

CASE STUDY

ACTS Enables Private School to Seamlessly Integrate Online Instruction

The U.S. education system increasingly relies on a mix of digital technologies and traditional classrooms to deliver the best learning experiences for students from all walks of life. But as the need for IT transformation grows, many private schools are challenged with developing technology strategies that enable seamless collaboration, improve student access to course materials and support instructors' day-to-day activities.

IT Enablement: Starting from Scratch

In 2005, First Coast Christian School (FCCS) realized it needed to modernize its IT infrastructure and knowledge-sharing systems to provide students and instructors with a more digital-friendly learning environment. At the time, the FCCS campus was not a centralized network and relied on small computer labs to support middle school and high school students' education.

These labs were filled with obsolete, outdated computers that had frequent hardware and software issues, and the school did not have the in-house IT support needed to make sound improvements.

"Our partnership with ACTS began a journey to transition from a basic computer lab environment to a fully integrated campus that incorporates all the features and benefits of a centralized network," said Ashely Teel, Director of Technology at FCCS. To solve these challenges, FCCS partnered with the experts at ACTS to create an IT implementation roadmap and develop strategies that would support wide adoption of digital technologies. The ACTS team helped FCCS build a new IT infrastructure and initiate their move to Office 365 for Education, allowing for better collaboration between instructors, administrative faculty and students.



“By helping us on the back end, ACTS was able to transform our 1-to-1 technology goals into a fully realized program.”

At first, there was some resistance to this transition, but over time the staff began to see the advantages of centralized servers and email capabilities. Thanks to the partnership, FCCS was able to roll out campus-wide Wi-Fi that helped students and teachers stay connected.

Scaling-Up Online Learning: Next Steps

After streamlining their IT infrastructure, FCCS began looking into new learning technologies that could enrich their students' education, both in and out of the classroom. In 2010, the administration made the switch from a Windows-centric campus to a hybrid environment that could support Apple products.

In particular, FCCS wanted to cultivate a higher student-to-device ratio, but its existing IT framework did not have enough bandwidth or access points to support a one-to-one environment.

FCCS started by making adjustments to their existing equipment, but it became clear that new devices and IT policies were needed to support wider transformation.

With the help of ACTS, the school was able to upgrade its computer labs and seamlessly integrate iPads into their classrooms.

“When we first started out with ACTS we were at ground zero. We had a hodgepodge of old, outdated computers, no centralized network and no clear roadmap to support our IT goals. They helped us really pin down our implementation plan in a way that made the transition much smoother, better coordinated and cost-effective.”

During this process, ACTS provided hands-on support by helping FCCS establish firewalls, web browsing restrictions and other system-level protections. The ACTS integration team also ensured all new technologies and management practices were in line with the Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA), eliminating a wide range of compliance concerns.

Future-Proofing Education: Distance Learning and Beyond

The partnership between FCCS and ACTS has helped create a more reliable and organized IT environment for students and instructors, both in times of normalcy and crisis. With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, FCCS was able to quickly pivot to online learning thanks to its flexible IT infrastructure.

As a result of the work FCCS had already done with ACTS, they were able to get up and running with online instruction three days after the state closed schools. On-campus school instruction paused on March 16, and full online instruction (K4 to 12th grade) began March 18 and allowed FCCS to finish out the school year.

"ACTS was there to hold our hand and really help us through the process of IT transformation. Their team provided the hands-on support we needed to build the right infrastructure, networks and systems for our students and faculty."

Throughout the global health emergency, ACTS has continued to support the school's helpdesk, hardware, end user, security and compliance efforts by focusing on what really matters: Ensuring maximum system resilience and availability to enable distance learning at scale.

"Throughout our partnership, we've relied on ACTS to be our technical advisors to help guide our IT improvement strategies," Teel said. "The beauty of it was that they understood the industry - how the education world and the business world have started to overlap - and made adjustments to better meet our educational needs."

"Having worked with ACTS, we were ready for the disruption and uncertainty caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. We were ready to switch to distance learning without having to sit on long conference calls, and any issues that did spring up were quickly solved by ACTS' support team."

Today, FCCS has successfully established a one-to-one IT program for students that spans from the 3rd grade to high school graduation. The faculty has also benefited from widespread transformation—at the outset, only 1% of campus employees used learning technologies. After working with ACTS, IT usage has skyrocketed to 100% in less than 10 years.

IT tools and technologies have become the fabric of learning experiences at FCCS, opening up new opportunities to modernize K-12 education and create more accessible, adaptable and agile classrooms. To learn how ACTS can support IT innovation at your school, [reach out to us today](#).