

How K-12 Maximizes Learning and Minimizes Interruptions with NaaS

Securing student data while transforming the network experience.

Nile solves Wi-Fi and security challenges with an end-to-end network as a service (NaaS) solution for school district in historic Cripple Creek, Colorado.

Historic mining town, Cripple Creek, Colorado brims with gold rush history and offers year-round family fun and endless hiking, biking and winter sports activities. The Cripple Creek-Victor School District (CC-V) serves the education needs for the residents of this quaint town nestled at 10,000 feet in the rolling Rockies.

The school district's mission is to prepare its students for the 21st century and Merrill Ballinger, the CC-V IT director, is committed to supporting that goal. She champions reliable, easy-to-use solutions that allow teachers to leverage the power of technology to enhance education.

Unfortunately, the district and Ballinger's best efforts were hampered by an aged network for which support and replacement parts were nonexistent. The unreliable Wi-Fi connectivity for the district's 400 students resulted in more work for teachers and created a subpar learning environment for students.

"Teaching is a hard enough job without the additional burden of technology issues," says Ballinger. "Wi-Fi issues mean learning disruption. The network must be always-on so that teachers can focus on educating students."



Industry
Education, K-12



Users
400



Region
Cripple Creek, Colorado

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Merrill Ballinger, IT director,
Cripple Creek-Victor School District

Challenge



- Overburdened lean IT team
- Complex and tedious network management and maintenance
- Insufficient Wi-Fi coverage impacting the student experience
- Aged security: a breach waiting to happen

Outcome



- Offload tactical netops with NaaS solution
- 24/7 monitoring and maintenance frees IT to enhance the learning experience
- High-performance Wi-Fi connectivity that allows teachers to focus on educating
- Holistic zero trust security protects students, teachers and data from malicious actors

It was time for a change, but Ballinger is the sole IT department employee in the district. She knew she needed a solution that would take time-consuming network management and monitoring off her plate.

“It takes an incredible amount of time and expertise to manage a network, and honestly that's not the best use of my time,” she explains. “I want to spend my time focusing on the teachers and meeting their needs.”

Hands-off, reliable connectivity

Ballinger was introduced to Nile and knew immediately that its NaaS solution would meet her needs. Nile guarantees network performance backed by service level agreements (SLAs) for availability, capacity and coverage. Nile strategically places access points and sensors to provide network coverage through every hallway and at every desk; all with high-performance capacity that supports every device and user connected to the network. The all-inclusive solution also encompasses everything from Day 0 site survey, thru installation, monitoring and Day N operations.

“The Nile solution is perfect,” she says. “I have someone who's monitoring and maintaining the network - they let me know if there are any issues and they solve them, freeing up my time to support teachers.”

Ballinger was involved with the roll out of the existing CC-V network years ago, an experience she describes as “so much work,” and she had no interest in going down that path again.

“The Nile process was so easy,” she recounts. “I just told them what I needed, they surveyed the site and performed the install, and now the network keeps self-tuning for optimal performance. What more can I ask for?”

Zero complaints, zero complexity

Network connectivity was the first and most important priority at CC-V. Today, the Nile service supports the unique needs of the CC-V elementary, middle and high schools as well as an early education program, adult education and a soon-to-be-opened construction trade building. The Wi-Fi improvement is nothing short of miraculous. The time Ballinger used to spend troubleshooting is now devoted to finding innovative ways to align technology with teacher goals.

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The district relies on Google applications and equipment including Chromebooks, Google Classroom and Google Drive for in-class activities, homework, testing and student assessments. Dips in network performance caused havoc in the classroom, eating up precious learning time while teachers were troubleshooting. Often, the only stop-gap measure was resorting to a personal hotspot.



“Data security was always on my mind, it felt like it was only a matter of time until we had a breach with the old network. Knowing that Nile has secured the network from end-to-end brings me so much peace of mind.”

Merrill Ballinger, IT director,
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The situation also took a toll on Ballinger. “It was always in the back of my mind that I would have to go in on the weekend if the network went down,” she recalls. “In fact, more than once I was out hiking and got a call that there was an issue and had to turn around and drive to work.”

The elementary school in particular really struggled with the Wi-Fi and was the source of many IT tickets. But, Ballinger reports that “Since implementing Nile, I haven’t had one complaint about connectivity!”

Guaranteed customer support satisfaction

For Ballinger, Nile’s support has been a game changer. “Nile’s willingness to work with me has been awesome. I’m always in the know for my network performance,” she says.

Thanks to Nile’s 24/7 proactive network monitoring, Ballinger is alerted to any issues immediately and can rest easy knowing that the Nile experts have it under control. On the few occasions that Ballinger has submitted a ticket to Nile, she got an immediate response and was guided all the way through to the resolution.

“Before Nile, I was basically starting from scratch every time I had to troubleshoot a problem and I was doing it all on my own,” says Ballinger. “I’d spend hours just trying to find the access point that was causing the issue.”

Securing Student Information

One of the many hats Ballinger wears is manager of the district’s student information database. With only a firewall to protect this sensitive data, that responsibility was a significant source of stress.

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Nile’s holistic, zero trust approach to security addresses the challenges that all schools face in securing their data and protecting their students. Zero trust access and functionality like IEEE 802.1X authentication deliver unified secure access across wired and wireless. Available right out of the box, the network and its connected devices are protected against malware proliferation and secured from malicious actors.

NaaS Offloads Ops

Because Nile delivers the network completely as a service, from Day 0 thru Day N operations, Ballinger no longer needs to worry about the complexities that come with bringing up and maintaining the school’s network.

The all-inclusive service allows Ballinger to offload network operations enabling her, as the district’s only IT staff member, to focus on how to better serve students and teachers.

“Smaller school districts like ours simply can’t afford to hire someone who is solely focused on maintaining the network,” says Ballinger. “I can’t get an E-Rate grant for a salaried position, but I can write one to pay for the Nile equipment and services that support our network.”

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Visit nilesecure.com for more information.

Simplifying Consumption

Nile's pay-per-user consumption model is ideal for school districts, ensuring that they pay based on actual usage. This payment structure is giving Ballinger exactly what she wants: the time and money to focus on improving the experience for teachers and students. When you support teachers, you ultimately help students, and Ballinger credits Nile with allowing her to do just that.

"School district IT professionals, wear so many hats and we're typically stretched pretty thin," says Ballinger. "Switching over to Nile's Network as a Service model gives us the time we need to refocus on the things that best serve our students."



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