



DISTRICT PROFILE

Maynard Public Schools, MA
www.maynard.k12.ma.us

1,439 students

125 teachers

3 languages spoken

24% free/reduced lunch students

40% E-rate district

Show Me the Money

Thanks to E-rate, a Massachusetts district goes from spotty wireless coverage and outdated desktops to a robust, technology-rich campus.

OVERVIEW

Before the teachers at Maynard Public Schools could infuse their classes with today's digital offerings, the district had to address its aging network infrastructure.

CHALLENGE

Six years ago, Maynard Public Schools' wireless infrastructure was woefully out of date. The network switches were a mishmash of corporate castoffs and end-of-life devices. "Wireless management was a nightmare," says Peter Martin, director of technology. "Access points went down regularly, and they weren't centrally controlled." In 2014, the district opened a new high school with state-of-the-art technology. This successful project made everyone realize the elementary and middle school needed to be updated too. The Town of Maynard offered to match any funding the district secured, but a state grant they were counting on didn't come through.

SOLUTION

In early 2015, Martin and Charles Gobron, the district's special project coordinator, attended a session at a technology conference on E-rate 2.0 that was co-presented by the Department of Elementary & Secondary Education (ESE) and TECedge. They were hesitant to apply for E-rate because of the complex and time-consuming process, so they hired TECedge, an edtech consultancy that specializes in technology planning, network improvement, 1:1 implementation, and E-rate consulting. "As a result of the E-rate funds TECedge helped us secure, we now have a robust technology infrastructure in every building in our district," says Superintendent Robert J. Gerardi, Jr. "What's more, TECedge is helping us continue to access the funding we're promised from E-rate. Thanks to all of this funding, we can keep making improvements."

RESULTS

Today, the district has a technology committee and an updated technology plan. Eighth and ninth grades are 1:1 with Chromebooks and iPads; grades 10 through 12 will be 1:1 by 2019. The elementary and middle schools have Chromebook and iPad carts, and there are discussions about doing 1:1 programs at those schools once the high school is complete. Teachers say that their classrooms are benefitting immensely from the upgraded wireless and that learning is greatly enhanced. One of the best things about working with a consultant to obtain E-rate funds is that it takes the stress out of a complicated process and ensures that all of the details are handled properly. "The technology our kindergarten students use today is not what they'll be using when they are high school seniors, but—rather than a one-time grant—we can receive annual funding," says Gobron. "TECedge knew exactly what we needed and they far exceeded our expectations."

From Obsolete to Up to Date

When Peter Martin, director of technology for Maynard (MA) Public Schools, came to the district in 2010, the infrastructure was woefully out of date: network switches were nearly a decade old, access points barely worked, and coverage was barely adequate. “Wireless coverage existed, but it wasn’t reliable or strong,” says Martin. Desktop computers were around, but they hadn’t been refreshed and there were no plans to do so. Servers—mostly donated—ran various versions of Linux and Windows.

Martin’s first step was to bring in VMWare. He and Jack Colombo, the network administrator, gathered equipment from closets all over the district and centralized it at the middle school while they virtualized it.

In With the New

When the new high school opened in 2014 with top-of-the-line technology, it became even more apparent that the elementary and middle schools needed infrastructure upgrades as well as new devices. Martin and special project coordinator Charles Gobron created a proposal to ask the town for the funding to make the necessary updates.

“The town approved funding for \$120,000, as long as we could get the rest we needed from another source,” says Gobron. “Unfortunately, we lost out on an ESE grant for \$80,000.”

Around that time, Martin and Gobron attended MassCUE, New England’s premier edtech conference, and went to a session that was co-presented by ESE and TECedge, ESE’s E-rate expert. They learned about E-rate 2.0, the federal program that helps school districts obtain affordable broadband and infrastructure upgrades. Because of E-rate’s reputation as being difficult to apply for, the district was hesitant to get involved.

“I knew it would take me many months and lots of aggravation to handle the application, and I didn’t have the time or the bandwidth,” says Martin.

The Right Choice

From preparing the bid specifications to soliciting the proper number of vendors to reviewing their quotes and filling out all of the forms, TECedge managed the whole process, says Martin. “Another great thing was that TECedge has a lot of technical expertise. Stephen Kelley came here and we walked the schools together and talked about what we wanted to do. He even had suggestions. If you have a technical background, but particularly for schools that don’t, it makes sense to work with people like Stephen.”

Today, every building has plenty of devices for teachers and students to share. Eighth and ninth grades are 1:1 with Chromebooks and iPads, and the 10th grade will get them next year. By 2019, grades 8 through 12 will be 1:1. Because the Chromebook feedback has been so positive, Martin is buying Chromebook carts for the other schools.

Teachers are taking advantage of the upgraded wireless, too. “Having technology is a huge extension to what we do,” says Nance Messina, a third-grade teacher. “In writing workshop, we use our Chromebooks to publish our poetry, personal narratives, and essays. In science we created a video using facts about a country in the southern hemisphere. We made pamphlets about the biomes where those animals live and are looking up weather in the southern hemisphere and comparing and contrasting it with the weather in Maynard. The possibilities are endless for projects.”

Robert J. Gerardi, Jr., Maynard’s superintendent, agrees that working with

TECedge was a smart decision. “Our initial conversations with TECedge showed they’d be hugely beneficial to our district and they were. They helped us bring in a significant

“It is great to have the infrastructure in place so that we have the freedom to do whatever else we want in our district.”

—Peter Martin, Director of Technology

amount of funding, but they didn’t stop there. TECedge is continuing to help us access funding through E-rate. It is nice to access federal money as another revenue source and not have to burden the town as much.”

A Bright Future

Now that the groundwork has been laid, Maynard Public Schools will continue upgrading devices and helping teachers learn how to infuse technology into their lessons. Already, the elementary school has begun offering authentic STEM experiences with curriculum from Project Lead the Way. Teachers have told Martin they want Chromebook carts, and he’s excited to get started.

No matter what else, the district will do its best to keep up with technology so that it doesn’t fall behind again. As Gobron says, “The technology our kindergarten students use today is not what they’ll be using when they are high school seniors, but—rather than a one-time grant—we can receive annual funding,” says Gobron. “TECedge knew exactly what we needed and they far exceeded our expectations.”