



Indian River and CPSI: A SIFA Success Story

Indian River County Public Schools in Vero Beach, FL

Enrollment count: 17,000

Number of buildings: 39 schools districtwide.

Located in the Florida coastal town of Vero Beach, Indian River Schools has slowly evolved from a small oceanside community to a population of over 105,000. As with many school districts, this population growth did not expand the district's IT staff size. In fact, the district office occupies a former hospital, with the network staff paradoxically housed in the morgue. Yet, there is plenty of life in the network area, which successfully strives to handle the needs of the district.

Problems:

The small staff packed a lot of punch when it came to upgrading to Windows 2000, collapsing a couple dozen domains to a single domain and deploying Visual CASEL. Indian River's most recent accomplishment is the automation of their account creation process, relieving the work load for both the district office staff and school technology coordinators.

SIF Solutions:

Like many other school districts, Indian River saw the Schools Interoperability Framework (SIF) standard as a vehicle to exchange data between their network applications. The challenge, however, was that the district's student and HR system does not have a SIF agent to pass the data necessary to create network and e-mail accounts. To resolve this issue, the district created downloads from the system and imported the data into Computer Power Solutions of Illinois's (CPSI) Universal Agent, which creates a SIF-normalized database that can feed information to other SIF-certified applications. This data is used to create home directories, user profiles, staff Exchange mailboxes, class rosters and student/parent e-mail accounts for the district office and 20 schools.

One issue that instantly became obvious with the new solution was the data coming from the mainframe HR and student information system. It was in all capital letters, which in turn changed all the display names to all caps rather than in title case. The district's active directory no longer looked user friendly. To resolve this problem, the CPSI programming staff quickly developed a routine that converted the names so they displayed in an acceptable format. Names are now in the proper format with no intervention needed from the district office.

One of the reasons why school districts shy away from student e-mail is the potential nightmare of trying to track the movement of students. Indian River expanded the use of SIF to automate the creation of student and parent e-mail accounts that are hosted in CPSI's St. Louis data center. The SIF Agent for Visual CASEL has an interface to their VC-Mail student e-mail product. VC-Mail provides filtered web-based e-mail access for students that teachers can use in conjunction with class rosters available within Visual CASEL. If a teacher wants to send an e-mail message to an entire class, he or she selects a roster, then can choose to send the message to students only, parents only or both student and parents. If a student is suspected of abusing his or her e-mail, teachers can also use the roster feature in Visual CASEL to view a student mailbox. Parent mailboxes are created for each student so that teachers can send individualized messages regarding a particular child. Parents can also forward their e-mail to another account if they wish.

As a result, Indian River has almost 31,000 student and parent accounts that are administered from within Visual CASEL without the direct need for intervention of the VC-Mail servers. New accounts are automatically created when a student is enrolled in the student information system. There is a tool within Visual CASEL that allows school technology coordinators to extract student and parent e-mail account information such as the logonid and password.

Results:

All accounts are generated based on a security screen within Visual CASEL that allows the district to assign different logon information for the school network and the e-mail accounts for security purposes. Students benefit from the use of CPSI's total solution by using the Student Tool that is available on their desktop when they log on. The tool allows student to log on to VC-Mail without the need to enter another logonid and password. If the district chooses, students can only use their e-mail while on the district's network.