

SOPHOS

CUSTOMER CASE STUDY

Through its trusted partnership with iCorps Technologies, East Lycoming School District was able to upgrade its firewall and wireless security infrastructure based on Sophos solutions. With Sophos UTM, the school district is able to provide comprehensive protection for 1,500 new school-issued iPads, with room to grow as security capabilities expand into the future.



Customer-at-a-Glance

The East Lycoming School District (ELSD)

East Lycoming School District
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Hughesville, PA 17737

Website

<http://www.eastlycoming.net>

Industry

K-12 Education

Sophos Solutions

Sophos SG UTM
Sophos Access Points





The East Lycoming School District (ELSD) is a public school district serving two boroughs and seven townships in Lycoming County, Pennsylvania. The district operates one high school, three elementary schools, and the Lycoming Career and Technology Center, with more than 1,600 students and close to 200 faculty members and other staff.

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Adam Creasy
Director of Technology
East Lycoming School District

Business Challenge

Adam Creasy has served for more than nine years as Director of Technology for East Lycoming School District. "Strategic planning can potentially be the most challenging aspect of this job, especially as technology and its role in education continue to evolve," he notes. "We need to ensure the district is using the most up-to-date technologies that support the way students learn, but we have to balance that goal with state-mandated budgets. It's important to adopt quality equipment that can cost-effectively support any types of applications and systems we want to bring in."

In line with these objectives, the school district recently made the decision to equip almost every student with a school-issued iPad. The addition of more than 1,500 new devices to the network created a strain on the firewall security system. In addition, ELSD was looking to replace its secure Wi-Fi network, which up until then had been managed by three Cisco wireless LAN controllers.

"Most school-issued equipment is adequate in a controlled and traditional setting, such as a computer lab, but it can be difficult to scale. Adding thousands of new devices to the network demands high-scalability and enterprise-level solutions," Creasy says. "Our previous Fortinet firewall had served us well for years, but it was no match for the one-to-one iPad program. We required a more cost-effective wireless solution that would be easier for our small staff to manage."

Technology Solution

As a result, ELSD enlisted Sophos partner iCorps Technologies to identify an enterprise-grade firewall and secure wireless solution that could provide comprehensive protection for all iPad users. Based in the northeastern U.S. with offices in Boston, Philadelphia, and New York, iCorps provides a range of outsourced technology services including managed services, IT consulting, cloud computing, and migrations.

Mike Wilkins, Senior Technology and Systems Consultant for iCorps Technologies, recommended Sophos UTM to East Lycoming School District after evaluating Sophos alongside competing products. After a thorough stage of testing and a detailed evaluation process, ELSD chose Sophos. The new installation includes a Sophos UTM 550 appliance with 130 Sophos 150 AP100c secure wireless access points distributed throughout the district.

"iCorps does its due diligence in vetting out its technology partners, so I knew Sophos offered a viable solution. But after further testing it out in a lab network, I felt even more comfortable recommending Sophos for ELSD," Wilkins discloses. "In addition to comprehensive protection, Sophos UTM offers great scalability and ease of use – and the Sophos Support team is outstanding to work with."

Comprehensive and Compliant Protection

Even in early trials at ELSD, Sophos UTM proved to be much more effective at filtering spam that was entering the network. Furthermore, Sophos UTM's Web filtering is allowing the school district to maintain consistent control over students' unauthorized use of the Internet – an especially important priority now that each student has 24-hour access to the ELSD network through the school-issued iPad. These features are particularly important since ELSD, as a public school district, is subject to laws governing Internet usage including a requirement to filter all web traffic even when students are using their iPads at home or other off-site locations. With Sophos UTM, ELSD is able to use global proxies to filter all traffic through the solution after hours from any location that is accessing the network using a Wi-Fi connection.

"We continually have to stay a few steps ahead of our students because they are constantly coming up with creative ways to get around our security measures to access social media and other prohibited content," Creasy explains. "Sophos UTM does a fantastic job of filtering Web

requests on the application level – and if a student does manage to download an unauthorized app, Sophos UTM makes sure no traffic can pass through it. At any given time we can identify who's on the network, what they're doing, and who our most frequent attempted abusers are."

Wilkins adds, "Prior to Sophos, if the Web filter went down, Adam had to take the Internet connection down to troubleshoot the problem and stay in accordance with the law. That meant the core curriculum would also go down and the school couldn't function. The stakes are even higher now that 1,500 iPads are dependent on the network. But Sophos UTM provides a robust web filtering proxy and is completely dependable. Additionally, it provides reporting with up-to-the-minute stats on what's going on with any device at any given time."

Enhanced Visibility and Control

ELSD's security posture is further strengthened through the increased visibility provided by the Sophos UTM management console and reporting features. "With the previous firewall, we had to generate reports manually and the system could not show a holistic picture of the environment. It was always difficult and time-consuming to identify and mitigate a threat," Creasy states. "With Sophos UTM, we're able to pinpoint a threat and its origin in under an hour, whether it's coming from our own network or some outside source. We're able to drill down immediately and find out quickly whether the threat is viable or credible."

He adds, "At times we're able to catch something before it's even actionable; for instance, a student performing a Google search for 'anarchist cookbook.' In an instant, we're able to trace that search to a specific Mac address and a specific user."

New Efficiencies and Cost Savings

Not only does the Sophos secure wireless technology provide a significant operational cost savings over the previous Cisco controllers, but the Sophos Access Points can be connected to the Sophos UTM appliance to provide an end-to-end solution for content filtering and application control. This results in the overall solution being much easier to manage and maintain by Creasy and his team.

"Previously, when we had an issue with one of the Cisco products, it might take at least an hour to figure out which one was malfunctioning and then resolve the issue. Now, with the outstanding Sophos GUI and centralized



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management console, we can see at a glance the health and status of each Access Point and troubleshoot them almost instantly," Creasy relates. "The cost savings of Sophos was enough of a motivator on its own for us to migrate, but the integration and ease of use mean that we can do much more without increasing our staff. In fact, we are now able to dedicate more time to initiatives such as staff professional development and student mentoring programs to allow hands-on technology immersion."

Scalability to Handle Traffic Now and Into the Future

Unlike previous firewall solutions, Sophos UTM offers an abundance of capacity to support ELSD's new iPad program. In fact, during the peak hour of a typical recent school day, the system was running at 11 percent utilization with more than 2,800 devices accessing the network. On a different day, the Sophos UTM management console indicated that the system had already filtered well over a million Web requests and blocked 200,000 unauthorized Web packets, as well as four virus intrusion attempts and 1,600 spam messages – all before lunchtime.

"With Sophos UTM, our firewall scalability issues are completely eliminated. We now have a solution that meets our needs and our future requirements. The system's filtering capabilities have already far exceeded our expectations and the utilization still remains low," Creasy remarks. "Going forward, as we move towards a bring-your-own-device policy for students and faculty, I have complete confidence that Sophos UTM will be able to handle the load."

A Long-Term Security Partnership

In recent years, iCorps has become a valued and trusted IT outsourcing partner for ELSD. "I work with 21 clients across a broad cross-section of industries, but I particularly enjoy assisting our education clients," notes Wilkins. "It's rewarding to take my experience working with enterprise deployments and determining how to apply it in a school district setting, to help the client realize cost savings and capabilities that might not have been apparent before. That's how I was able to bring Sophos UTM into ELSD."

Comments Creasy, "the iCorps team brings valuable enterprise-level expertise to our setting, but they are also sensitive to our budget constraints. They understand how to craft a cost-effective solution that will not limit our activities, but instead will open up powerful new capabilities that we might not have known about before. Both iCorps and Sophos bring a holistic understanding with the goal of building a unified architecture and integrating every piece of the puzzle."

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