A HOLY CROSS HIGH SCHOOL

Our New Campus Network Unburdens IT and Creates a Modern Student Experience at Saint Francis High School

The best educators and institutions help students to become well-rounded people who are prepared for post-graduation life. We want our students at Saint Francis High School to become leaders, so we've spent the last five years developing innovation programs to prepare them for those leadership opportunities.

Increasingly, preparing kids for the future requires robust and resilient technology.

Learning lessons from our existing infrastructure

Saint Francis High School is a college-prep Catholic high school in the Greater San Francisco Bay area. The IT department strives to give our 1,750 students what they need and help our 200 staff and faculty members be the best at what they do. I've been the technology director for 25 years, and we approach technology as a tool that works behind the scenes to support our mission.

Unfortunately, the situation reached a point where all of our technology issues sat front and center:

- **Not keeping pace with technology.** The adage, "If it's not broken, don't fix it," doesn't work in the world of technology. We have to update equipment to meet changing security standards, and staying on top of those can make long-term planning difficult.
- **Network security risks.** We host many guests, such as parents, visiting students, and business partners. Having so many guest devices on campus can pose a security risk, and we needed more security controls to keep our network secure.
- **Device management challenges.** The sheer number of devices on campus makes management daunting. Each device—sensors, cameras, heating and air conditioning systems, and photocopiers, to name a few—has specific needs, but we didn't want to find specialists for everything. We wanted to make management easier for our existing team.
- **"Free" equipment**. Living in the shadow of Silicon Valley, we received many technology donations. We were always grateful, but "free" doesn't accurately describe the transaction. The equipment became hard to maintain as support became an issue. Product life cycles changed, and we developed a patchwork of solutions from various vendors over time. We couldn't provide the highest quality service without a more cohesive environment.

- **Zapping team energy and effort.** Our team is highly skilled, but they spent much of their days maintaining service—not innovating. We wanted them to spend more time interacting with students and experiencing new opportunities for them to innovate.

Our network had become increasingly complex. While our team did a great job maintaining that environment, we began looking for ways to simplify the maintenance and operation of the network while providing more value to our students and staff.

Acing the test

I get approached by many software startups, and my response to their pitch is usually: “I appreciate you thinking of us, but no, thank you.” A personal connection led me to Nile, and the passion of the senior leadership team told me this was different. The AI-powered Nile Access Service, offering high-performance wired and wireless network access, would completely change how we operated. This wasn’t just a new version of our existing system but something new altogether.

> **“Nile was different. It wasn’t just a new version of our existing system but a different model altogether.”**

The Nile Access Service was built from the ground up, and even though I trusted the team, I didn’t know if we could trust the technology. So, we entered a lengthy period of evaluation. We set up a Nile lab in one of our tech offices and spent the better part of a year cycling through different technologies on campus. From our test experience, we learned that Nile can do everything. In the one case where it didn’t work, they identified and immediately solved the issue. In the process, they uncovered other improvements, and one of the ideas from our trial even led them to file a new patent.

We tested it hard, and it passed. Next step: deployment.

A smooth spring break transition

In my time here, we’d never performed a “forklift upgrade” and replaced every piece of wired and wireless networking equipment. That’s what we did with Nile, replacing everything at once over the course of two days during spring break. We started in our most complex building with the greatest diversity of devices. When that succeeded, we knew it was smooth sailing.

Since we’d completed the technology onboarding in advance, the lift was incredibly light. I was concerned that we might have some issues when the students returned, but we didn’t have a single one. It was fantastic.

We had never snubbed our nose at donated equipment. However, partnering with Nile gave us a high-quality standardized architecture across all our buildings that we never could’ve achieved with our previous model.

With zero trust, we’re top of the class

Cybersecurity is a big bugaboo. You don’t know you have a problem until it’s too late. Every hack or security breach keeps me on edge because we don’t specialize in cybersecurity; we specialize in education (as we should).

Nile’s built-in campus zero trust solution has given me peace of mind. We support almost 4,000 devices—a 2x increase in two years—and Nile’s per-device isolation provides top-notch user, network, and data security. The devices don’t automatically trust each other, and the network doesn’t automatically trust the devices. Our new segment of one traffic isolation and policy enforcement accommodates a wide

range of user and IoT needs, making it easier for us to give students and educators the best environment for their work.

> **“Nile has made us stronger, more secure, and better able to handle new needs as they emerge.”**

Nile now handles management, maintenance, and refresh responsibilities for our high-performance, redundant network design. Their performance-based guarantees mean we have the bandwidth for all devices on our network. I’m not concerned about a surge of traffic, and we no longer have WiFi dead spots. Nile has made us stronger, more secure, and better able to handle new needs as they emerge.

A modern network for tomorrow’s leaders

We’re a mission-based organization, not driven by a P&L statement. For us, ROI means we can better serve our students' needs. Our IT team has shifted much of its time away from maintenance tasks and can now dedicate more time to improving the on-campus experience for students, teachers, and staff.

Nile helped us take this big step forward. Our more predictable pricing model improves our long-term planning. We’re no longer stuck using inferior solutions or spending time figuring out security workarounds for the thousands of devices on campus. We've simplified our network and are no longer managing it alone.

Nile is a great partner who worked to understand our needs and our network from the start. We bought into their vision, and they’ve given us the support we need to prepare our leaders of tomorrow.

Watch the Video