

The Bronx Better Learning Charter School Works with IKON to Navigate E-Rate Application Process and Implement Critical Technology Initiatives

The Bronx Charter School for Better Learning was founded in 2003 by experienced teachers and school administrators with a focus on providing students with a solid foundation for academic success. In their most recent test results, the school outperformed their districts average and numerous schools in New York State. Technology is an important part of the classroom experience, and every year the school applies for E-Rate funding from the federal government to purchase essential voice and data communications services. One day, the school's Technology Coordinator, Kevin Williams, noticed a major network issue. There was a problem with the domain controller, which caused his system's replication to stop working and end-users to receive password error messages. The IT company he was using at the time looked into the problem but was unable to solve it.

"The teachers and administrators at our school rely on technology to perform their jobs and to stay in communication with students, parents and each other," said Williams. "We have a commitment to our students and the community to offer a high-level of service. When things aren't working smoothly, it can be very disruptive."

Determined to get to the bottom of the situation, Williams went through his rolodex and recalled having met IKON Business Group while evaluating potential E-Rate vendors. He gave them a call in hopes that they could offer some assistance. IKON immediately solved the problem, and from that point started an ongoing partnership with the charter school working on minor network maintenance issues as they arose.

In particular, the school had been struggling with their internal email server—the system would often crash, and staff members were getting bombarded with spam. IKON resolved the issue by placing them on a hosted email platform, allowing them to repurpose their old email server instead of purchasing a new one for thousands of dollars.

"The biggest difference between IKON and other vendors we've worked with is availability," Williams remarked. "When something goes down in the middle of a school day, we need to get it back up immediately. Ninety-five percent of the time, I can pick up the phone and get a live technician from IKON on the phone to help fix the problem."

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"IKON saves us a lot of time," Williams went on to add. "In fact, my time spent on network maintenance has been cut down drastically from 3-4 days per week, to just 3-4 hours per week. That extra time allows me to offer greater support to our end-users and work on more strategic initiatives that benefit our entire organization."

Two of those strategic initiatives include the organization's plans to expand its wireless network and to open up second school. Both schools' networks will need to be connected in order to share resources across locations. IKON was instrumental in helping Williams correctly apply for the E-Rate funds that will help get the project done. "IKON has a wealth of knowledge in navigating the E-Rate process," said Williams. "They've been able to help out any time I've come across a question on an E-Rate application that I didn't know how to answer."

Under IKON's advisement, The Bronx Charter School put in an application for an MPLS network that will connect the two schools without having to purchase duplicate phone systems and servers. IKON also pitched in and offered guidance when the school needed to purchase amplified tablets in order to fulfill its 1:1 initiative where every child will have access to a smart device to assist with their learning. The project is still underway, but an initial pilot where every 4th grader received a netbook has been met with much enthusiasm and success.

When asked what he enjoys most about working with IKON, Williams responded, "Apart from making me look good, IKON is very knowledgeable. They are a very important part of our team. I'm not sure where I'd be without them, and I really don't want to find out. IKON is like Tylenol—they offer pain relief!"

