THE SCHOOL DISTRICT PALM BEACH COUNTY

PALM BEACH SCHOOLS | PROBLEM SOLVED

The School District of Palm Beach County needed to reliably and securely provide students, teachers, and parents fast access to student records. NetApp® AFF was the answer.

Palm Beach Schools Get an A+ in Managing Student Data

Public schools face immense budget pressure, so their IT departments must spend wisely. Every dollar spent on IT is a dollar not spent on textbooks and direct education benefits for K-12 students. When the School District of Palm Beach County, Florida, needed a data management solution to provide secure access to student data, improve teacher and administrator productivity, and create efficiencies in its data center, the district chose NetApp.

4.5PB
of student data

Batch processing reduced from
6 to 3
hours

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> "Student data is the essence of the school district. We needed to modernize our legacy storage to a single unified system that provides block, file, NAS, just about any protocol that an IT team needs to provide storage to their servers."

Joe Zoda
Senior System Engineer, School District of Palm Beach County, Florida

Every day, the tenth largest school district in the United States serves more than a quarter of a million students in 200 schools. The district generates huge amounts of critical data, including homework assignments, grades, projects, paperwork, and attendance records. Teachers, administrators, students, parents, and even alumni use the Student Information System —and they all expect immediate access to the information. Archived data, some dating back 30 years, must also be readily accessible at all times.

"Student data is the essence of the school district," says Joe Zoda, senior system engineer, School District of Palm Beach County. Zoda is charged with helping develop and implement the NetApp AFF system. "We needed to modernize our legacy storage to a single unified system that provides block, file, NAS, just about any protocol that an IT team needs to provide storage to their servers."

Data security, high throughput, low latency, cloud affinity, and data storage across any protocol were other essential requirements that AFF delivered. Although the district doesn't currently use cloud, Zoda wanted to future proof in case the chief information officer decides to go in that direction in the future.

CONSOLIDATING FROM FOUR VENDORS TO ONE

By choosing to modernize its infrastructure with a new NetApp AFF cluster, the district consolidated data from four different legacy vendors into one cluster, providing faster services and solutions, while reducing the total cost of operations.

Zoda and his team were able to easily migrate the applications and data they needed on schedule. The throughput and performance improvements were immediately apparent.

By making SAN administration less complex, the school district reduced time spent on applications and batch processing by 50%. Processes that used to run overnight for nearly 6 hours can now run in 3 hours or less. By migrating from the legacy storage to its new NetApp cluster, the school district also realized a 20% to 30% improvement in latency and throughput. The district can now meet its SLAs for backups during the evening and no longer conflict with the day-to-day needs of its students.

The new solution directly benefits students, staff, and parents. Students who need to miss school because of illness or other reasons can easily access teacher assignments through the district's Student Information Center. Instructors and district administrators can quickly find detailed historical information. Parents can view their children's grades and attendance records.

SECURING PERSONAL STUDENT DATA

Because the school district collects so much personal data, the IT department is charged with making sure that data is secure and accessible online for parents and students. Zoda and his team determined that NetApp offered the most comprehensive data protection for the district with the strictest SLAs for data protection and compliance solutions.

n NetApp®

The school district implemented NetApp Volume Encryption (NVE) to secure designated NetApp volumes that provide storage for the Student Information System, IBM DB2/Peoplesoft, and other select databases.

According to Zoda, "This targeted approach allows us to encrypt data at rest only where needed, avoiding excess CPU overhead. NetApp NVE with key manager options gave us the security compliance for SAN storage encryption at rest that we lacked in previous years."

INCREASED DATA CENTER EFFICIENCIES

The combination of NetApp all-flash controllers and hybrid systems, installed in each of the district's three data centers, provides 4.5PB of usable data storage. By choosing all-flash controllers, the school district increased speed and reduced latency for applications and batch processing, while the hybrid controllers provide affordable capacity for archived data as well as future information and data.

IMPROVING THE CLASSROOM EXPERIENCE

"Whether it's all the protocols that they have, or the ability to have close to a single pane of glass for administration, or features and benefits that come with simple upgrades, NetApp has it all," Zoda says.

He feels that the partnership with NetApp enables the district to better manage, store, and analyze its data, resulting in improved classroom experiences.

"The education of our students is of the utmost importance," Zoda says. "These students are our future. We partnered with NetApp to make sure that our data would be reliable, consistent, and secure. By having such a fantastic platform in NetApp, our teachers, students, and families of Palm Beach County are afforded a much better, richer experience at school."

SOLUTION COMPONENTS

NetApp AFF

NetApp Volume Encryption

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netapp.com/us/products/storage-systems/all-flash-array/index.aspx

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