

California school district gets top marks for endpoint security

Eliminates network intrusions while increasing performance of user devices



Serving the town of Pico Rivera, California, the El Rancho Unified School District educates 8,700 K-12 students in 17 buildings across the region. A centralized IT staff of eight support all classrooms and administrative computing.

THE CHALLENGE

When school's out for summer, the entire IT landscape at El Rancho Unified School District changes. Teachers unplug and lock away their classroom computers. Cleaning personnel rearrange anything in their way. And the IT staff has a few precious months to find, upgrade and repair everything before the flood of students return.

Four years ago, against that looming deadline, the district's IT team faced an urgent problem. Its out-of-date anti-virus solution was hindering classroom learning and student safety, as well as office productivity. Startup delays blocked computer access for 15-20 minutes at a time. Badly configured security scans would kick in during crucial tasks, slowing work to a crawl.

In frustration, some users and IT staff had already taken matters into their own hands, explains Ken Reece, Computer System Specialist, El Rancho Unified School District. "Since our old virus utility didn't appear to do the job well enough, users installed freeware hoping to combat the issues they were having. Unfortunately, this caused more bloat than anything else."

THE SOLUTION

A centrally managed solution would be the only way to control thousands of heterogeneous Windows laptops and desktops, as well as tablets. After evaluating several endpoint security products, the IT team shortlisted Bitdefender GravityZone Enterprise Security and a solution from Kaspersky.

Given the rapid summer deployment schedule, GravityZone's simplicity and quick learning curve won the evaluation. In just a couple of months, the IT team removed the existing Symantec and Microsoft Defender anti-virus solutions, dismantling the existing token-ring architecture. Then, IT physically reconnected more than 4,500 computers and devices across the district into a single domain. Finally, IT deployed and configured GravityZone from the solution's central console.

THE RESULTS

Users saw immediate improvements. Computer startup time dropped from 15-20 minutes to five minutes or less. Thanks to GravityZone's lightweight design, performance increased by an estimated 300 percent. As security software headaches disappeared, user satisfaction soared.

GravityZone's management dashboard maximized IT efficiency. Updates are initiated centrally, eliminating travel to multiple school locations. What used to be a 30-60-minute trouble ticket, depending on local traffic, can now be completed in under five minutes.

Industry

Education: K-12

Headquarters

Pico Rivera, California, U.S.A.

Employees

1,100 (IT staff, 9)

Results

- Increased overall performance by 300 percent
- Eliminated virus, malware and intrusion incidents
- Cut trouble calls from 5-10 per day to zero
- Lowered typical trouble ticket resolution from 30-60 minutes to five minutes.

The dashboard also helps troubleshoot specific computer issues. From force of habit, some users were still disabling their security software. The IT team can instantly see the status of GravityZone on any computer or whether updates have been blocked—and correct the problem remotely. Over time, this is happening less.

More importantly, GravityZone functions largely invisibly. The average volume of trouble calls, which had been five to 10 daily, has dropped to essentially zero. The system is so trouble-free that the IT team can't recall contacting Bitdefender with any problems.

"That's probably the hugest aspect. GravityZone just works by itself," says Rolland Kornblau, Director of IT, El Rancho Unified School District. "So we're free to divert our efforts to planning and helping the schools become more efficient."

"We no longer need to travel to different schools to install the latest updates. We shoot out updates automatically across the district from the GravityZone central console."

In the four years since deployment, El Rancho Unified School District has experienced no virus outbreaks, no phishing breaches and no intrusions. Although nearby districts continue to report these issues, Kornblau credits Bitdefender GravityZone with protecting his district's students and employees. "We really don't know it's there because it's doing its job in the background. We'd have to actually research the logs to identify the issues GravityZone resolved without our knowledge."

Looking ahead, El Rancho Unified School District plans to use GravityZone Enterprise Security to provide endpoint security to 30-40 virtualized servers. "We're planning to stay with Bitdefender for the long haul," Kornblau says.

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Rolland Kornblau, Director of IT, El Rancho Unified School District

Bitdefender Footprint

- GravityZone Enterprise Security
- GravityZone On-Premises Management Console

IT Environment

- Microsoft data center
- Microsoft and iOS clients