

GRAVES COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT

CHALLENGE - IMPROVING LEAD TIME & AGILITY DESPITE SHRINKING BUDGETS

With three systems administrators in charge of supporting an entire school district, comprised of 18 locations distributed across 556 square miles in Kentucky and with over 2,000 devices, the Graves County Schools IT Department needs to be able to act fast to resolve issues.

“Since our district covers a rather large area, responding to issues efficiently can be a challenge when they may occur at locations almost 20 miles apart,” explained John McMillen, Chief Information Officer for Graves County School District.

When Java 7 Update 10 exposed a zero-day vulnerability that could be exploited by attackers to run remote code and command, McMillen and his team had to move fast to patch their systems to Java 1.7u11, and later to 1.7u13 (a series of ad-hoc fixes released by Oracle to address the vulnerability).

Day-to-day challenges for the team also included detecting users and machines in real-time in order to pinpoint the source of issues, supporting users without interrupting their work, maintaining high quality support despite shrinking budgets, and reducing the district’s energy footprint.

RESULTS - REAL-TIME SOLUTIONS TO SOLVE SCHOOLWIDE ISSUES

Value to the Enterprise

“Goverlan has not only helped us overcome our [geographical] challenge, but it has changed our model of response, saving us money and time. When possible, we now respond virtually first, cutting down the number of tickets that we have to physically respond to. Responding physically in our district is a challenge in itself, but it also costs money. Not only do we spend money on gas and vehicle wear and tear, but we also spend time behind the wheel,” noted McMillen.

Despite declining operating budgets, the Graves County Schools IT Department can continue to provide on-the-spot support to their schools. “Our budgets have been shrinking in public education for years; with Goverlan, we can provide a higher quality of service while operating on a smaller budget. Also, by cutting the lead times on our responses, we gain good will with our end users by allowing them to get back to normal operation faster,” he added.

Powerful Search & Detection, Global Patches & Updates

To handle the latest Java security breach, McMillen’s team, including John Wilkins, District Network Technician, used Goverlan to quickly isolate computers containing the flawed Java version, and then push the new patches to those machines school wide.

“Goverlan saved our hide and gave us the quick access and agility we needed. With Goverlan’s Scope Actions, I was able to create a remote console command (which I named ‘Java version reporter’) to detect and isolate machines with Java 7 Update 10, and then patch Java on those specific machines, without having to drive into or RDP the users’ machines. If computers were turned off, I created a Custom Action to selectively wake those machines via Wake on Lan and then push the Java patch to these individual targets,” explained Wilkins.



THE CHALLENGE

- Improving lead time & quality of support despite reduced funding
- Pushing software patches school wide
- Needed real-time access to users & computers
- Limited options to share, customize & automate actions
- Interrupting teachers while performing support tasks
- Unable to automate power on & shutdown of computers

GOVERLAN'S SOLUTION

- **Powerful search** capabilities to access users/computers in **real time**
- **Customizable/shareable** actions that can be pushed school wide, run ad hoc or automated (i.e., software patches)
- **Background processes** for unobtrusive support
- **Simple power management** - automate power on & shutdown computers school wide

“On some machines, the Java installation became corrupt if the version being patched was already installed (a side effect of some users inadvertently downloading the update when prompted by a Java pop-up), requiring time-consuming manual uninstall/reinstalls. To circumvent this, I modified a Scope Actions to detect existing installations and bypass any that match the version I’m installing. The most powerful part of Goverlan’s Scope Actions is being able to create a fully customized action in less than 5 minutes, save it as a template, and then simply click to run school wide. I can also share these customized actions with the team, saving them a great deal of time,” he continued.

Unobtrusive Support for Teachers

Another aspect of Goverlan that has proven essential to the Graves County Schools IT team is the ability to perform troubleshooting tasks without interrupting the users’ work. “A teacher can continue a PowerPoint lecture while I perform my tasks unobtrusively in the background; they usually don’t know that I’m doing anything until I notify them they’re fixed!” stated Wilkins.

“[Goverlan’s] ‘invisible hand’ at the keyboard offers so many options to get things accomplished that any network is bound to benefit - be it one with 10 machines or nearly 2,000 machines. Goverlan has proven invaluable for instant issue resolving and machine updating; if I can see the machine in Goverlan, I can make changes to it in real time,” he added.

Green IT Made Easy

Additionally, as part of a recent district-wide initiative to implement a greener IT and reduce the schools’ power consumption and operating costs, the team began using Goverlan to automate the shutting off and turning on of machines. “We can now easily shut off machines at the end of the day and then start them early in the morning prior to students arriving,” noted Wilkins.

CONCLUSION - MORE EFFICIENT, GREENER IT

With Goverlan, the Graves County Schools IT team now saves more time and effort in performing their daily support tasks, and is better equipped to handle any challenge today’s complex IT environment throws their way. Additionally, they have been able to reduce their energy footprint and costs by automating the powering on and off of school computers, implementing a greener IT.

“Goverlan offers very useful, time-saving features integrated in one console; I can dispatch a GPUupdate to a group of machines network wide with a simple right click instead of having to create a batch; I can quickly pull all local printers off, migrate them or install new ones - all with a Custom Action I can set up to right click and go. In addition, having a remote command line in one program along all these other tools has also proven very useful,” noted Wilkins.

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ABOUT GRAVES COUNTY SCHOOLS

The Graves County School district, consisting of 14 schools spread across 556 square miles in Graves County, Kentucky, including Elementary, Middle, and High schools, is guided by a student-centered philosophy with teachers at its core, and fosters an educational environment where schools, parents, and communities work together to help students reach their highest potential. To learn more, visit www.wkatc.kyschools.us