

Low-cost computing for education

Stimulus funds create a sustainable future in Louisiana

Challenge

Effectively use government stimulus funds to expand computing access in schools without incurring increased maintenance or upgrade costs in the future.

Solution

Deploy 5000 NComputing X-series computing seats.

Impact

Provided computer access to nearly 16,000 students in 1,200 classrooms with a sustainable, low-cost, low-maintenance solution.

Partner

NComputing partner Howard Computers supported this deployment.

The paradox of the federal stimulus program is that a one-time infusion of cash can create an obligation that can't be sustained. Buy PCs today and what happens in four years when they are obsolete? That is the question the Tangipahoa Parish school district in southeastern Louisiana faced as they were poised to receive a temporary but hefty increase in school funding through the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. The government issued these stimulus funds with clear warnings that they should not be used for projects that require long-term or expensive maintenance as funding would only be available in 2009 and 2010. That's why Tangipahoa chose NComputing.



Tangipahoa students enjoy access in the classroom with NComputing.

Facing obsolescence

For IT administrators, large-scale technology purchases often mean facing impending obsolescence— which can cripple a limited technology budget and inhibit plans for growth. Tangipahoa was no exception. Mike Diaz, the assistant director of technology at Tangipahoa Parish, knew that the average PC loses about a quarter of its value every year. And he was well aware that an increase in the parish's PC-to-student ratio would likely require another large purchase in three or four years— a fate that was clearly discouraged in the stimulus fund requirements for spending.

“With NComputing we can now provide three times as many computing seats for the same money and can expect a fraction of the upgrade costs.”

MIKE DIAZ
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR, TECHNOLOGY
TANGIPAHOA PARISH

Increasing seats and avoiding future costs

Mr. Diaz heard about NComputing through local reseller Howard Computers. He liked the idea of increasing seats with fewer PCs to maintain and deploying a solution that wouldn’t overburden the facilities’ infrastructure. Fewer PCs also meant fewer to upgrade in three to four years.

The NComputing solution is based on the fact that today’s PCs are so powerful that the vast majority of applications only use a small fraction of the computer’s capacity. NComputing’s virtualization software and hardware tap this unused capacity so that multiple users can simultaneously share it. This allows students to work independently and administrators to easily manage and maintain the hardware.

And NComputing devices typically last ten years or more. So when it comes time to buy new PCs, you only have to buy one for every ten (or twenty, or thirty) users. And when you do eventually upgrade your NComputing equipment, it is at a much lower cost than what you’d have to spend on PCs. All told, the savings in reduced obsolescence from an NComputing solution is approximately 90%.

Technology that plans for the future

Tangipahoa used their economic stimulus funds to purchase 950 NComputing X-series kits, providing computing seats to nearly 5,000 students. “Buying PCs was too expensive and we’d be faced with upgrading all those PCs in a few years,” said Mr. Diaz. “With NComputing we can now provide three times as many computing seats for the same money and can expect a fraction of the upgrade costs.”

The NComputing solution fit well into the government’s requirements for the funds which include increasing capacity for student improvement and avoiding the “funding cliff” after stimulus funds are no longer available.

The NComputing X-series allowed Tangipahoa to increase access without setting themselves up for bigger expenses down the road— upgrade costs or otherwise. “We’ve put six computing seats in every single classroom in the district with no strain on the electrical systems. We also expect our support calls to go down by 90 percent so our staff can focus on new initiatives instead of driving around putting out fires.”

