

# Westfield School District Delivers 21st Century Learning Environment Case Study

## CASE STUDY

*RMM helps Westfield School District leverage the power of Cisco solutions to bring collaboration to school district.*

**R**ural school districts in Wisconsin face increasing challenges to provide students with a quality education. Decreasing enrollment, mounting financial pressures and the lack of resources to offer comparable curriculum as school districts in large communities, leave many wondering if students are prepared for continuing education or entering the workforce with the necessary skills.

The Westfield School District is typical of many rural school districts. “Our school district draws students from three counties and area codes,” explained Bonnie Dresen, Director of Media for the Westfield School District. “The geographical size of the district is almost 350-square miles, while the total number of students is just over 1,200.”

Offering a well-rounded curriculum that includes classes in foreign languages and advanced placement (AP) were becoming more difficult because of budget cuts and increasing costs. Westfield explored several options before moving forward with video conferencing.

### Hitting the Books

There were serious discussions with a neighboring school district on consolidating the two into one school district. Several obstacles, including a major logistical challenge caused the two districts to abandon this option.

Virtual and charter schools offered potential. However the vision developed by staff and administration in Westfield did not meet the requirements from the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. “We wanted to provide a ‘blended’ type of virtual school,” Dresen shared. “Studies from Minnesota showed students enrolled in an onlineschool were not testing well compared to students attending a traditional school. They also had increasing numbers of virtual students not completing the programs. They believed that not having some manner of connection to the classroom caused the problem.”



### The Real Test

“That’s where we think our blending concept helps alleviate the poor testing and completion issues,” Dresen said. “It provides personal attention for students in the program without the expense of having a person on-site with the student. It wasn’t until Bill Moll, Technology Coordinator for the Westfield School District, discussed the district’s needs with RMM’s Sales Manager, Arthur Corallo, that we decided on the video conferencing option.”

The school district had two more challenges to overcome before moving forward. Fortunately, one challenge almost solved itself. “For most school districts, the major challenge for technology improvements is funding,” Moll said. “Westfield was no different. Fortunately, we had a plan for where we could get funding. Then we needed buy-in from the district and community and we were able to enlist the support of key people who ‘helped getting the OKs. Because of that backing, the project came together with few issues. We were fortunate to have special funding from Microsoft become available which helped us avoid taking this to a public referendum.”

Additionally, the goal of integrating the video conferencing into the district was to provide a benefit to the community. “Because we presented the video conferencing capability as a potential asset for delivering things like post-high school training for individuals and local businesses, we were able to get a buy-in from the community,” Moll stated.



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## A Perfect Score

“I’ve worked with Art Corallo from RMM Solutions in Wausau on several projects,” Moll said. “We discussed the needs and challenges of the school district and how the video conferencing option could work—not only to provide quality educational options but how it would work with the current infrastructure.”

“RMM Solutions helped us focus on what we wanted. Through their partnership with companies like Cisco, it gave us the knowledge of the capabilities out there to make this work. Art also shared his insight and experiences from similar applications of this technology and the things other organizations are doing in the state and around the country. We couldn’t get that kind of feedback and exposure without Art and RMM Solutions.”

Once the funding issue was resolved, the implementation and installation went smoothly, at least from the perspective of the school district. Corallo, RMM Solutions Sales and Account Manager recalled the challenge of installing the video conferencing and two additional projects for the district in 15 days.

“Summer school got out in late July,” Corallo explained. “We needed to completely re-engineer, redesign and replace existing product with the new infrastructure and have it up and running by the time teachers returned to school in late August.”

There was only five hours of downtime for the whole project.

## Show and Tell

With the video conferencing up and running for three weeks, Moll said they have not implemented much of the curriculum planned for the video conferencing. However, Moll did cite three instances where the new video conferencing system is already paying dividends.

“We’ve already done some professional development for our office staff,” he said. “We had the office staff use the video conferencing room to learn more about improvements from the district’s web developer. Had they sent someone to do the training, it would have cost \$1,000.”



Several district administrators have used the video to attend meetings, saving the district the cost for travel and downtime while travelling. “

## Extending the Classroom

“Recently, we held a virtual field trip with our 7th grade history class utilizing our 21st century learning environment connecting to an Egyptian expert from Vanderbilt University,” stated Moll. “Our students can experience destinations and hear from university experts from anywhere in the world, not just within a bus ride of an hour or two.”

“Our plans going forward include connecting with other schools and professionals. This allows Westfield School District to expand our curriculum by offering language courses, higher education courses, and advanced college placement classes,” Moll said. “Finally, we have conferenced with three other districts that have this capability and people at the University of Wisconsin to determine how we will use it going forward.”

“Public education is changing and while no one really knows the direction it will take, we do know that there will be a heavier video presence in it,” Moll shared. “We’re moving from a brick and mortar type of school to one that expands the boundaries of ‘anywhere, anytime.’ Thanks to RMM Solutions and our new state-of-the-art video conferencing system, the Westfield School District assures its students a 21<sup>st</sup> Century education.”



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