BUTLER AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT
strengthening connectivity

7,600 STUDENTS

15 BUILDINGS

150 SQUARE MILES

600 FACULTY
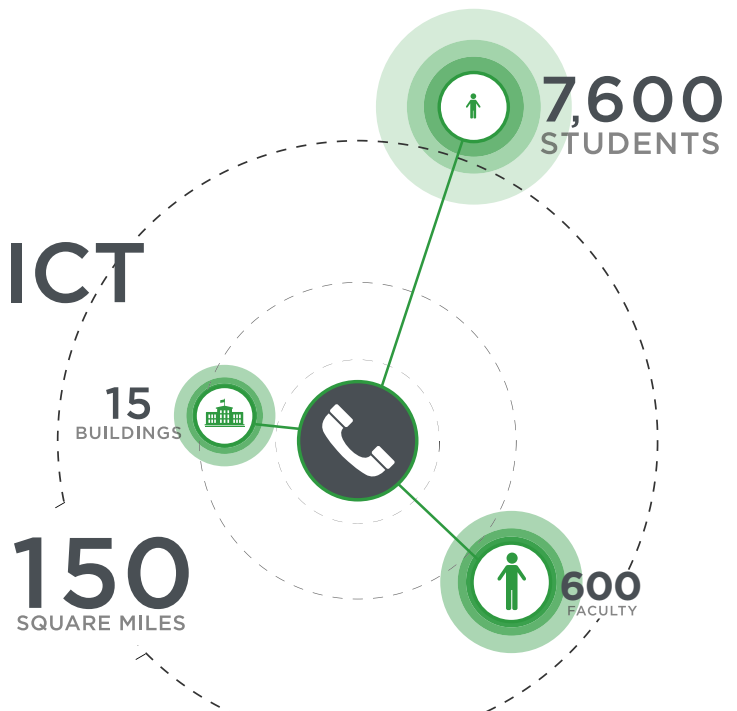
STRATEGY
INFRASTRUCTURE

INDUSTRY
EDUCATION

TECHNOLOGIES USED

The Butler Area School District serves a big community, and that can present unique challenges.

The district encompasses a large suburban and rural area of western Pennsylvania, with fifteen buildings spread across 150 square miles, serving 7600 students and employing 600 faculty members – making communication crucial. Recently, however, the staff began to see outages in the 16-year-old phone system, and the network was showing signs of age, unable to keep pace with the district's growing educational vision.

"We had two different, significant needs converge at the same time," says Jerry Slamecka, assistant superintendent for personnel, technology and federal and state programs. "We were outgrowing the capacity of our network and our overall capacity to deliver content to the classroom." Since safety and security hinge on reliable communication, the district sat down with key industry players to find a solution.

"We have been working with Butler for many years now, and have gotten to know both their technology and their people," says Jhony Perez, OpenArc's managing partner for network infrastructure. "We understood the issues and brought in our top architects and engineers to provide an efficient, scalable solution." And they delivered. Over the summer of 2012, OpenArc designed and implemented a complete overhaul of the district's network infrastructure using Cisco hardware, a sizable upgrade of the wireless LAN and a new Voice over IP (VoIP) phone system with nearly 900 Polycom handsets – creating one of the largest educational telecommunications systems in the region. The redesigned local and wide area networks feature a 10-gigabit backbone and give up to ten times the performance of the previous network, while the high-speed wireless system was upgraded to 802.11n, providing another significant performance boost.

850+
POLYCOM
handsets

"We looked at several proposals for the project," says Rose Conroy, Butler's telecommunications network administrator. "OpenArc's design included more calling

features at no additional cost, and their long-range plan, together with the ease of setup, management tools and help and support made them by far the best of the field." In fact, OpenArc was able to deliver this comprehensive solution in a year when the district was facing significant budget concerns. "Pricing for a school district has always been huge," Slamecka says. "We're a public entity, and we owe it to our taxpayers to be effective and efficient with tax dollars. OpenArc appreciated the fact that we were working on a very tight budget with limited resources."

Slamecka was also impressed with OpenArc's deep expertise in educational technology. "One of the biggest benefits of working with Jhony and his team is their experience with K-12 education," he says. "You can't work in a school system and only focus on technology. You have to have people with a vision of how the technology fits the learning process." Perez concurs. "Our company was founded on a passion for education. We're dedicated to working with educators and sharing their mindset."

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Once the project was completed, the district was able to implement several forward-reaching initiatives: streaming video, student use of iPads and other handheld devices, and an advanced communication template through VoIP that allows teachers to push vital and recurring information like announcements, grade reports and test results directly to parents and students with ease.

"We wouldn't be looking at any of those right now given the performance of our network a year and a half ago," Conroy says. "The network upgrade was absolutely critical in setting the stage for some of the educational implementations that we're currently involved in."

ZERO
downtime

Slamecka lauded the fact that the installation was completed entirely over the summer, and parallel to the existing networks - resulting in a transition with zero downtime. OpenArc personnel were available onsite throughout the installation for training and support, and for followup after implementation. "I have a wonderful staff, but when you're trying to support an entire telecommunications network with six people, it's very, very difficult," he says. "Having a partner like OpenArc that can offer additional help and direction is very important."

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"The bottom line is that we have a longstanding professional relationship with OpenArc," Slamecka says. "They have worked hand-in-hand with us on several projects, and no project has been too small. We feel very comfortable working with the OpenArc team for any need." OpenArc's combination of open architecture networks and industry leading, top quality hardware resulted in a scalable, future-proof implementation that not only addressed Butler's technological and educational needs, but saved the district considerable sums of money.