Tablets in education: Why one Texas school district turned to the Surface

By Trevor Ferguson

The tablet landscape is crowded with iPads, Galaxy Notes, Kindles, and Surfaces, each including a different blend of features, that IT managers must carefully evaluate to select the tablet that meets the needs of thousands of users. Unfortunately, there is no "best" tablet for any industry or organization — it all depends on what systems you're currently using and what functions you need to achieve defined goals. That's exactly what a Texas school district recently discovered as it navigated this exact situation, vetting the many tablet options to find the one that best fit its teachers' needs and its existing IT infrastructure. Here's how the school district narrowed down the tablet field and what option they ultimately settled on.

The Challenge

The district sought to equip its 2,200 district teachers with tablets to aid in classroom activities and increase mobility and productivity throughout the school year. But many tablets could achieve those objectives. The district was unsure which tablet would offer the greatest benefits, and needed to narrow down the choices. It turned to longtime partner SHI to dig into its true needs and match the district with the right device.

SHI defined the district's six key device needs as follows:

- Quick and easy integration into the district's current IT environment

- Clean connectivity with the school's Cisco Meraki system

- Intuitive usability for teachers and students

- An HD display to allow teachers to read digital textbooks and watch instructional videos

- A USB port for file saving and transfers

- A monitor output to allow for presentations

The Solution

Once SHI defined the district's tablet needs, it compared those functionalities against current devices running on competing platforms.

Since the school system already held a Microsoft software contract, the Surface would easily comply with existing licensing of Office 365. The district could also manage the devices using Cisco Meraki. Plus, the familiar Microsoft interface would allow teachers to quickly learn the tablet's functionalities and seamlessly integrate them into everyday class activities.

As for the device itself, Surface's full-sized USB port and MicroSD card slot allow for easy file saving and sharing. It also includes a full HD display and access

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to more than 100,000 apps. Finally, Surface tablets run full versions of Microsoft Office apps, such as Outlook, Word, Excel, and PowerPoint, the preferred programs for educators. At the time, Office for iPad was not yet available, making this a key differentiator.

In the end, Microsoft's Surface emerged as the district's best tablet option.

The Benefits

Since the rollout, teachers in the district are experiencing the benefits of increased mobility. They can create lesson plans, log in to the school district's internal information system, look up their students' attendance, and keep up with school emails at work or at home. In addition, the district is offering Microsoft's Windows in the Classroom (WiC) Sessions to teachers to provide recommendations on how Surface devices can be used to engage students in the classroom.

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With the plethora of tablets currently on the market, it's hard to know which one is the best fit for your organization. If your company's interested in making a large-scale tablet acquisition and you'd like to learn more about the device options, please contact Mobility@SHI.com.

Case Study: Tablets in education: Why one Texas school district turned to the Surface
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