Located on southwest Florida’s Gulf Coast, Manatee County School District works to inspire its pupils to “Learn, Dream, and Achieve.” The student body of over 47,500 children, supported by 10,500 teachers and staff, is rapidly growing: The county’s natural beauty and commerce-friendly environment have made it a favored destination for families and businesses alike. New schools – at all age levels – are being constructed to accommodate the expanding population.

The school district has been a long-standing advocate of the positive impact of technology in education. In 2006, to accelerate pervasive Internet use, Manatee implemented a district-wide fiber network that provided each school and administration building with multiple 10 Gbps connections.

**GROWING PAINS**

Since that time, the number of students has grown by 10,000 and – because of the spectacular expansion of web-based resources and applications – network traffic has experienced an almost exponential increase in volume.

Today, each teacher is given their own computer, and the Internet is tightly integrated into the daily curriculum, including testing. There are an estimated 30,000 computers in the district, and 90% of students connect on a phone or tablet during each school day.

Steven Wright, Communications and Technical Systems Manager for the district, recalled, “A primary goal of ours is to provide students and staff with a safe environment in which to learn and grow. We saw that countering the escalating number of cyber-based threats required a more sophisticated approach than we currently had in place; we got budget approval and drafted an RFP for what was known as the “E-rate Firewall RFP project.”

**MEMORABLE MOMENTS**

The highly detailed RFP solicited proposals from vendors and third-parties. After a rigorous evaluation process, Wright and his team narrowed the field down to two contenders; both

“This FortiGate enables us to eliminate multiple points of failure, simplify our infrastructure, and save money; all at the same time!”

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**DETAILS**

**CUSTOMER:** Manatee County School District  
**INDUSTRY:** Education  
**LOCATION:** Manatee County, Florida  
**PARTNER:** Maxis360

**SOLUTION**

- FortiGate 3700D

**BUSINESS IMPACT**

- Enhanced threat protection across entire infrastructure
- Low ongoing maintenance and renewal costs
- Reduced operational costs and simplified management
- Ability to accommodate growing headcount and facilities without additional investment
MANATEE COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT IMPLEMENTED TWO FORTIGATE 3700DS AT ITS CENTRAL DATA CENTER, CONFIGURED AS A HIGH-AVAILABILITY PAIR. “I WAS AMAZED BOTH DURING AND POST-IMPLEMENTATION; THERE WERE NO PROBLEMS, NO COMPLAINTS. EVEN HAVING TO INTEGRATE WITH OUR ACTIVE DIRECTORY, WE HAD THE FORTIGATES UP AND RUNNING WITHIN 45 MINUTES, WITHOUT OUR END-USERS EVEN NOTICING.”

The ability of the FortiGate to perform web filtering makes a significant contribution to the district being able to maintain compliance with the Children’s Internet Protection Act (CIPA); a law holding schools responsible for the content their pupils are accessing online. Five servers that were originally tasked with content filtering were replaced with a single FortiGate, and the integrated suite of reports conveniently delivers the information necessary to fulfil audit requirements. An even more impressive reduction took place with the number of devices needed to perform load balancing: “Because of the way the FortiGate is designed, we were able to go from 11 different servers down to four and get rid of two core switches,” said Wright. “The FortiGate enables us to eliminate multiple points of failure, simplify our infrastructure, and save money; all at the same time!”

MAXIMIZING RESOURCES

There have been operational benefits as well: “We’re a small team and we’ve found the GUI to be extremely intuitive and reports very easy to run: There’s no training or steep learning curve involved,” commented Hoaglin. “The visibility we have across the district’s entire infrastructure, from a single pane of glass, enables us to really maximize our efficiency and elevate the quality of protection that the team can provide.”

He added, “The tangible sense of commitment we have from the Maxis360 and Fortinet partnership is amazing. The FortiGates have more than lived up to our expectations and I would strongly, strongly recommend the entire range to anyone in a similar situation to us.”

Wright concluded, “We’re here to educate and protect, but the dollars we spend on IT come from the same place that teachers and support staff are paid from. To have the levels of protection and performance that we get from the FortiGate, at such a great price point, makes a huge difference to us.”

The manager of the large mainframe operations team, according to Wright, was impressed with the FortiGate’s performance. “In addition to the impressive feature set, we have significant benefits in terms of the ease of use.”

The Fortinet team was able to demonstrate the FortiGate’s ability to balance traffic from 11 different servers down to four and get rid of two core switches, said Wright. “The FortiGate enables us to eliminate multiple points of failure, simplify our infrastructure, and save money; all at the same time!”

EASY IMPLEMENTATION, EASY OPTIMIZATION

Manatee County School District implemented two FortiGate 3700Ds at its central data center, configured as a high-availability pair. “I was amazed both during and post-implementation; there were no problems, no complaints,” praised Hoaglin. “Even having to integrate with our Active Directory, we had the FortiGates up and running within 45 minutes, without our end-users even noticing.”

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