



Georgia School District Selects Cohesity for Ransomware Resiliency and Reduced TCO



INDUSTRY
Education

USE CASE
Backup and Recovery, Dev/Test,
Ransomware Recovery

COHESITY SOLUTIONS
DataProtect, FortKnox

WORKLOADS
VMware, SQL

Clayton County Public Schools (CCPS) is located just south of Atlanta, Georgia, and serves more than 52,000 students from kindergarten through twelfth grade. The district has 66 school campus locations, including sites for alternative education, STEM and STEAM programs, and psychological education centers. A challenging curriculum is offered at every level, and students can also participate in exploratory courses and extracurricular activities.

The IT team and primary data center are located in Jonesboro, with a disaster recovery site at a separate school location. With an annual budget of more than \$744M, CCPS is dedicated to developing programs to foster the best place to learn.

Challenges

Over the last several years, CCPS has witnessed a dramatic change in technology, including the move to virtualized environments and the increased threat of ransomware. At the time, the IT team relied on solutions from Dell EMC and Data Domain. The legacy environment was not able to back up and restore virtual machines (VMs), and as most of its entire server environment was running VMware, a new solution was needed.

Key Benefits

- Secured critical data against ransomware and other cybersecurity threats
- Met cybersecurity insurance requirements for data isolation
- Faster patch testing by over 90% for dev/test
- Improved backup times for VMs by 98%

“Like many enterprise environments, we at Clayton County Public Schools were looking to update our 3-2-1 backup strategy to protect our data from increasingly sophisticated ransomware attacks. The simplicity and convenience of the Cohesity FortKnox SaaS solution were just what we needed to achieve this, while reducing operational complexity and meeting demanding SLAs. With FortKnox, we now have an isolated, immutable copy of our critical data in the cloud without having to manage an offsite data vault ourselves, saving us a lot of time and budget that can be utilized to better serve our students and teachers.”

– Kurt Pritchett, Sr., Network Engineer, Clayton County Public School

Routine backups took exorbitant amounts of time, often more than 12 hours and even then, the IT team did not have a clear sense of how long backups were taking because the process was tedious and cumbersome.

In the last year, CCPS needed to meet mandates for cybersecurity insurance compliance. While the district has a separate disaster recovery (DR) location, it was required to have an offsite copy of data isolated from the primary environment to qualify for cybersecurity insurance.

Solution

CCPS was on the verge of deploying a Veeam solution when the IT team learned about Cohesity, and then decided to do a Proof of Concept before making a final decision. The ability to manage their entire backup and unstructured data environment from a single, secure multicloud data platform, along with the significant cost savings it offered, drove CCPS to move forward with Cohesity. CCPS also recently implemented Cohesity FortKnox, a SaaS data isolation and recovery solution hosted on AWS that provides an immutable copy of data in a Cohesity-managed cloud vault to provide an added layer of security against ransomware and other cybersecurity threats.

“We are confident we made a good choice in selecting Cohesity for our enterprise data management across our entire school district,” said Pritchett. “Like many enterprise environments, Clayton County Public Schools has seen tremendous changes in IT in the last five years and we needed a single, secure solution for our virtualized infrastructure. Cohesity has not only enabled significant cost and time savings, it has set us up to optimize our future data management and meet cyber resiliency requirements.”

The school district deployed two Cohesity nodes, including one at its disaster recovery location several miles away. Reducing cost was a primary concern for CCPS. EMC licensing costs alone were more than the total cost of the Cohesity solution. The school district also made a policy decision to only store 30 days of backups to reduce the amount of data needed to recover. If the policy were to change down the road, Cohesity’s native integration with the leading cloud providers would provide a seamless route for archival storage.

CCPS is backing up its entire virtualized infrastructure and its SQL database environment. The district is also using Cohesity for dev/test to test patches for VMware, OS upgrades, and other updates.

Results

Like many organizations, security is top of mind at the school district. With Cohesity FortKnox, CCPS not only meets requirements for cybersecurity insurance, it also ensures an additional layer of protection against ransomware. CCPS has had minor incidents of malware, but the threat was mitigated quickly with Cohesity that helped restore data quickly and fix vulnerabilities that led to the attack. “We incurred no financial impact or ransom, and we are confident that with Cohesity we are well-positioned to recover confidently and combat any future attacks,” said Pritchett.

Organizations are often struggling to identify skilled staff resources with cybersecurity and data isolation expertise. With SaaS-based solutions like FortKnox, CCPS can ensure continuity for IT management. “Honestly, it doesn’t get any easier than this. SaaS solutions are what every K-12 needs when you are hard-pressed to find the right talent pool. It was easy and fast to deploy and has simplified our entire environment. With FortKnox, we were able to vault all our data to the cloud in a couple of hours without having to deal with the overhead of managing cloud storage buckets ourselves,” adds Pritchett.

Additionally, the Cohesity solution enabled the IT team to search and recover data directly from Cohesity, without the need to recover whole volumes. Many times an employee would lose a file on a mapped drive and the IT team would only have the name of the file. Without being able to know which server the file resided on, CCPS would have to recover many backups at once, costing the IT team time and resources.

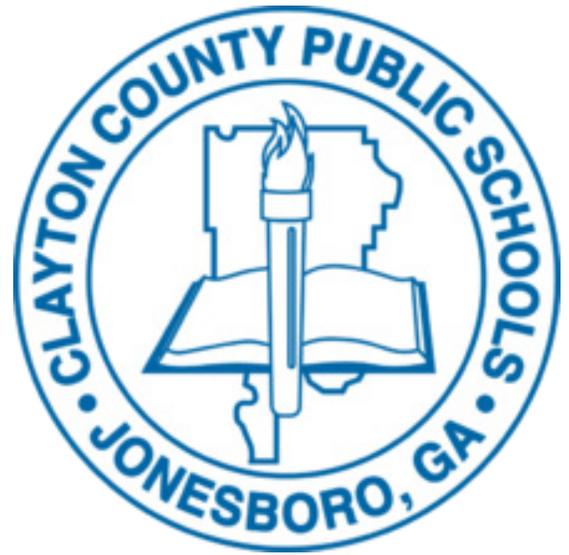
CCPS realized greater efficiency with Cohesity for time savings and business continuity, including reduced RPO and RTO. Backup times for VMs went from five hours to only several minutes, and full backups are completed in less than a day with Cohesity.

Now when the IT team needs to test a patch for VMware tools, they can use Cohesity to clone a VM into an isolated test environment. The district can test and apply new patches before applying them into a production environment. When the IT team upgraded the Windows OS for its servers, they were able to test ahead of time to ensure application compatibility, determine how long the upgrade was going to take in production, and better plan for school staff and resource disruption. With the previous solution, this process took more than an entire day but now with Cohesity, the team conducts many of these operations in under 30 minutes.

“Cohesity support has been instrumental to ensure a smooth deployment. They have been tremendously responsive in providing the IT team what it needed quickly. Cohesity’s performance monitoring features also give the district insight into its infrastructure and gained the ability to spread backup jobs over a broader time range for optimal performance,” said Pritchett.

Some of the many benefits Clayton County has obtained with Cohesity include:

- Secured critical data against ransomware and other cybersecurity threats
- Met cybersecurity insurance requirements for data isolation
- Gained the ability to use Cohesity for dev/test for operational efficiency, including over 90% faster patch testing
- Achieved time and cost savings by moving away from legacy environment
- Obtained the ability to easily and quickly recover data, with tremendous time savings for enterprise backup and recovery
- Improved backup times for VMs by 98%



COHESITY

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