STORServer environment into a virtual datacenter. They are making a physical location move to a new datacenter and are using that opportunity to move to virtual machines.

"As we consolidate from physical to virtual, our backup needs will change, but we know STORServer will continue protecting our data like they've been doing for years," said Sherrill.

ABOUT STORSERVER

STORServer is a leading provider of data protection solutions and offers the only enterprise data backup appliance that is built to order. Each backup appliance solution is tailored to the customer's unique environment to simplify management of complex backup, archive and disaster recovery needs. STORServer's appliances feature enterprise class data backup, archive and disaster recovery software, hardware, services and U.S.-based customer support. For more information on STORServer, please visit our website.

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