

Gordon County School System Improves Classroom Instruction, Maximizes Planning Time, Reduces Costs with LifeSize HD Video

Rural school system leverages the federal E-Rate program to connect all K-12 schools and administration office

Organization

Gordon County Schools, Calhoun, Georgia, USA

Gordon County School System is a rural, K-12 school district located approximately halfway between Chattanooga, Tennessee and Atlanta, Georgia – it's the last rural school district between two large cities. The district consists of two high schools, two middle schools, and five elementary schools located in the northwest corner of Georgia.

The system serves approximately 7,000 students and offers a wide variety of course offerings supplemented with strong emphasis in technology and quality teaching.

In recent years, Gordon County has received numerous honors and awards from The Governor's Office of Student Achievement and the Georgia Department of Education. One high school received the Platinum Award for Greatest Gain of Students Meeting and Exceeding the Standards. Four elementary schools received the Distinguished School Award for making Adequate Yearly Progress for three or more years.

Every classroom is a standards-based classroom with twenty-first century technologies for quality teaching. The goal of the school system is to challenge all students in a nurturing and caring environment.



Gordon County School District is a K-12 school system serving more than 7,000 students.



CHALLENGE

With district-wide budget reductions and virtually no money for travel in the budget, Gordon County needed to keep educators connected for departmental meetings and professional development while eliminating travel.



SOLUTION

A total of 19 LifeSize HD video communications systems were deployed throughout the Gordon County School System - LifeSize® Room™ and a cart-based LifeSize® Team™ unit at each school and one at the administration office.



RESULTS

By utilizing federal E-Rate funding, Gordon County was able to purchase twice as many LifeSize units than if they went with another manufacturer's product. Significant reduction in travel and improved district-wide communications.



Challenge

Like so many public school districts in the US, budget cuts were an all too familiar reality for Gordon County. With a growing number of students, fewer teachers and limited funding, the school board needed to find a way to bridge the gap.

One particular item of concern - professional development for teachers. The state of Georgia requires that all teachers complete 10 Professional Learning Units (PLUs) or 10 hours of specialized training, every year. In previous years, the district would send teachers to trainings or conferences in locations 35 miles away or farther. Additionally, the county would hold monthly training sessions and bring in curriculum consultants to give teachers ample opportunity to meet the State requirement.

Unfortunately with recent budget reductions, they didn't have enough money to bring in leading education experts as frequently as they had in the past or send teachers to trainings or conferences. Additionally, in 2008 the district's travel budget was also significantly reduced. With some schools were more than 40 miles apart, a simple on-site meeting or training now became a bigger issue. Gordon County needed to find a suitable communications alternative.

The district needed a solution that would allow the 700+ teachers in the district to stay connected with one another not only for professional development but also internal and departmental staff meetings and training sessions - all with virtually no travel budget.

New to video communications, Gordon County Schools needed a solution that made sense.

Gordon County's Key Requirements:

Superior quality: HD audio and video for a seamless, in-room feel between locations

Unique flexibility: Easy to deploy, simple to use, with built-in collaboration tools

Unmatched price-performance: With budget cuts on the rise and communication in high demand, a solution must make sense fiscally



"LifeSize HD video enhances the ability of our schools to develop students who are critical thinkers that utilize teamwork as they prepare to contribute to and live in a global, technological society."

- DR. BILL MCCOWN, ASSISTANT SUPERINTENDENT,
GORDON COUNTY SCHOOLS



Solution

The Gordon County School System sought out a local innovative systems integration firm to demonstrate the different video communications systems on the market and help the district find the best possible solution.

After a thorough evaluation process, LifeSize emerged the clear winner. 19 LifeSize HD video systems were implemented, with two in each of its nine schools and one at the district's central administration office. Each school has a stationary LifeSize® Room™ unit and a cart-based LifeSize® Team™ system that can be moved from classroom to classroom within the school.

To procure the systems, Gordon County utilized the federal E-Rate program, which provides eligible kindergarten through grade 12 public schools and libraries 20 percent to 90 percent discounts on approved telecommunications, Internet access, and internal connections costs. Combined with the unbeatable price-performance of the LifeSize systems, the E-Rate program allowed Gordon County to purchase twice the number of systems than otherwise possible.



Results

Gordon County sees tremendous benefit by using LifeSize HD video systems.

“The LifeSize systems are very easy to use and our teachers are very comfortable with the technology,” said Linda Whitacre, Assistant Superintendent at Gordon County Schools. “In addition to helping us become better teachers by keeping us connected, LifeSize has helped reduce the cost and administrative burden of travel and in-service teacher training. Because they’re used so frequently, our LifeSize systems are paying for themselves. Every school system that has access to E-Rate funding should utilize the funds to get this technology into their schools.”

“Video conference technology isn’t just a business technology; K-12 schools can benefit immensely from the ability to create a broader, more diverse educational program,” said Craig Malloy, CEO, LifeSize Communications. “Gordon County School System is a great example of how reliable, intuitive, easy-to-use and cost-effective high definition video technology can promote a more engaging and effective learning environment.”

“LifeSize HD video enhances the ability of our schools to develop students who are critical thinkers that utilize teamwork as they prepare to contribute to and live in a global, technological society,” said Gordon County’s Superintendent, Dr. Bill McCown.

In the near future, McCown and the staff at Gordon County plan to implement LifeSize video communications directly in the classroom. Coupled with the district’s strong focus on giving students the opportunity to experience state-of-the-art technology first-hand and the growing problem of teacher shortage, distance learning is the natural next step.

“The addition of the LifeSize video experience to the classroom will improve teachers’ options to develop a rigorous and relevant curriculum, as well as build stronger relationships with their students,” Whitacre said. “We have already begun to partner with other districts, universities and regional education centers to plan virtual field trips and arrange special lectures from university professors that will enhance the curriculum for students, as well as incorporate more technical and specialty-focused training for professional development sessions. It’s very exciting what this technology can do - giving our students and teachers the opportunity to get a broader sense of our world, outside of the four walls of a classroom, the opportunities for teaching and learning are endless.”



Today, Gordon County uses LifeSize for departmental meetings and professional development for educators. In the future, the district plans to implement the technology in the classroom.



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