Hermon School District

The Hermon School System selects FirstLight for dependable, low-latency, high-speed fiber connectivity.

HERMON SCHOOL DEPARTMENT
Home of the Hawks

CHALLENGE

Hermon is a small town that neighbors Bangor, Maine. The town spent $19 million on a new high school, and with no fiber connectivity and limited resources, the Hermon School District needed a way to ensure students didn't get left behind in the new digital economy and connected world.

Although the high school was the primary focus of brick and mortar improvements and enhancements, the community knew it had to create a plan that enhanced the educational journey of all its students – from grades K-12.

SOLUTION

When it comes to IT innovation, Hermon is a small town with big city sophistication. Jeff Wheeler, Director of Information Systems for the Hermon School District, is too modest to say so, but since coming on board 25 years ago, he's a primary reason for Hermon's remarkable and unique success.

That is, along with fiber connectivity and a longtime partnership with FirstLight.

Wheeler recalls that Hermon's superintendent of schools wanted to do something meaningful for the community after the town agreed to build a new high school in 1995. So the School District offered dial-up Internet service for all taxpayers — between 200 and 300 homes — and became the town's de facto Internet Service Provider (ISP) and help desk.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

COMPANY:
- Hermon School District

INDUSTRY:
- Education

LOCATION:
- Hermon, Maine

CHALLENGE:
- Need for dependable, low-latency, high-speed fiber connectivity to allow students across the Hermon school system access to its Linux-based network as their primary gateway to learning
- A way to affordably ensure that students from grades K to 12 have access to the modern technology to enhance the learning environment

RESULTS:
- FirstLight's low-latency, high-speed fiber connectivity and 2 Gig bandwidth allows the Hermon School District to run all computing resources
- FirstLight's fiber network allows the town offices and school system to network with low latency and high availability
- Since all students are assigned a personal computer, FirstLight's high-speed connectivity allows them access to a Linux-based network platform with access to their entire academic portfolio throughout their school career

That was long before fiber connectivity was widely available. "We had large pipes coming into the school district, and we covered expenses for last-mile connectivity for the town," says Wheeler. "We installed our own fiber between school buildings and the town office. It was a wonderful collaboration between Town Hall and the school system that's been going on for 20 years."

Hermon's IT arrangement with schools is even more unique. Hermon's elementary, middle and high schools operate on computers donated to the community by an organization called Ruth's Reusables, which collects used hardware and servers from companies such as LL Bean, local banks, and other businesses that update equipment every three to five years. Wheeler's department repurposes the computers, which operate district-wide on a Linux operating system.

"For $5,000, we have computers for everyone across the district," explains Wheeler. "We use them for streaming, video production, design, and most school work. And what's truly noteworthy is that the Linux system and a student's entire work portfolio follows the student throughout his or her school career. A high school senior can review an assignment she did in fifth grade, seventh grade, or as a high school sophomore. If they have a smartphone, we provide Internet access as well.

"Regardless of financial status, every student is connected. To do that well requires a low-latency, high-speed connection that FirstLight offers."

When FirstLight built out its fiber footprint from Bangor to Hermon last year, it provided a better connectivity option for Hermon schools instead of wireless connectivity they had arranged with a local company, or dial-up Internet, which is largely obsolete. Hermon purchased 1 Gbps Internet service from FirstLight, and is now upgrading to 2 Gbps Internet service.

"For years, fiber terminated at the edge of the community," adds Wheeler. "With FirstLight's fiber connectivity, along with a new processor and a modern version of Linux, our system runs like a rocket."

Wheeler credits some of the success for the Linux system and repurposing computers across the school system to FirstLight Chief Revenue Officer, Matt Jancovic, who started his career as an IT consultant to Wheeler when Jancovic had his own business. "Matt was in the right place at the right time. Matt's knowledge of Linux helped me, and he ran the first servers here and put some ideas in my head," remembers Wheeler.

Judging by the success of students within the Hermon School District, those ideas really took off.

ABOUT FIRSTLIGHT

FirstLight, headquartered in Albany, New York, provides fiber-optic data, Internet, data center, cloud and voice services to enterprise and carrier customers throughout the Northeast connecting nearly 9,000 locations in service with more than 30,000 locations serviceable by our 15,000-route mile network. FirstLight offers a robust suite of advanced telecommunications products featuring a comprehensive portfolio of high bandwidth connectivity solutions including Ethernet, wavelength and dark fiber services as well as dedicated Internet access solutions, data center, cloud and voice services. FirstLight's clientele includes national cellular providers and wireline carriers and many leading enterprises, spanning high tech manufacturing and research, hospitals and healthcare, banking and financial, secondary education, colleges and universities, and local and state governments.