McAllen ISD – Sets the Bar for Today's Modern Classroom with AirWatch and F5
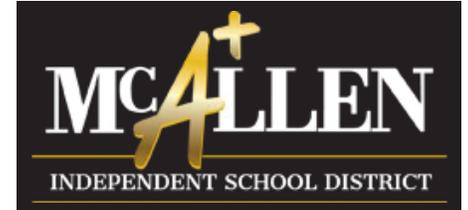
The Client

Located on the southern tip of Texas, only four miles from the U.S. – Mexico border, the city of McAllen is one the fastest growing metro areas in the nation. About 85 percent of the 129,877 residents are Hispanic and approximately 27 percent of them live below the poverty line. The city is home to the McAllen Independent School District (ISD), which is comprised of 34 campuses with more than 25,000 students; more than half of which are considered economically disadvantaged.

In 2011, McAllen ISD took an ambitious and ground-breaking step as part of a transformational approach to learning proposed by school superintendent Dr. James Ponce, Ed.D. The idea: to provide a mobile device to every student in the district regardless of age, creed or socioeconomic status. The initiative, Transforming Learning in the Classroom, Campus and Community (TLC3), is also known as TLC Cubed. "It makes sense that education must change to meet the needs of our students. Traditional methods of learning, like reading books and regurgitating facts no longer work. We have to ensure our kids are achieving results," Dr. Ponce said. "Students today are digital natives. It's common for them to have a device in their hands because they've grown up using them. It's our job to push the envelope and provide the best solutions for our students."

Solution Overview

- Client: McAllen ISD
- Industry: Education
- Geography: North America
- AirWatch Features: MDM, 1:1 Deployment
- F5 Features: VIPRION, Access Policy Manager, Local Traffic Manager
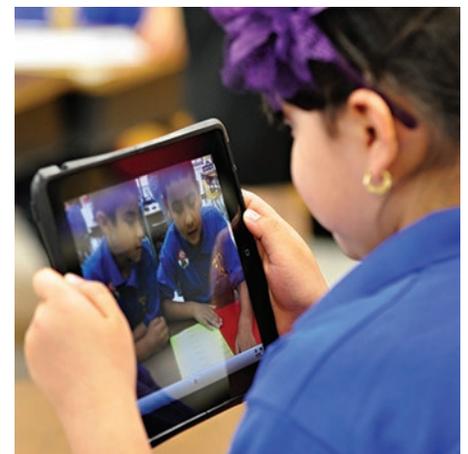- Devices: 25,000+

The Challenge

The five-year, $20 million initiative uses private, state and federal funding for costs related to technology including hardware, software, infrastructure, training, support and maintenance. Pat Karr, McAllen ISD coordinator for network services and support, oversees 25,000 iOS devices and the related infrastructure for TLC3. Karr recognized that for the district-wide initiative to be successful, McAllen needed an enterprise mobility management (EMM) solution to manage and secure thousands of school-owned iPads.

After researching a number of EMM solutions, Karr selected AirWatch® by VMware®, based on the company's proven track record of implementing large-scale deployments, its global presence and analyst-recognized safeguards to ensure the integrity of devices. "My first piece of advice when

evaluating EMM providers is to test several solutions. This helped me determine what the must-haves were and what I could do without. AirWatch was the best fit for our needs," said Karr. He noted that the extended device monitoring capabilities of AirWatch were critical to the district's ability to gauge a return on its multi-million dollar investment. "The iPads are technology assets, but they also represent an investment in students and staff. We want to ensure that we're getting the most out of them on both counts. That means knowing how much they're being utilized and ensuring they're being utilized correctly."

A critical component of the TLC3 initiative was protecting students from the Internet. "We needed to block access to certain sites and enforce the same filtering policies, whether the device was connecting via our campus network, a student's home network or a public network like a coffee shop," explained Karr. To meet this need, he selected F5, a Seattle-based company that helps organizations seamlessly scale cloud, data center and software defined networking deployments.

> "We're able to see students, who previously had limited exposure to technology, engage with the material they are learning and quickly adapt to using mobile devices in the classroom. It really illustrates the mission of TLC3 – we're impacting students and their entire support network."
>
> – Pat **Karr**
> Network Services and Support Coordinator
> McAllen ISD

The Solution

Karr and his team worked closely with AirWatch throughout the iPad deployment, which spanned 12 months. "AirWatch is an invaluable partner for us. They allow us to provide certain applications and Web clips that we can customize based on grade level and school type right from our dashboard. Our library services system can designate clips district-wide or through specific grades or classrooms. It helps relate the content to an age group and ensures students are receiving valuable, relevant material. It's this custom tailoring that's a huge advantage for us," he said.

Karr added that AirWatch has helped McAllen eliminate countless hours of manpower and third-party costs, which are normally associated with large hardware acquisitions. "The traditional mechanism of 1:1 entails a lot of manual work – syncing stations and configuring one device at a time. We don't have to configure 25,000 devices individually in a factory-based process because we are leveraging AirWatch to do everything. Instead of having a third-party imaging each device, we can save $250,000-$400,000 in these costs alone."

The school district relies on F5 to prevent students from turning off the VPN. F5 also provides McAllen with granular security, policy management, redundancy, resilience, reporting and analytics. "Without F5, we wouldn't be able to control student activity on the mobile devices and that that means we wouldn't be able to provide this program at all," said Karr.