

Cypress Fairbanks Independent School District



Profile:

The third largest school district, and the largest Recognized school district, in the state of Texas.

Location:

Cypress, Texas, United States

Industry:

Education

Website:

www.cfisd.net

Solutions:

- Ivanti Secure User Management Suite
- Ivanti Data Analytics
- Ivanti Management Suite
- Ivanti Mobility Manager
- Ivanti Security Suite
- Ivanti Xtraction

Benefits:

- Provided reliable patch management and remote control for 70,000 machines
- Delivered secure, reliable, updated software automatically to users
- Saved potentially hundreds of person-days per year and cut travel costs
- Accelerated and simplified migration to Windows 10
- Helped progressive organization deliver best possible tools to students and staff

Cypress Fairbanks Independent School District (CFISD) in Harris County is the largest Recognized School District in the state of Texas. Covering 186 square miles, the district levies local taxes and uses the funds to run 54 elementary schools, 18 middle schools, 12 high schools, and four special program facilities, serving a total student population of more than 100,000. Founded in 1939, CFISD employs more than 12,000 people, including more than 6,500 faculty members.

Outgrowing the System

Technology is a vital element in today’s approaches to education, and CFISD takes pride in giving students and staff reliable and secure access to the latest and greatest tools to keep them learning, creating and working to their maximum potential. With administrative offices and school campuses spanning more than 100 locations across a large area, the Personal Computer Support team at CFISD faces a major challenge in keeping computing devices patched, updated, and equipped with the right software for users. The relatively small central team manages approximately 70,000 desktop and laptop computers, and maintains more than 700 different software packages for students and administrative staff.

Larry Barrios, Manager of the Device, Imaging, and Integration Team, explains some of the challenges: “Our mission is help our students and educators achieve their full potential, and that means making sure that they have the right tools at their fingertips. Our user community is highly diverse: not only do we have students across every academic discipline, but also teachers, food services personnel, transportation personnel, security personnel, and more. This means that we need to support a huge variety of software, confirm that updates and security patches are applied on time, and monitor software licenses so that we can ensure compliance. Given the large number of machines we manage and the geographic area we cover,

we rely on technology to help us automate our processes and run them remotely.”

The previous endpoint management software at CFISD provided—in theory, at least—centralized software deployment, patch management, and remote-control capabilities. In practice, however, the solution was no longer fit for purpose, and the gap between CFISD’s needs and the software’s capabilities was growing fast.

“Software deployment and updates were limited to the ‘pull’ model, so we were reliant on users to keep machines updated,” says Josh Zhang, HW/SW Technical Analyst. “The previous solution was also unreliable, in particular around the remote controls, so technicians often needed to jump in their cars and drive up to 30 minutes for an on-site fix. Also, we had to run a massive on-site program to update plug-ins at the start of every year, physically visiting every machine on the network. We could see that the functionality was falling further and further behind our needs, even while the price was continuing to rise.”

To enable better user support and security, to improve license monitoring and accelerate software updates, and to reduce the time and effort spent on support, CFISD looked for a new endpoint management solution.

Sourcing the Best Solution

As the key criteria for the new solution, CFISD was looking for strong capabilities around remote management, software push, and inventory and patch management. Ease of use for end users was also vital: to avoid employing armies of technicians, CFISD is heavily reliant on user self-service. If the team could find a solution that would automate important updates while also making it easy for users to manage their own computing environment, this would free up central staff from repetitive IT fire-fighting and enable a greater focus on strategic initiatives.

The school district ran a formal RFP process in which it compared four leading solution options; the existing vendor’s solution was excluded. “We felt that the Microsoft offering was relatively limited in functional terms, and would require us to add many components to get the capabilities we needed—particularly as we support so many devices,” says Anthony Melton, HW/SW Technical Analyst. “IBM was quite simply way out of our financial reach, and the Dell option was not scalable enough for our environment. The Ivanti® Secure User Management Suite gave us everything

we needed at a price that made financial sense, and with significant headroom for future growth.”

During the RFP, Ivanti partnered with SHI, a major global IT service provider and specialist in government contracts. “We have worked extensively with SHI, and we know that we can trust them to bring us the best solutions at the most affordable pricing,” says Austen Chang, HW/SW Technical Analyst. “It’s not easy for vendors to sell into education accounts because there are complex rules and regulations around the RFP process. SHI understands what vendors need to do to comply with state laws, so they help ensure that our chosen technical solution can actually be purchased and deployed.”

Lillie Swearingen, HW/SW Technical Analyst, adds: “We ran a proof of concept for the Ivanti solution in one of our middle schools, and it was impressive to see that Ivanti listened to our feedback and needs, then rolled out new functionality for us in the next release.”

Rapid Migration

Working over the summer vacation to minimize disruption for users, CFISD deployed the Ivanti solution virtualized across nine high-end servers, in a configuration that will scale to manage up to 100,000 end-user devices, ensuring that the organization will not run out of headroom anytime soon. Ivanti Secure User Management Suite is a comprehensive IT systems management and endpoint security solution that unites four products: Ivanti Management Suite, Ivanti Security Suite, Ivanti Data Analytics, and Ivanti Mobility Manager.

CFISD also deployed Ivanti Xtraction, which employs visual reports and dashboards to bring business intelligence to IT management. During the rollout of the Ivanti solutions across the full estate of desktops and laptops, the CFISD team used Xtraction to display rolling statistics on a 70-inch monitor in its operations room. “It was great to be able to monitor our progress and pace in terms of the number of machines re-imaged and the number of software packages built and deployed,” says Daniel Serwinek, HW/SW Technical Analyst. “We had an absolute cut-off date of July 31 to get off the old solution, or risk paying another year of licensing and support. Thanks to our planning, great work from the teams, and this ability to see our progress, we completed the migration of all 65,000-plus machines a week ahead of schedule.”

As part of the project, CFISD used the Ivanti imaging process to migrate all student laptops to Windows 10, representing 60 percent of its total fleet. In order to preserve software and documents required for the coming school year, teachers' machines were converted in place by deploying the Ivanti agent, while the students' machines received a completely fresh OS image. "Thanks to the Ivanti solutions and the dedication and skill of our teams, we were able to achieve everything in just two and a half months and we came in a week before the deadline," says Larry Barrios.

Saving Time and Effort

With all desktops and laptops now under the control of the Ivanti Secure User Management Suite, and all software packages migrated into the new solution, the team at CFISD is training staff and users to get everyone up to speed.

"It's early days, but we're already seeing some great benefits from the Ivanti solution," says Anthony Melton. "Software packaging is easier than before, so we can share the workload across the team, and deployment is also simpler. The ability to push out software and updates is incredibly helpful."

Michelle Campos, Technology SW Specialist, adds: "As an example, historically, we would have to go to all 54 elementary schools to install new testing software each year. Now we just have an automatic update job that runs overnight and at weekends, so we've already touched 4,000 computers without making a single on-site visit. In the past, one person could handle perhaps 120 machines a day, so we have probably already saved at least 30 person-days just for this one requirement."

With more than 700 software packages under management, and new ones being added all the time, the ability of the Ivanti solution to push out software, updates, and patches to computers from a central point of control will save huge amounts of time, effort, and travel. The Ivanti solution also offers more granular power management than the previous solution, and CFISD plans to implement policies that will wake machines overnight for background patch updates. And with automatic monitoring and management of software licenses, the Ivanti solution will save further time and effort for the central team while ensuring compliance.

End-users are also feeling the benefits of the new solution, as Derly Buentello, Food Service HW/SW Technical Analyst, explains: "The user authentication in the previous solution was dysfunctional, and people sometimes had to wait 10 minutes to log into a machine. With Ivanti, it's 10 to 20 times faster." Nancy Grella, Assistant HW/SW Technical Analyst, adds: "Previously, the remote control was also very hit-and-miss, so we often had to drive over to fix a user's problem, potentially leaving them waiting for 30 minutes. Today, with the Ivanti solution, we can typically get them back up and running within a couple of minutes, improving everyone's productivity and boosting user satisfaction."

Value-add Solution

Looking to the future, the PC support team at CFISD will continue to build out policies, processes, and reports in its Ivanti suite, further increasing the automation and efficiency of managing its endpoints.

"The time we are already saving with the Ivanti solution is time that we can reinvest in improving our whole approach to endpoint management, ultimately improving the future prospects for our students," says Larry Barrios. "We are no longer occupied with repetitive, low-value tasks, so we can focus on setting up the solution for seamless self-service, which will deliver greater value to the district. Most important, the solution keeps our end users happy, productive, and equipped with secure, reliable, fully licensed software. We are very happy with the solution and look forward to developing our relationship with Ivanti."



www.ivanti.com



1.800.982.2130



sales@ivanti.com