



Duval Finds Success One STEP At A Time

Duval County Schools needed to manage and connect 129,000 students, 13,000+ staff, and 195 schools in a single software program that was feasible, intuitive, and would show real-time data. STEP CG delivered.



The mission of Duval County Schools is “to provide educational excellence in every school, in every classroom, for every student, every day.” To carry out this mission, they had a problem to solve: “How to manage and connect all locations in a ‘single pane of glass’ software program that shows real-time data, and is feasible and intuitive, as well as easy to use right out of the gate.”

The challenge was not only the monetary expenditure but also the need to build a system that was secure, could be easily monitored by the CTO as well as new members of the technology team, and could be validated 24/7.

CUSTOMER OVERVIEW

Located in Northeast Florida, Duval County Public School District (DCPS) is the 20th largest school district in the nation serving the urban, suburban, and rural areas of the City of Jacksonville and Duval County, Florida. Jacksonville is the largest city in the contiguous US in land area and ranks as the 14th largest city in population with more than 1,000,000 residents. Less than one percentage point from being an “A” district, Duval focuses on ensuring “every student is inspired and prepared for success in college or a career and life.” Duval has over 129,000 students, employs over 13,000 staff, and has 195 schools.

BUSINESS NEEDS

Duval County School’s technology department needed to monitor and validate that every facility was consistently up and running. Each facility could have multiple pieces of equipment, ranging from 1-2 Extreme Networks VSPs, a Cradlepoint router with dynamic failover, a routing switch, and an ASE circuit as well as needing verification of Internet throughput. Supervisor of Network Operations, Stephen McLaughlin, was tasked by Duval’s CTO to find

a way to know in an instant if all these pieces of equipment were working. He wanted to be able to look at a screen and visually see a map of every facility with a red or green light indicating whether they were up or down. In past years, Duval had faced consistent outages throughout the school year, including during critical times such as testing. Student scores, instructional time and teaching were all being majorly impacted. The software they were using had astronomically outrageous licensing and service fees and was very difficult to navigate and use. Not only was the software expensive and cumbersome, it was not meeting their needs in practice. Outages were prolonged and diagnostics were not immediate.

Duval also had a very young and inexperienced staff after McLaughlin became the Supervisor of Network Operations. They were very limited in both manpower, networking knowledge and equipment. McLaughlin had a vision of where he wanted the district to go but knew he would not be able to get there with his current staff. He was able to fix the equipment issue but he still had a deficit of finding someone with the knowledge and background who could help train his people daily as well as deploy all the new switches and wireless in their newly opened data center.

THE STRATEGY and SOLUTION

STEP CG proposed their Dashboard as a solution for Duval County Schools. STEP CG's Dashboard offered a "pane of glass" view that could geographically show every location in the district, monitor real-time data of the top 5 pieces of equipment and send alerts if something went down or needed to be addressed.

Dashboard is a service that delivers customized performance monitoring, network, analytics, key health indicators, and reporting in a virtual appliance that is easy to deploy, view and use. All information was embedded into the software, so the Duval team immediately knows critical information such as what device was down, circuit ID, Internet throughput, etc. The software can be customized based on the information they needed and will grow as the district adds new features, appliances or facilities.

DASHBOARD

Multiple benefits were realized when DCPS switched to Dashboard. They were able to monitor their data in real-time. If something did fail, they are able to click on the location and see what pieces of equipment were in the facility, the ID's of each item and immediately identify the issue. This was a huge savings in time and man hours just in the diagnosis of issues. This resulted in a huge Return on Investment savings from switching to Dashboard from the previous software being used by the district.

Not only was the previous software outrageously more expensive, it was not nearly as user-friendly, as robust or had the customization capability of Dashboard. Dashboard was able to check every box and more for all the needs of the district.

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Dashboard far surpassed what our CTO was asking for and it was fantastic. There were so many extra features that we were all just blown away. STEP CG was able to take something that was just an idea and turn it into something that was so useful. It was great!

The value for what you get was INVALUABLE!

– Stephen McLaughlin, DCPS
Supervisor of Network Operation

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ENGINEER

Once McLaughlin took over his role, he was able to open a new data center in 30 days, oversee the deployment of over 3300 switches, deploy Automated Campus, install Dashboard and eventually deploy new wireless throughout the district. Because his staff was young and inexperienced, he knew he needed help, so he made the decision to hire a contract engineer through STEP CG. McLaughlin remarked, "Having a STEP CG engineer on-site allowed my techs to learn all the new technologies being deployed in the district and be hands-on. It was a no-brainer."

Along with a young staff, the antiquated equipment and consistent outages had taken a toll on the district reputation. The issues in the district were well known by the administration and staff, as well as the state. They were no longer able to get any extensions for testing due to having so many outages over the years. After hiring a STEP CG engineer, deploying new equipment and implementing Dashboard, the district no longer had to deal with these problems.



WHAT MADE STEP CG STAND OUT

STEP CG is an award-winning, nationwide IT services engineering firm headquartered in Northern Kentucky/Greater Cincinnati. While STEP CG is known for providing cutting-edge IT services and solving complex IT challenges through a blend of experience and expertise, McLaughlin says STEP CG is not just a vendor but a partner.

According to McLaughlin, "STEP CG meets my needs promptly and efficiently. They have highly experienced engineers in every discipline you can imagine. They have not only met any vision I have brought to them; they have exceeded them! They are easy to work with and flexible."

STEP CG's team is comprised of expert engineers who provide enterprises with solutions for cloud, security, collaboration, core infrastructure, managed services and more.

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Even with deploying a new data center, we had ZERO issues on the first day of school. It was nothing short of remarkable based on previous years.

– Stephen McLaughlin, DCPS
Supervisor of Network Operation

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