

California School System Implements 21st Century Learning Tools

Fontana Unified School District increases student, faculty, and staff collaboration utilizing Cisco TelePresence solution

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
FONTANA UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • K-12 Education • Fontana, California USA • 41,000 Students
BUSINESS CHALLENGE <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of student, teacher, and faculty collaboration across the district • Inability to offer all classes at all district schools • Limited educational resources and professional development programs
NETWORK SOLUTION <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement Cisco TelePresence solution to enable students to attend classes remotely • Leverage unified communication technology to better student-teacher communication
BUSINESS RESULTS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced travel time and intra-district transfers for students and faculty • Increased collaboration, professional development information, and remote classroom instructions • Improved connection with corporations and universities

Business Challenge

Educational institutions across the country are starting to augment their traditional brick-and-mortar facilities with virtual learning tools that enable students to connect with educators and other students in an unprecedented manner. Although educators have always recognized the impact that technology has on collaboration, there is an increasing amount of pressure to offer a broad range of rich-media services as technology in general grows and potential resources become more robust. These services enhance the potential for participation and deeper engagement by students. Because communications, collaboration, and digital content are the fundamental building blocks of rich-media learning environments, educational institutions rely on technology to combine engaging interactions with the latest teaching methods.

Located 50 miles east of Los Angeles, Fontana is recognized as one of the fastest-growing centers for technology, industry, and commerce in the Southern

California marketplace. The Fontana Unified School District (USD) consists of approximately 44 schools dedicated to educating preschool to adult students in a diverse learning environment.

“With over 40 schools spread out over 41 miles, we were looking for a way to not only make our district seem smaller, but also find a way to leverage and share all of our educational resources,” says Randy Bassett, Chief Technology Officer for Fontana USD. “With a highly mobile population, we wanted to establish consistency among our schools. As students transfer from school to school, it was our desire to have the technology and educational resources the same throughout.”

As the community grew, district officials saw an opportunity to enhance its technology offerings to meet the growing demands of its students, faculty, and staff. By leveraging Fontana’s existing fiber-optic backbone, the district could deliver high-quality video for instruction, professional development, and traditional meetings without starting from scratch. During the planning stages, it became very clear that the Cisco TelePresence™ solution was the answer.

Network Solution

In 2009, the Cisco® TelePresence solution was presented to the Fontana Unified School District Board of Education as a way to introduce 21st century learning to the district. During the meeting, Bassett and his colleagues requested the acquisition of TelePresence 3200s in five comprehensive high schools and a TelePresence 3000 at the district office. No other K-12 organization has deployed this technology (using the largest form factors units), making Fontana the first known district to use TelePresence for classroom instruction.

“We here at Fontana don’t have a ‘wait-and-see’ attitude. The educational landscape changes so rapidly and we do not want to hesitate in offering our students something that would be a great benefit to them,” says Bassett. “We wanted to take full advantage of the innovative and valuable resources available to us.”

Although existing video conferencing systems allow end-users to see and hear each other, the design is not based on the way that people naturally interact. Low-definition hampered their success. Due to poor audio quality, poor image resolution, and the small size of the picture, there is no sense of being in the same room with other participants. Additionally, eye-to-eye contact is commonly absent from frequently misplaced cameras. The Cisco TelePresence units deployed in Fontana USD use multiple video cameras and high-definition screens. As such, students and educators can see one another while viewing shared video and/or conducting electronic dialogue.

“TelePresence is so easy to use, that it was a ‘no-brainer’ to move forward with it,” says Bassett. “If you can use a phone, you can use TelePresence.”

Business Results

Through the implementation of Cisco TelePresence, Fontana USD has furthered its role as a leader in educational innovation and enhanced the learning experience for students. The

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— Randy Bassett, Chief Technology Officer, Fontana Unified School District

integrated, single-platform communication solution, with superior features and functionality, increased the districts bandwidth and connectivity. It allows students and staff to work and learn with the latest voice, video, data, and Web 2.0 tools.

Students are being exposed to industry leaders and resources that they did not have before. For example, students will be given the opportunity to speak with college students via TelePresence regarding “college life” and how to prepare for their studies. Also, district staffers can conduct mock job interviews and provide instant feedback on how to communicate in the professional world. Fontana teachers will soon begin incorporating TelePresence into the school curriculum and develop targeted programs around the product.

In addition, TelePresence provides an easy, cost-efficient alternative to conducting administrative meetings across the district. Faculty travel expenses were reduced as meetings can take place virtually. In this tough current economic climate, Fontana USD officials have put in place a new technology that is cost effective and reflective of a responsible budgetary decision. Plus, the reduction of time travel for faculty allows for more time spent on campus and in the classrooms.

Since 2004, Fontana USD has seen an improvement in the quality of student-teacher interactions and met the growing needs of a tech-savvy generation. TelePresence offered a type of group brainstorming and interaction that is rewarding and productive for students, while also building essential teamwork skills. “By providing advanced communication services, we are equipping our students with the skills needed to succeed in this evolving, globalized world,” says Bassett.

PRODUCT LIST
<p>Video</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cisco TelePresence 3200s • Cisco TelePresence 3000

Next Steps

Currently, there are five TelePresence solutions deployed in the district, and district officials are planning to increase that number. Expanding the distance learning program and improving the overall learning environment for students and teachers have been slated as a top priority for Fontana.

For More Information

To find out more about the Cisco education solutions, go to: <http://www.cisco.com/go/education>

To find out more about the Cisco TelePresence, go to: <http://www.cisco.com/en/US/products/ps7060/index.html>

Figure 1: Cisco TelePresence System 3000



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