Blue Springs School District Makes an Educated Decision to Move to Nutanix

Blue Springs School District
Education with Distinction

Missouri School District Consolidates 22 Datacenters Down to One, Reduces Annual Power Consumption by $100K, and Realizes Rapid ROI with Nutanix Converged Infrastructure

The Blue Springs School District

The Blue Springs School District consists of 22 elementary, middle, and high schools located on the eastern edge of Kansas City, Missouri. The district currently employs nearly 1,000 teachers and 2,000 staff, with an enrollment of over 14,500 students.

IT Challenges

"Our district has a rich tradition of academic excellence," noted Tim Jones, IT Director for the Blue Springs School District. "One of the ways we achieve this is through continued investments in new technologies. Our biggest challenge in achieving this goal was related to our distributed IT environment. We were running separate data centers at each of our school locations. Our team was managing a mix of Dell servers, with two domain controllers and data storage for staff and students in each building. "

Jones and his team were spending a lot of time administering all of the distributed systems. "We had 144 different servers," noted Jones. "Maintaining and updating all of the servers and making sure they were running optimally consumed a lot of man-hours. And when we calculated the cost of replacing all of those servers as they reached end-of-life, and added up the amount of energy that those servers were consuming, we realized that running a data center in each building was not an efficient model."

The Blue Springs School did not have a centralized IT team before Nutanix. "All of our building techs were taking care of their own infrastructure," Jones reported. "As a result, not only was our equipment spread out across multiple locations, a lot of our policies and procedures were inconsistent as well. I knew if I could get things centralized to our main office, we would have a much better chance of managing everything efficiently. Our goal was to come up with a solution that would enable us to consolidate all of those severs in one centralized data center to ease IT management and cut costs, while at the same time improving performance for all of our end users."

Choosing Nutanix

The Blue Springs School District issued an RFP for a new campus server and storage solution. They received bids from Yellow Dog Networks, Inc., and two other systems integrators. Yellow Dog Networks is a large enterprise solutions provider headquartered in Kansas City, Missouri. They recently implemented a campus-wide wireless solution for the district, and it has been working very well.

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— Tim Jones, IT Director, Blue Springs School District

Industry

Education, K12

Business Needs

Wanted to consolidate distributed computing environment to simplify management, reduce capital expenditures, and cut power costs.

Solution

The Nutanix Virtual Computing Platform

Benefits

- Consolidated 22 datacenters to half a rack in one centralized facility
- Obtained hyper-converged storage at a low price
- Reduced electrical expenditures by $100,000 per year
- Simplified storage management
- Anticipated ROI in less than four years

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Since Yellow Dog Networks recently partnered with Nutanix, they recommended the Nutanix Virtual Computing Platform for the new centralized datacenter. "We have been very impressed with the Nutanix hyper-converged solution, it's easy to implement easy to migrate," stated Tim Taylor, Vice President of Sales at Yellow Dog Networks.

"We chose Nutanix for several reasons," Jones reported. "One, it was the least expensive solution by far. We are a public school district so we are always looking for ways to keep our expenses down. But the most important criteria for us was ease of management. With Nutanix, we wouldn't have to build out a separate storage area network for each of our sites, or require our IT staff to attend specialized training to learn about the storage platform." Jones and his team then worked with Yellow Dog Networks to install the Nutanix appliances. The entire deployment took less than a week.

Nutanix Benefits

"We are thrilled with the Nutanix appliances," Jones said. "The only small downside with our new datacenter – one that I can really live with – was the lack of the "wow" factor. When people come by to tour our new converged datacenter, they are actually a bit disappointed. They tell us that they were expecting to see a big facility with lots of flashy servers. But there's just four little Nutanix nodes sitting there in a rack that are doing everything we need for our entire campus. I just smile and say, 'Sorry, there's not much to show you, but good things truly do come in small packages!''

In addition to the smaller footprint, Jones has been very impressed with the manageability of the Nutanix environment. "We spend almost no time at all managing the Nutanix appliances. Once deployed, they just run by themselves. We also love all of the redundancy built into the Nutanix nodes, and the replication capabilities are amazing. Bringing up a new virtual machine takes just a few clicks and we can immediately see exactly what is going on with every virtual server we have running from one central console."

The Nutanix investment has resulted in a fast ROI for The Blue Springs School District. "The power savings alone with the Nutanix appliances have been phenomenal," Jones reported. "We estimate that we will save about $100,000 every year on our electric bill, just by shutting down all of the other servers. Based on our projections from the energy savings alone, we should be able to pay for the four Nutanix nodes in less than four years. And that doesn't even factor in all of the manpower savings or the costs of replacing all of our 144 aging servers. Our management is more than thrilled with the fast ROI of the Nutanix solution."

Moving More Workloads to Nutanix

Jones and his team plan to move the district's MS Exchange servers and the Power School student portal solution over to Nutanix very soon. "We would've had to spend a lot of money to upgrade our MS Exchange and student access solution. The Power School application alone would have required us to purchase six or seven new Dell 710s servers, adding an entire new rack to the datacenter. It is a much more cost-effective project with Nutanix. We can just add those two applications on to one of our existing Nutanix nodes without purchasing any new hardware.

Jones is now planning to purchase a fifth Nutanix node soon to continue to build out capacity for the 22 schools in the Blue Springs School District. "Easy scalability was one of the things that we wanted in our new data center solution" Jones said. "Based upon our experience installing the first four nodes, we know the process will be quite simple and we are actually looking forward to doing it. I have never said that about any infrastructure upgrade before!"

Nutanix Catalyst Program Training and Support

Jones and his team received initial training on the new systems through the Nutanix Catalyst Program. The program packages Nutanix courses with specific consulting services, delivered as on-premise workshops for customers and partners. The Catalyst workshops were designed to provide rapid enablement for partners, with in-depth courseware and hands-on experience. "We were

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very impressed with the Catalyst Program from Nutanix Global Services," Jones reported. "We really liked the ability to consume the content over three days, including hands-on implementation exercises of our Nutanix block. The information and advice we obtained from Nutanix Consulting enabled our team to implement the project very quickly and efficiently."

Although they haven't had any problems yet with the appliances, the Nutanix support team did help Jones and his team with one issue. "When our network consultants were building the virtual servers, they accidentally took down one of our Nutanix nodes. We called the Nutanix Support line, and they were able to quickly get things fixed. All of our interactions with the Nutanix training and support teams have been amazingly good."

Concluding Thoughts

"Nutanix is an excellent solution for K-12 districts and other educational institutions," Jones concluded. "It was a perfect fit for our lean-budget environment. When we looked at its low cost and management simplicity, choosing Nutanix was an easy decision to make. Not having to build a separate SAN and have four admins dedicated to running it is a huge benefit. After hearing about Nutanix, we said, 'If it does even a portion of what they say it will, it will be incredible.' Now when people ask me about our Nutanix appliances and our data center, I can tell them it works even better than promised."

About Nutanix

Nutanix delivers web-scale converged infrastructure to medium and large enterprises with its software-driven Virtual Computing Platform, natively converging compute and storage into a single solution to drive unprecedented simplicity in the datacenter. Customers can start with a few servers and scale to thousands, with predictable performance and economics. With a proprietary elastic data fabric and consumer-grade management, Nutanix is the blueprint for application-optimized and policy-driven infrastructure.