Pennsylvania Public School Relies on Nutanix to Power Education, Administration

Nutanix Xi Leap Disaster Recovery Keeps Critical Data Safe

CHALLENGE

The motto of the Avon Grove School District is "We champion innovation. We celebrate community. We demonstrate sportsmanship. We define school spirit." Technology is instrumental in helping the District achieve each of these objectives. Its IT organization is committed to driving innovation with the latest technology, including a virtualized infrastructure—without losing sight of the big picture: empowering teachers to support student learning.

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COMPANY
Avon Grove School District serves more than 5,200 students at four schools in the Philadelphia region.

INDUSTRY
Education

BUSINESS NEED
Ensure availability of critical applications and protection of 10TB of vital data for entire school district in case of disaster, with a disaster recovery (DR) Solution that is easy to setup and manage

SOLUTION
- Nutanix Enterprise Cloud OS
- Xi Leap Disaster Recovery Service

BENEFITS
- One-click DR enables the District to maximize availability of critical district data and applications.
- Single hyperconverged solution enhances manageability and performance.
- Scalable, flexible solution can grow and evolve to support future learning initiatives.

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Avon Grove believes in a smart application of technology to support its teachers and administrators. Its IT staff is committed to controlling costs and maximizing efficiency.

"As a public school district we are funded primarily by local community real estate tax dollars," says Gary Mattei, Director Technology for Avon Grove School District. "It is incumbent upon us to make sure we are being fiscally responsible."

To keep pace with industry trends and ease administrative tasks, the District is committed to migrating its operations to the cloud, and business-critical systems like DR are no exception.

"We are trying to push things out to the cloud as much as possible to streamline systems management and facilitate the movement of data," says Mattei.

Unfortunately, the District's previous cloud-based DR solution was expensive, hard to configure, and required frequent fixes, taking up valuable time and hampering productivity for its 13 IT staffers.

"From a technical standpoint, the DR system was very clunky and difficult to manage," says Mattei. "It constantly needed attention for any changes that we had. Sometimes we would adjust a configuration on the fly and did not realize that the system had broken on the back end. It was also overly complex, and if something went wrong, it was difficult to reach the vendor."

The Avon Grove IT team was looking for a better way to consolidate its administrative and disaster recovery systems onto a single hyperconverged platform environment. The solution would need to deliver not only performance and flexibility, but ease of use.

SOLUTION

When a key network administrator at Avon Grove was invited to learn more about Nutanix at a boot camp for local districts, he saw tremendous potential in Nutanix Enterprise Cloud. Built on the industry's leading hyperconverged infrastructure (HCI) technology, it integrates compute, storage, virtualization and networking in a single full-stack solution.

"I went to the boot camp and I was instantly sold by the way it was set up using the one-click interface," says Mike Tustin, Network Administrator at Chester County Intermediate Unit supporting Avon Grove. "Everything was intuitive and easy, and I was impressed by all the storage space we would save physically, and the energy savings. The benefits were obvious—we could replace racks full of devices with one little chassis."

A top requirement for the solution was that it include a native DR platform for the District's critical applications and 10TB of vital data. Xi Leap, provides an integrated, turnkey service. Xi Leap enables Avon Grove to quickly, intelligently protect the applications and data in its Nutanix environment, without having to purchase and maintain a separate infrastructure stack.

"We have had experiences with third-party vendors, and it was not a positive one," says Mattei. "When we heard Xi Leap would be available, it helped seal the deal to Nutanix. We like its single pane of glass, and with that the ability to upload our data directly to the DR solution."

The Nutanix solution lets Avon Grove support its most critical applications on one hyperconverged platform, to simplify administration.

"We use it largely for PowerSchool, our Student Information System and file services," says Mattei. "We run five instances simultaneously on the Nutanix system, including our production, test environment, and scheduling environment. And we keep snapshots of previous years. We're very pleased with our performance so far."

"Our authentication servers are all virtual now," says Tustin. "You can consolidate everything you need into one box, and that is what we are doing."

Avon Grove also replaced its previous hypervisor with Nutanix AHV, which further simplifies its administration, and lets the District avoid the escalating licensing fees of its previous solution.

"Our previous system was too expensive to keep every year," says Tustin. "We could save a lot more going to the native hypervisor. It also helps us reduce complexity. Technically, I don't like things being overly complicated. The less help I require to work with a solution, the better."

BENEFITS

With Xi Leap in place, Avon Grove no longer has to grapple with complex fixes or support calls to third parties to keep its DR system running. Its IT team enjoys simpler operation and peace of mind.

"Nutanix did a great job in extending one-click disaster recovery to the cloud," says Mattei. "It's now much easier than our previous experience that was extremely time consuming and complicated. When you consider the time we were spending on it, it really wasn't the best return on our investment."

Nutanix Technical Support provided guidance every step of the way, enabling the District to rapidly unlock the benefits of its new solution.

"I was highly impressed with the team that helped set up DR platform," says Tustin. "I felt that I was in good hands the whole time. If I saw something that I didn't understand, they were on my computer figuring out what my local problem was, and helping solve it."

Mattei and his team experienced not only smoother management, but improved performance, with the Nutanix solution.

"I was surprised at the speed with which we could do things," says Mattei. "Under our old system, protecting Virtual Machines (VMs) might take the better part of a day for setup and configuration. With Nutanix, the process was done in ten minutes."

End users accessing the District's applications are reporting better performance as well.
"A lot of my VMs are performing better, and I've started hearing praise about how fast it is to reboot or do other functions," says Mattei.

NEXT STEPS

Mattei and his team view the District infrastructure as much more than simply an information service, but as a foundation for extending instruction beyond traditional limitations.

"At the K12 level, we will continue move toward more of an asynchronous learning environment that can support students whether they are at school or at home," says Mattei. "We need an infrastructure that supports that, not only in terms of educational applications devices, but our Student Information System."

With its new Nutanix hyperconverged infrastructure in place, backed by dependable, intuitive DR from Xi Leap, the Avon Grove IT team is confident in its ability to deliver the applications its teachers and administrators need to be productive and focus on students.

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