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Case Study: Implementing Cloud Video at the Region 13 Education Service Center

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JANUARY 19, 2015

EDUCATION, LDV ORIGINALS

Last month, 1,200 children in central Texas got the opportunity to hear Christmas stories read to them by Mrs. Claus. How did Mrs. Claus get around to so many schools? Actually, there were *four* Mrs. Claus' and two of them read the stories in Spanish. (Santa, what were you thinking?) And, the story time took place over the cloud-based videoconference platform, Zoom, making it possible for many schools to participate in multi-point calls.

Opportunities like this are common for those 60 districts in central Texas that are in the Region 13 Education Service Center area. Carol Teitelman, head of distance learning services, reports that Region 13 switched from an entirely hardware-based video deployment to a cloud-based solution, after testing multiple options. As everyone knows, the education sector is always highly cognizant of budget, and the cost savings have been significant, over \$17,500 per school year.

Just as important as savings is how people are using the technology. After making the switch, the adoption rate by educators sky rocketed. In just the first semester of the 2014-2015 school year, schools logged a 70% increase in usage over the previous year. Teitelman credits the ease of use to be the main factor for this boost in usage from the teachers. Unlike the H.323 systems, Zoom seems to "punch right through" the firewalls, which historically has been an issue in education networks running H.323.

Another advantage is the ability to utilize video in the classroom. Previously, teachers would have to take students to the "Distance Learning Room" to do videoconferencing. However, since switching to cloud-based video, teachers have been able to use video in their own classrooms, as each was already equipped with a laptop connected to a large display.

A core mission of Region 13 is providing professional development for thousands of teachers. Use of a cloud-based video solution has made it simple for educators to participate in continuous professional development workshops. These sessions are recorded and can be accessed easily by those that missed the training or those wanting to review the material. Additionally, Region 13 partners with the TETN network, which offers even more professional development opportunities for Texas educators.

Finally, Region 13's distance learning staff supports the use of video to provide engaging programs and collaborative opportunities to the students they serve. Educators are encouraged to use the Connect2Texas clearinghouse for programs originating from Texas content providers and the CILC database for programs delivered by content providers from around the world. Not only do students benefit from engaging programs delivered by professional museum educators, but they often participate in collaborative projects with other Region 13 schools and with peers from around the globe. One Region 13 educator has been using video to involve his students in debates with students in other countries and has partnered with global colleagues to engage students in mock trials.

Region 13 has been a leader in trialing emerging distance learning technologies. Replacing traditional hardware-based solutions with cloud-based solutions was a big change for such a large organization, but for this institution, it made total sense. When asked about the drawbacks in implementing this switch, Teitelman did not hesitate to say, "None!"

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