



Avery County Schools

Improving education with student-centric learning

The Avery County School District includes over 2,100 students and prides itself on its one-to-one computing initiative. All students — from elementary to high school — are provided with an iPad or MacBook to utilize. These devices enable individual instruction while giving students access to courses online.

Personalized Learning for Better Results

One of the formal beliefs of Avery County Schools is, “Children are our greatest resource,” which is why the system ensures each student is given an equal opportunity to learn in a safe, nurturing environment. A student-centered education process, using familiar electronic devices, addresses individual needs and engages students for better outcomes.

Superintendent Dr. David Burleson comments, “The one-to-one computing initiative has a tremendous impact. The technology enables individual instruction and access to online courses that would be otherwise unavailable.” Specifically, students can learn Mandarin Chinese or take Advanced Placement courses online. “Students and parents have access to technology they never dreamed possible.” Chief Information Officer Dennis Brown adds, “The one-to-one initiative enables parents to view their children’s grades, assignments and study materials. We’re excited about the positive changes and hope for even greater gains in the future.”

The school system takes advantage of the program’s flexibility to enable learning for students who have dropped out of school because these students take a majority of their courses online. The Blue Ridge Academy program was selected by the North Carolina State Board of Education two years ago as the Most Innovative Program of the Year and in 2015 was awarded the Governor’s NCWorks Award of Distinction as an “Outstanding Innovative Partnership.”



SkyLine’s Tim Miller (left) works with Eric Hale, Avery County Schools' Network Engineer

Providing Student Opportunities

Burleson notes, “At the inception of our one-to-one initiative in 2011, we were the only district in North Carolina known to have a one-to-one initiative in all grades, K-12. Some school districts have one-to-one programs, but most are grade specific.”

In addition, Avery County High School includes three academies: a ninth grade program that helps freshmen assimilate into high school; a Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) academy; and a comprehensive high school. The district’s vision is to become a national model of education. Brown notes, “STEM Project Lead the Way is helping our middle and high school students prepare for robotic competitions. Even two of our elementary schools are involved in robotics, and we hope all five elementary schools will be offering it soon.”



Connectivity Is Essential

For its technology to work smoothly, Avery County Schools needed a strong, reliable infrastructure, which it chose SkyLine/SkyBest to provide. Brown notes, “We had an open-source-based VoIP system for several years that we outgrew, and support for it was virtually non-existent. We felt exposed and weren’t sure how quickly our telecom system could recover if something happened.”

The recently installed SkyLine/SkyBest Mitel VoIP system provides consistent service and stability, which is essential for efficient communication with staff and parents. Burleson notes, “We can now retrieve voice mail remotely, and transferring calls is much simpler. We no longer worry about losing calls. SkyLine deployed the whole system in one week-end, which took a lot of coordination.

In addition, SkyLine has been a tremendous partner in providing grant money for technology in the classroom, helping with the one-to-one initiative and being responsive to our needs.”

Brent Keith, Strategic Sales Supervisor at SkyLine/SkyBest, notes, “We’ve been a long-time partner with Avery County Schools and are becoming more involved in their mission-critical infrastructure needs. It’s a very progressive school system that fully embraces technology, and we know how hard the entire staff works to keep Avery County Schools in the forefront of education innovation.” Gbps,” Keith says.

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- Dr. David Burleson, Superintendent, Avery County Schools

Besides a comprehensive education, Avery County Schools provides its courses in a positive, friendly environment. The schools offer personal meetings with parents; and students and parents can meet together with a counselor during the registration process. At the end of every year, parents and students are asked to complete a survey and provide anonymous feedback.

Burleson notes, “We also work hard to make our schools as safe as possible with officers at the high school and middle schools, and cameras at the entrance of all schools with a buzz-in system.” Brown adds, “We’re in the pilot stage of a project sponsored by the Governor’s Crime Commission called Speak Up, which provides students with a smart-phone app that lets them anonymously post concerns about bullying, weapons or other dangerous situations.”



Brent Keith, Dennis Brown, Chief Information Officer, Dr. David Burleson, Superintendent