

Drury High School

"It's uniquely suited to the education environment. Everything else is too expensive for a cash-strapped public school system to deploy, let alone to administer."

Shaun Meredith, Drury's wireless consultant

Challenge

Public high school in rural Massachusetts needed reliable wireless to connect students with state-provided laptops to school network

Public school board is limited by an extremely tight budget

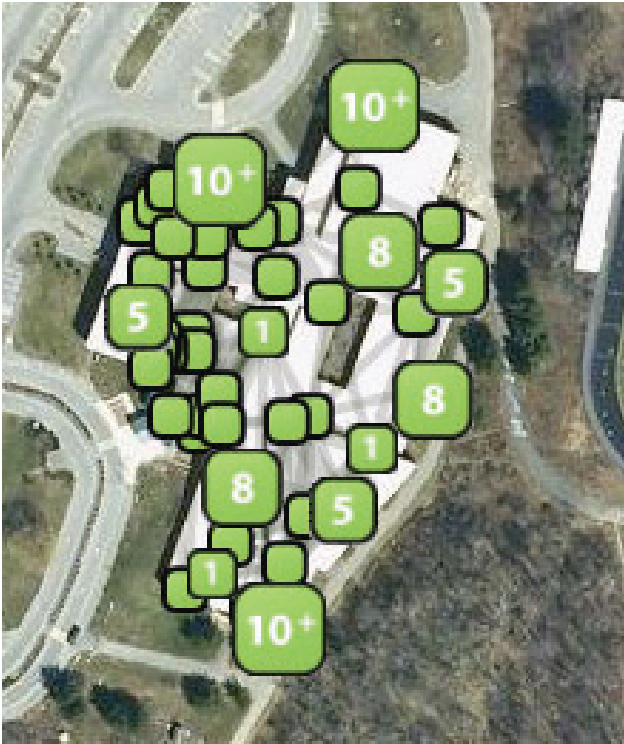
Terrain makes deployment tricky

Results

Entire network deployed in 2 days at 1/10th the cost of competing solutions

More than 100 users per day

District officials so pleased with results, have deployed the solution in 6 more schools, with 6 more in planning stages



Drury High School is a small public school nestled in the Berkshire mountains of northwestern Massachusetts. As part of an aggressive campaign to deliver technology to underserved schools, the local government adopted a “1 to 1” policy, providing laptops to every public school student. But once the computers were deployed, the district had a conundrum: how to connect all those students to the Internet?

The school turned to a local VAR, Infobridge, for help. Infobridge, based in Maine, specializes in technology solutions for K-12 public education throughout New England.

Before Meraki, the district had deployed Apple Airport basestations in middle schools, a solution that proved frustrating and unworkable for them. “There was no Dashboard to monitor the network and devices, or to get notifications when one of them failed. Unlike Meraki, you couldn’t track bandwidth usage, or do whitelisting or blacklisting without doing it on every single access point,” says Infobridge founder Shaun Meredith. “They couldn’t push software updates like Meraki does either; we had to deploy 20 engineers to update each unit on-site. They had tremendous problems with it.”

Drury’s administrators knew that they needed a better wireless solution, but there were challenges, including the rugged landscape (“They are in the mountains and there is a LOT of granite,” says Meredith) and a general unwillingness by telecoms to lay expensive copper and cable in such a rural area. The school called Cisco Systems, which sent out a sales rep to survey the campus and provide an estimate. After collecting a hefty fee just for the visit, the rep gave a quote of \$75,000 for just one of the school’s two buildings. That was more than \$250 per student, far above the spending cap the school had to work under. Dejected, the school turned to Meredith and Infobridge.

Meredith introduced the school to Meraki, and pitched a deployment – which included hardware, hosted services and all labor costs – for \$17,000. “The estimate was far less than anything else they could do, well within their budget,” Meredith says. Intrigued at the price-tag, administrators put their faith in Meraki.

Tapping into an existing backhaul including a lone T1, two microwave relay towers, and a few cable modems, Meredith and 2 engineers had the network up in 2 days. Meredith’s contract included 90 days of network support, after which he handed the reigns over to the school’s IT chief. More than 100 users are on the network each day, including students and faculty.

“They have been super happy,” says Meredith. “They just wanted everything to work.” In fact, the school’s technology officer liked the solution so much, he installed a Meraki network at his parents’ bed and breakfast. And now Drury High School is planning to expand its Meraki network to outdoor areas, including the athletic fields, so that coaches can communicate in realtime from the sidelines.

