

IKON Helps Ascend Public Charter Schools Navigate Remote Learning and Staffing Challenges with After-Hours Support and Education-Focused Solutions

Ascend is a network of K-12 public charter schools serving 5,800 students in 15 schools across Brooklyn—New York City’s most populous borough. Focused on providing a rich and joyful liberal arts education, Ascend is committed to paving a sure path to college for its students and families. As Managing Director of Technology, Emeka Ibekweh handles the hardware, software, and networking needs of the entire organization. Like many schools, Ascend’s technology resources were stretched thin during the pandemic. In addition to his normal day-to-day responsibilities, Ibekweh suddenly found himself fielding a barrage of help desk support requests from students and staff working from home – a nearly impossible task for he and his small internal IT team to manage on their own.

To help take on some of the load, Ibekweh looked within his personal network for a solution and was led to IKON Business Group who quickly stepped in to provide after-hours support.

“References are why we ultimately chose IKON. I’m always speaking with vendors and staying tuned-in to what’s working for my peers at other charter schools. Everyone always spoke so highly of Ken Nero and his team – including a fellow colleague who worked with IKON in the past,” said Ibekweh. “The skillset that IKON brings and their laser-focus on K-12 schools were key differentiators. It’s important for us to work with vendors who are invested in our community. Working with a managed services provider who specializes in the education space has been invaluable.”

Once hired, IKON also worked diligently to ensure all students and teachers were equipped with the necessary learning tools to promote both in-school and remote learning – including laptops, high-speed internet access, interactive white boards, web cameras, and more.

“Making sure students had reliable internet connectivity at home was an especially tricky challenge to navigate,” Ibekweh remarked. “But with IKON’s help, our team succeeded in providing families with Wi-Fi hotspot devices and putting them in touch with local cable and internet providers.”

Working with IKON to oversee Ascend’s increased technology needs also meant Ibekweh didn’t have to seek out and hire additional full-time employees in a turbulent job market.

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“IKON put us into a month-to-month contract that allowed us to scale certain services up and down as our needs shifted with the pandemic. We didn’t have to stay locked into services we no longer needed.” Ibekweh continued, “If I had to do the math, I’d say that hiring the required number of full-time employees would easily have cost us 4-5x the amount that we pay IKON.”

Also top of mind for Ibekweh was the recent surge in cybersecurity attacks against schools. The sudden rise in remote learning and increased access points to school networks presented the perfect scenario for unscrupulous hackers to exploit. “Cybersecurity is

always a moving target,” Ibekweh said. “We were aware that navigating a new virtual environment with untrained students and staff could easily make us vulnerable to ransomware attacks and phishing attempts. IKON worked diligently to keep our systems secure and handled end-user training with professionalism and grace.”

Overall, Ibekweh and his team are very happy with IKON and have a positive outlook towards the future. “IKON’s tailored solutions have risen to the challenge at every turn. As we grow and scale, they can grow and scale with us – so I’m pleased about that.”

