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Chantelle Folkes
IT Engineer
Prince George's County Public Schools

Keeping Computers in the Classroom

Prince George's County Public Schools Reduces Losses, Streamlines Distribution and Increases Computer Use in Classrooms Using Absolute Software

Prince George's County Public Schools is the 18th largest school system in the U.S., with 134,000 students and 16,000 full time employees, including 10,000 teachers. With one laptop for every teacher and a 5:1 student to computer ratio, Prince George's has nearly 40,000 computers spread over 209 schools. Prior to 2004, asset management and software license counts were done by hand, and the IT techs spent about 8 days a year distributing laptops to teaching staff. Mysteriously, several dozen laptops went missing each year – either stolen or misplaced during the year while not being used. Since installing Computrace from Absolute Software, laptop accountability is up, thefts are down, and the annual laptop hand-out/take-back tasks are completed 30% faster, saving over \$47,000 per year in time and resources.

Situation

In 2004, IT inventory at Prince George's County was done by hand. If a machine moved from one classroom to another, paper work was supposed to be done, but rarely was. Thousands of dollars of mobile computers were set up in labs, yet there was no consistent way of keeping track of where a specific machine had been rolled to.

When the head of IT saw a demo of Absolute Software's IT asset management solution at a tradeshow, he bought it with the intention of using it in the mobile labs. A start, but, in the words of Chantelle Folkes, the IT engineer who started working with St. George's in October 2006, "the power of Absolute's system wasn't being fully utilized."

Solution

"When I first started working with Prince George's, AbsoluteTrack was just on the IBM mobile labs," recalls Folkes. "When we understood the time savings that could be realized by using Absolute system-wide for asset management and software inventory, we expanded our installation."

Prince George's now uses both Absolute's Computrace solution for IT asset management, theft recovery and data protection.

"Absolute's Computrace is an ideal asset tracking solution for educational, corporate, and government environments," says Absolute Chairman and CEO John Livingston. "Computrace allows IT departments to know exactly what they have, what it's doing, and where it is – regardless of location. IT teams can better manage resources and protect machines from loss or damage."



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Making the Most of Resources

"Computrace gives our team – in fact, our schools and our children – a huge advantage in that we can ensure our computer resources are put to the greatest use," says Folkes.

Each month, the IT techs run a report on which laptops are in the field, and which ones are – or aren't – being used.

"We can see who has a laptop, and when they last logged in," says Folkes. "In terms of asset management, we can make sure the laptops aren't in the teacher's house or closet where they're more in danger of being stolen or lost. In terms of resources, we can encourage teachers to use the computers they've been given. This discussion allows us to uncover and solve problems in user training or comfort level. We could never have done this before using Absolute."

Knowing What You Have

Computrace is used in the Prince George's mobile labs, which are computers used for specialized programs or special events. The computers in these labs are completely portable, and therefore more at risk. Prince George's IT team can now find out where every machine is 24/7.

"There's no more relying on paperwork to figure out where machines are – paperwork that can be slow to find or easily lost or misplaced," says Folkes. "With Computrace, we always know the answer to the question, 'Where is that computer?' We can log in online and see exactly where it is."

"In the future, we hope to use Computrace on other equipment like printers and projectors that are connected to computers," says Folkes. "It really simplifies asset management for desktops and laptops."

Protecting Assets, Improving Licensing Compliance

Computrace's ability to provide an accurate count of computers and the software installed on them has been paramount in Prince George's reaching license compliance as well as reducing their risk of having computers affected by dangerous and unauthorized applications.

"We're now in complete compliance with software licensing," says Folkes. "And, we're better protected in terms of virus protection. Specifically, we can see who has or hasn't updated their Symantec dat files. Before, we'd be waiting blindly until a machine came in all messed up; today, a technician can go out, find the machine, and install the necessary updates. It's much more proactive and safer for our machines and our network."

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Simplifying Distribution, Saving Time

Laptops for Prince George's 10,000 teachers are handed out in September and recollected in June.

For the 85 techs, the September hand-out used to take 4 days. Now, with Computrace installed, it takes 3 days. The June collection used to take 5 days. Now, it's 2.5 days. This accounts for a \$47,000 annual savings (a 30% increase in efficiency) on teacher laptop recirculation alone.

"The best part is no more relying on paperwork," says Folkes. "Using Absolute's Computrace, we can log in online, see where a laptop is, then retrieve it, saving us hours in legwork."

"Training from Absolute Software made us even more productive with their solutions," recalls Folkes. "Absolute showed us better ways to use reports and how to use automated notifications through Computrace to prompt users who weren't making use of their computer to report in promptly. The notifications really got those users moving!"

Reducing Losses, Saving Money

"Thefts and losses are down, without a doubt," says Folkes. "As a starting point, Absolute makes it possible for us to tell right away if a computer has changed hands."

Because Prince George's uses a particular naming convention for all computer names, any changes to this convention – for example, "PGCS_2045" being changed to "Bill's laptop" – are instantly visible when a computer calls back to the Absolute Monitoring Center. If the Prince George's team is unsuccessful in tracking down the machine, they can then use the services provided by the Absolute Theft Recovery Team.

Prior to 2006, several dozen laptops went missing each year, with no recourse available. Since installing Computrace, losses are down significantly. For example, at the end of the 2008 school year, 58 laptops were missing. After Chantelle and her team used a feature in Computrace to display a message on the missing machines strongly advising the owner to bring the machine in for accounting purposes, 55 were turned in. In just this one exercise, Computrace saved the school board over \$93,000 in replacing missing laptops, a significant amount of capital expenses.

Losses are inevitable. Yet, reports Folkes, even filling out the police reports for stolen machines has been faster and easier with the information available in Absolute Customer Center. Reports require details on the computer, including make, model, and serial number. If this information has been lost by the teacher, the techs had to look it up, which took on average 40 minutes. With Computrace in place, this information can be attained in just a few minutes.

Computrace also includes computer theft recovery and a \$1000 Service Guarantee for each machine that cannot be recovered or have a data delete performed. When a computer equipped with the system is reported stolen, the Computrace Agent sends a silent signal over the internet to the Absolute Monitoring Center, providing critical location information. Alternatively, Absolute can delete data on the machine remotely, protecting the owners from a potential data breach. When embedded in the firmware, the Computrace Agent is capable of surviving operating system re-installations and hard-drive reformat or replacements.

Return on Investment

Using Absolute's Computrace solution, Prince George's County has:

- Implemented a paperless, more efficient asset tracking system, allowing IT techs to see the location of over 40,000 laptops, desktops and mobile computers county-wide
- Saved over \$47,000 annually on teacher laptop hand-out/take-back tasks, representing a 30% increase in efficiency
- Reduced computer losses by approximately 95% per year, saving potentially \$93,000 in capital expenses
- Met software license compliance goals and developed a system to ensure computers have proper virus software updates installed
- Increased use of laptops in the classroom, benefiting teachers, students, and the community

About Absolute Software

Absolute® Software is the leader in computer theft recovery, data protection and secure IT asset management. Absolute provides organizations with the ability to accurately and securely track their computing assets, manage leased computers, ensure software license and regulatory compliance, deter computer loss, protect data and recover stolen computers. For more information about Absolute Software and its Computrace suite, visit: www.absolute.com

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ABT-CS-PGCPS-E-052709