

# When the Wi-Fi Goes Down, So Does the Greenhouse

**How a tiny Wyoming charter school found a technology partner who actually understood what they were trying to do**

## **The School**

Prairie View Community School sits about an hour north of Cheyenne, in a town of roughly 200 people. It's Wyoming's first state-sponsored charter school, founded to expand and continue educational opportunities for families in the region. Students drive in from ranches and small communities across a wide geographic radius—some traveling 30 miles each way.

What makes Prairie View unusual isn't its size or location. It's what happens inside. The school runs on a project-based learning model, which means students don't just read about circuits or ecosystems—they build them. On any given day, you might find middle schoolers programming microcontrollers, elementary students tending an aquaponics system, or high schoolers running a student-managed laser engraving business that takes real orders from the community.

This kind of learning requires technology that works. Reliably. Every time.

## **The Problem**

When Prairie View first opened, it inherited an aging patchwork of IT equipment from the previous district school. The wireless network was inconsistent—strong in some rooms, nonexistent in others. Internet access didn't extend to all buildings. The phone system still ran on landlines that created safety concerns. And the security cameras and door access systems were approaching end-of-life.

Director Bryce Cushman wore multiple hats, including IT. But designing, deploying, and maintaining a modern school network wasn't something he had time or specialized knowledge to do well—and the stakes were too high to get wrong.

During a community showcase, connectivity issues interrupted a student-led automated greenhouse demonstration—an example of how inconsistent infrastructure could surface at exactly the wrong moments in a highly hands-on learning environment.

Over time, the pattern became impossible to ignore. Technology gaps weren't just inconvenient, they were creating friction in environments where reliability mattered most. When your students are running real businesses, monitoring living ecosystems, and building systems that need to communicate with the internet, Wi-Fi isn't a convenience. It's infrastructure.

On top of everything, Prairie View needed help navigating E-Rate, the federal program that provides funding for school technology. The application process is notoriously complex, and getting it wrong means leaving money on the table—or worse, compliance issues down the road.

## Finding the Right Partner

Prairie View was referred to Pine Cove Consulting while looking for help with their E-Rate application. What they found was something different from a typical vendor relationship.

“The first conversation wasn’t about products or services. They wanted to understand what we were trying to accomplish as a school. What does project-based learning actually look like day-to-day? What are students doing? Where does technology fit into that? I’d never had a technology company ask me those questions before.”

— Bryce Cushman

Pine Cove took a consultative approach from the start, acting as an extension of the school’s leadership team rather than an outside contractor. They walked the buildings. They watched students work. They asked about the aquaponics system and the laser engraver and what happens when a student’s code needs to talk to a sensor in the greenhouse.

Then they designed a solution.

## What Changed

Pine Cove designed and implemented a new network built on RUCKUS Networks technology, selected for its performance, cost-effectiveness, and E-Rate compatibility. The work included a complete wireless refresh with coverage across all school buildings, network segmentation for students and staff, and replacement of the unreliable landline system with VoIP phones.

But the technical work was only part of it. Pine Cove also guided Prairie View through the E-Rate process, handling the paperwork and compliance requirements that had felt overwhelming. That alone removed a significant burden from school leadership and accelerated the timeline for upgrades.

More importantly, Pine Cove stayed. They continue to serve as Prairie View’s outsourced IT department—monitoring the network, providing security guidance, supporting Google Admin, recommending hardware, and training internal staff. They check in regularly. They answer the phone when something breaks.

“They’re professional, but they’re also real. They understand we have a budget. They explain the trade-offs clearly. When I call with a question, I don’t feel like I’m being upsold—I feel like I’m talking to someone who actually wants our school to succeed.”

— Bryce Cushman

## The Results

The tangible improvements are straightforward: consistent wireless coverage throughout the school, reliable systems for instruction and administration, simplified communications, and reduced risk from aging infrastructure.

But ask the staff what actually changed, and they talk about something else: confidence. Confidence that the technology will work when students need it. Confidence that someone will answer when they call. Confidence that the school’s ambitious educational model isn’t being held back by its infrastructure.

The automated greenhouse project? It ran flawlessly at the next community showcase. The students demonstrated how their sensors monitored temperature, humidity, and soil moisture—all feeding data to a dashboard they’d built themselves. The Wi-Fi didn’t go down. The technology did what it was supposed to do: disappear into the background and let the learning happen.

### Looking Ahead

Prairie View is preparing for its next phase of modernization, including a security upgrade with new cameras and door access controls. Pine Cove will manage the project once funding is finalized.

They're also working together on thoughtful approaches to AI in education—supporting the school's philosophy that AI should be a "thought partner" for students, not a shortcut.

As the school continues to evolve, the partnership continues too. Not because of a contract, but because it works.

### About Pine Cove Consulting and RUCKUS Networks

Pine Cove Consulting recognizes the critical role of stable and high-speed connectivity in driving business growth and efficiency. This understanding has led them to partner with RUCKUS Networks, a vanguard in the realm of wireless solutions and network infrastructure. Known for their high-performance networks, RUCKUS Networks excels in creating robust, scalable, and seamless wireless experiences.

As a privileged partner, Pine Cove Consulting integrates RUCKUS Networks' advanced networking technologies into solutions. This collaboration ensures clients receive best-in-class connectivity, facilitating smooth digital operations and fostering a connected business environment.

With Pine Cove Consulting and RUCKUS Networks, you aren't just connected; you're empowered.

# Small schools deserve big support

**Pine Cove Consulting and RUCKUS Networks helps rural and independent schools build technology infrastructure that actually supports what they're trying to do.**

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