

CASE STUDY / K-12 SCHOOL DISTRICT / MONTANA

A *Scalable* and Personal Solution

How a growing Montana district secured its network and sized it for the students it has not enrolled yet.

AT A GLANCE

CLIENT

East Helena School District

LOCATION

East Helena, Montana

INDUSTRY

K-12 Public Schools

SERVICES

Sophos XG Firewall · Network Assessment · Ongoing Support

SCALE

~1,400 students across 5 schools

HEADLINE RESULT

Secured and ready to scale, K-8 to K-12

01 THE CLIENT

A district that keeps *growing*

East Helena sits just east of Montana's capital, and it has been getting bigger. The district serves just under 1,400 students and roughly 250 staff across five schools.

Most significantly, it recently completed a transition from a K-8 district to a full K-12 district. On paper that is a governance change. In practice it is new grades, new staff, new devices, new bandwidth, and an entirely new set of expectations about what the network is expected to carry on a Tuesday morning.

Five schools and 250 staff is a wide footprint for a district this size, and the K-12 change touched all of it: new schedules, new rooms, new devices, and more people online at the same moment each morning.

Growth of that kind is a good problem, but it is unforgiving of infrastructure decisions made for the district you have rather than the district you are about to become.

02 THE CHALLENGE

New to education IT, and *sizing* for growth

DJ Howell came to East Helena as technology coordinator after 13 years in health-insurance IT. He knew infrastructure and he knew security. What he did not yet have was a reference point for how a school district's demands differ from a corporate network, or for how quickly this particular district was about to expand.

The risk in that position is not choosing the wrong brand. It is choosing the right brand at the wrong size, and finding out two years later, after the budget cycle has closed and the students have already arrived.

IN HIS WORDS

"Had I tried to audit the network myself, I likely would have undersized the solution. Pine Cove found the right solution at the right price point."

03 FINDING THE RIGHT PARTNER

Not built for a quick *sale*

East Helena brought Pine Cove in to assess the network. What stood out to Howell had less to do with the assessment itself than with how the conversation was framed: around where the district was heading, not around what could be closed that quarter.

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It is clear that Pine Cove isn't in business for a quick sale, they are in it to help organizations reach their long-term goals, and I really appreciate that.

DJ HOWELL · TECHNOLOGY COORDINATOR, EAST HELENA SCHOOL DISTRICT

04 WHAT CHANGED

Audited first, then *sized*

Pine Cove treated capacity as the real question, and worked the assessment before the recommendation.

01 A deep-dive network audit

Pine Cove assessed the district's network end to end, establishing what was actually in place and what it could realistically carry.

02 Bandwidth sized for growth

Capacity was specified against projected enrollment and the completed K-12 span, not just the headcount on the day of the audit.

03 An industry-leading Sophos XG firewall

The district was secured behind a firewall chosen to protect it now and to leave headroom as the network grows into its new size.

04 Ongoing support

Pine Cove stayed on to support the environment as it expands, so the plan does not end at installation.

05

THE RESULTS

Secured, and ready to *scale***1,400**

students across five schools, on
a network sized for more

K-12

full grade span supported, up
from K-8

Sophos XG

firewall securing the district end
to end

East Helena got the thing that is hardest to buy: a solution that fits now and still fits later. Nothing had to be torn out and repurchased when the K-12 transition finished filling in, and the district avoided the quiet, expensive mistake of buying for its current size.

Howell also got the reference point he did not have coming in, which turns out to be worth as much as the hardware.

06

LOOKING AHEAD

Room to *grow*

East Helena is still growing, and the plan assumes it. As enrollment climbs and the K-12 span fills out, the network has headroom already specified and a partner who has been through the district's numbers once and can do it again.

Ready to *chat*?

Let's talk about what your organization is trying to accomplish, before we talk about products.

[Schedule Your Free IT Assessment](#)

CALL

800.432.0346

EMAIL

sales@pinecc.com

WEB

pinecc.com