



A rural school district gives AT&T Dedicated Internet and Office@HandSM straight A's

- **Business needs** - A better way for teachers and other staff in a small, rural school district to communicate with parents, students and one another
- **Networking solution** - AT&T Dedicated Internet delivers highly reliable, robust connectivity and AT&T Office@Hand gives the district the dependable phone, fax, messaging, and conferencing systems employees need to work effectively
- **Business value** - The power and convenience staff need to communicate and collaborate
- **Industry focus** - Public education
- **Size** - 100 students

About Justice Public School District

Justice Public School District serves students in a 16 square-mile area of Seminole County, Oklahoma. District officials work to create a learning environment in which students can master the skills they need to be productive citizens.

The situation

The small, rural district had only three telephone lines, which were aging and unreliable. This meant that teachers often had to use their personal phones to connect with students and parents during and after school hours. They were willing to make themselves available to students in the evening and on weekends but were hesitant to give out their personal phone numbers. In addition, the district needed a more robust and secure internet service to support important educational and administrative functions.

Solution

AT&T Dedicated Internet gives Justice Public School District a private, one-to-one connection with AT&T that protects sensitive information. Justice also chose AT&T Office@Hand, a flexible, cloud-based solution that gives teachers and staff the communication tools they need to be productive at school and virtually anywhere else they might be working.

Personalized education for each student

The Justice Public School District in Wewoka, Oklahoma, serves students in pre-kindergarten through grade 8. It also provides a full-day Head Start program for three-year-olds. District Superintendent Chris Bryan said his students reflect the multicultural population of Seminole County. About three-quarters of students are Native American or mixed race. The district also includes white, African American, and Hispanic students.

Approximately 22% of the county's residents live below the poverty line. Fully 100% of Justice Public School students qualify for free or reduced meals. Cognizant of that fact, the district serves its students breakfast, lunch, and a third meal every school day.

The district is unusual in that it is a magnet for students who live in other areas. "About 80% of our students are transferred in from other schools or from other school districts," Bryan said. Some come because their parents or grandparents went to school there. Others like the quality academic and athletic programs. Justice's graduating eighth graders are highly recruited by area high schools.

The district has an excellent teacher-to-student ratio and personalized learning environment. "There is a personalized plan for each student," Bryan said. "A very small part of our day has the teacher in front of the classroom doing large group instruction. It's never made sense to me that we expect every kid because of a chronological age to be at the same point at the same time. Every kid is going to be at a different level."

Teachers instead split their classes into small groups of four or five students working at the same level within the classroom. "About 90% of our day is spent in small-group instruction," he said.



Pandemic creates challenges for families

Like most organizations, Justice Public School District was hit hard by the coronavirus. "COVID-19 has really been a kick in the teeth for us," Bryan said. "And it's revealed big issues with the national infrastructure."

“I understand that teachers don’t want to give their cell numbers out to the public and don’t want to get texts or calls at 2 a.m.”

Chris Bryan
Superintendent, Justice Public School District

Many families lacked internet service that would have enabled their children to continue learning online when the schools were closed. Others had internet, but it was too slow to support video learning. “We’ve lost kids as a result,” Bryan said. “Some may be learning online, but others might be sitting at home under the guise of being homeschooled when actually nothing is going on.”

Bryan hopes that these students will return to school once the pandemic passes, but he fears they may not have learned much since they stopped attending classes in person.

Snap, crackle, and pop

Communicating with students and their parents, especially during the pandemic, is very important to Justice teachers. However, it was difficult because the district had only three telephone lines, and there were no phones in the classrooms. “We just had normal phone lines,” Bryan said. The district’s underground phone lines, however, were at least 40 years old. “We called our phones ‘Rice Krispies communication devices,’ because anytime you picked up the telephone, you’d hear snap, crackle, and pop.”

Justice Public Schools wanted to move to a Voice over IP (VoIP) system that would provide advanced features their old phones didn’t have. But they encountered another challenge. The district’s wireless internet signal wasn’t powerful or reliable enough to support VoIP calls.

Staying connected with parents and students often meant teachers had to use their cellphones or home phones, which presented problems. “Times have changed,” Bryan said. “It’s not like the 60s and 70s when parents wouldn’t let their kids call a teacher after 7 p.m. Some of our parents get off work at 11 p.m. and wake the kids up to do their homework. They wouldn’t think twice about calling a teacher at 2 a.m.”

The district needed a highly reliable, high-speed internet service and a phone solution that would enable teachers to define the hours when they were willing to receive calls, and allow parents and students to leave messages at their convenience in the off-hours.

New ways to connect with students

The district installed AT&T Dedicated Internet, which delivers a dedicated connection with consistent, guaranteed bandwidth and performance. The robust solution enabled Justice to use AT&T Office@Hand, a cloud-based phone, video, conferencing, messaging, and team collaboration solution. By using this hosted solution, the district can avoid capital expenditures, maintenance, software, setup, and support fees.

Office@Hand provides useful features, like an app for teachers to call from personal devices without revealing their private numbers. “When teachers use

the AT&T Office@Hand app on their phones, the people they call will see the school's phone number," Bryan said.

When parents return a call, it automatically goes to the teacher's extension, and will ring on their preferred phone number. Teachers can turn off the phone at night and callers can leave messages. The system also makes it easy for the superintendent to send calls for school cancellations and delays at the touch of a button.

Enhanced security and service

Office@Hand also enhances security and accessibility at Justice Public School District. Instead of having just three phone lines for the whole district, there's now a phone in every classroom.

"I feel a lot safer knowing that teachers can communicate in an emergency," Bryan said. "We could even have different people on the line simultaneously with emergency personnel."

Bryan also appreciates the attention he receives from the district's dedicated account team. In the past, he was often frustrated by trying to reach customer service. "I love being able to call our AT&T account team," he said.

Bryan takes a long view of the value of his relationship with AT&T Business and the services it provides. Most important, he notes, Office@Hand makes it easier for the school district to serve its students and their families.

"At the end of the day," Bryan said, "no parent or student is going to remember one single lesson in math or reading, but they're going to remember forever that there was someone there that called to check on them, to see if they needed us to deliver meals to their house or whatever else they needed. That's what will stick in their memories when the COVID-19 pandemic is said and done. They'll end up telling their kids and grandkids about this one of these days."

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