

Grant Helps Provide Stability and Room for Growth

Written by Whitney Smith-Bringolf
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In the spring of 2011, the Scott County Regional Authority awarded the Mississippi Bend Area Education Agency (AEA) a grant in the amount of \$44,240. This grant was provided for the two-year maintenance contract/license renewal of the Fortinet Firewall used at the Mississippi Bend AEA. The renewal of the maintenance and license agreement is a small, but important piece of a larger project.

In 1995, the Mississippi Bend Area Education Agency (AEA) led its partner districts and schools to form a wide area network (WAN) in order to consolidate services, facilitate communication between districts, and benefit from economies of scale. Today, data lines for the districts and schools aggregate at the AEA, which provides a connection to the Internet and firewall, DNS, filtering, traffic shaping, monitoring and data archiving services. The Mississippi Bend AEA provides services to districts and schools in Cedar, Clinton, Jackson, Louisa, Muscatine and Scott Counties; a client-base of approximately 50,000 students and 4,000 faculty and staff.

The WAN has become an integral part of education throughout the districts served by the AEA. Students and staff rely upon this valuable resource daily and therefore need a stable environment in which to learn, teach and communicate. Along with the increased demand for bandwidth has come increased use of the WAN outside traditional school hours. Parent portals, online learning resources, electronic grade books, one-to-one computer initiatives and other network intensive resources, require access to more bandwidth, and have also caused a shift in the operating model of the WAN. The previous acceptance of service from 7:00 AM to 4:00 PM, five days a week has now become an expectation of continuous 24 hour a day service with decreased frequency and duration of any unavoidable outages. This grant will help provide a firewall that should reduce down time where students and staff lose access to the WAN and Internet to minutes rather than hours.

The districts and schools count on the AEA Information Technology (IT) Department to maintain a network that can grow as their demands grow with as few interruptions of service as

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possible. This grant will not only help provide the stable, responsive network districts need today, but will also support future growth as they expand their one-to-one laptop initiatives and increase online learning opportunities.

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The Mississippi Bend Area Education Agency is one of nine AEAs across the state of Iowa created by the 1974 Iowa Legislature. It provides educational services, media services and special education services to approximately 50,000 students in twenty-two public school districts and twenty-two approved non-public schools in Cedar, Clinton, Jackson, Louisa, Muscatine and Scott Counties.

The Mississippi Bend Area Education Agency does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, creed, gender identity, marital status, sex, sexual orientation, national origin, religion, age, socioeconomic status, or disability in its educational programs, services or employment practices. Inquiries concerning this statement should be addressed to Dr. Edward Gronlund, Equity Coordinator, at [563-344-6315](tel:563-344-6315).