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Microsoft Enrollment for Education Solutions Helps Schools Maximize IT Investments

Subscription-based software licensing delivers cost and time savings.

Karen D. Schwartz

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North Carolina's Cary Academy prides itself on being a progressive, innovative school that prepares its sixth-

through 12th-grade students for college and beyond in every way possible. In addition to offering small classes and creative learning experiences, the school incorporates technology into every aspect of students' lives.

In keeping with that mission, school officials decided during the 2006–2007 school year to provide nearly 700 students and the bulk of their 130-plus faculty and staff members with convertible tablet PCs. That way, students could more easily conduct research, write essays and create multimedia presentations, and teachers could more readily create lesson plans, grade assignments and better communicate with parents and students.

But the complexity of keeping tabs on nearly 1,000 tablets and their corresponding software licenses immediately became apparent. "All of a sudden, we had more than 700 student tablets with the Windows operating system and *Microsoft Office*, and even more software on the faculty and staff tablets," says Information Services Purchasing Manager Kris Wetterling. "We knew it was going to be expensive and time-consuming to keep track of everything."

To overcome those challenges, school officials decided to move away from the traditional perpetual-licensing model they had used for years for their desktop computers and toward a more flexible, cost-effective *software--licensing model*. Wetterling enrolled Cary Academy in the Microsoft School Agreement subscription-based software-licensing program, which saved the school about 25 percent over the perpetual-licensing model and allowed IT staff to better manage the various versions of software it was utilizing.

Then, about a year ago, Wetterling switched to *Microsoft Enrollment for Education Solutions (EES)*, a *volume-licensing program* that makes licensing even more cost-effective and easier to manage. According to Wetterling, Cary Academy has saved an additional 50 percent — about \$20,000 — since converting to EES because of Microsoft's reduction in the pricing of student licenses and because the plan uses a special formula to determine how many licenses the school must purchase for its teachers. The formula assigns percentages of software use to faculty and staff based on whether they work full time or part time, resulting in a number lower than the entire staff count. (The previous subscription plan, by comparison, was priced per computer.)

In addition to the school's tablet program, Wetterling says, there are desktop computers around campus that have additional types of software installed on them, including in the multimedia lab, which is used by different teachers throughout the day. Transitioning to EES has saved money by reducing the number of faculty and staff licenses required for the software from a one-to-one, computer-to-license ratio to a one license per full-time employee fee structure, resulting in 61 fewer licenses.

Reducing Complexity

Hacienda La Puente Unified School District leaders also have reduced licensing complexity and saved money through EES. The district manages the software on about 8,000 computers at 33 school sites in City of Industry, Hacienda Heights, La Puente and portions of Valinda and West Covina, Calif.

"Before EES, we had to create a license-purchase transaction for every PC that came into the district, which took a bite out of an already tiny budget," says Thomas Tan, HLPUSD's director of network and computer services. "There also was extra administrative work and recordkeeping that translated into time, money and effort expended."

In addition to helping maintain version control, EES allows the district to standardize on Microsoft Office and other services such as Active Directory on the network; Microsoft Exchange for e-mail; and Microsoft SQL Server and Microsoft .NET for back-end servers, programming and database systems. Without a license, Tan explains it's easy to end up with computers that have different versions of Microsoft Office and Microsoft Windows, - making maintenance, support and upgrading especially costly and complicated.

Like Cary Academy, HLPUSD has benefitted most from the ability to maximize its IT investment. "All we need is a single district software license and we're done," Tan says. "We don't have to keep track of time-consuming paperwork and small budget transfers. We sleep better knowing that we're all legal on the desktop and server software side of the house."

Before subscribing to EES, the district paid more than \$380,000 annually for Microsoft licensing. Now, HLPUSD spends roughly \$100,000. In addition, the EES agreement includes *Microsoft Forefront*, an end-to-end security solution that eliminated HLPUSD's need to spend \$40,000 each year on an antivirus package that was providing duplicate services.

Dollars and Sense

The ways in which these institutions are using and benefitting from EES are typical, says Cameron Evans, chief technology officer for Microsoft's U.S. Education division.

"EES gives schools an opportunity to retire outdated software contracts that no longer reflect the mobility and academic needs of students and educators," Evans explains. "It removes the conventional barriers of affordability and access so schools can enable a modern learning environment that helps educators and students be future-ready."

Perpetual Versus Subscription: What's the Difference?

The march of technological progress is prompting many school districts to switch from the traditional method of accessing software to a more flexible subscription model.

In the traditional model, known as perpetual licensing, school districts purchase the number of software licenses they need. For an additional fee, they can purchase software assurance — basically, the right to upgrade to newer versions of software as they become available — and many do.

But as districts begin to incorporate technology more intrinsically into every aspect of school life — from the classroom to the teacher's lounge to students' homes — software has become much more difficult to manage, and the cost equation has become far more complicated.

"Once technology has attained a certain status in schools, it becomes even more important to ensure that everyone has the most recent version of software applications so users can take advantage of the latest features and collaborate more effectively," says Tim Hegedus, a senior analyst with Miro Consulting, a software-licensing consultancy in Woodbridge, N.J.

Many districts are switching to a subscription-based software-licensing model to create parity with how they acquire hardware. Some, for example, lease servers, as well as desktop and notebook computers, so they can upgrade when more powerful models are released and retain software flexibility.

Cost management advantages also drive many schools to consider the subscription model. Both school budgets and student enrollments fluctuate each year, and financial officers want to spend only what their institutions can afford — which means paying only for the users they have at any given time. Subscription licensing provides this capability.

District leaders considering a subscription-based software-licensing model must determine how they'll balance technology investments against other priorities (such as building new schools or investing in new playground equipment). There are a lot of variables that must be weighed, Hegedus says.

"You could capitalize the purchase of perpetual licenses, or you could opt to incur an ongoing operational cost over a period of time," he explains. "It depends on which one makes the most sense for the organization."

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