

Reaching our community's kids – the ROCKFI way.

How Rock Island Milan School District teamed up with Verizon to deploy a fixed wireless solution for students during the pandemic.



Supporting fourteen K-12 schools and learning centers, the Rock Island Milan School District in Illinois consistently demonstrates its ability to adapt to its environment and face challenging situations with a “failure isn’t an option” attitude. One such example of how Rock Island succeeded in meeting and exceeding the needs of its roughly 6,500 students is how the district dealt with the COVID-19 pandemic during the 2020-2021 school year.

“When the pandemic hit, none of us knew how long we were going to be residing in our homes,” says Troy Bevans, Director of Information and Technology, Rock Island Milan School District. “And being a high poverty school district we had many students and families who did not have internet access.”

Indeed, of the roughly 6,500 students polled in the district at the time, nearly 80% of them were without any form of home internet service.

Dealing with supply and budgetary challenges

As the entire country experienced during the pandemic, two weeks of sheltering in place stretched ever longer to the point where, as Bevans explains, “it didn’t look like we were ever going to get back.” Device shortages and budgetary concerns made it impossible to provide hotspots to individual families. So Bevans had to pivot. “I decided to create an entirely separate WiFi network, which would work the same way a traditional, secured school WiFi network would, was owned by the district, and that students could log into using their existing credentials.” Effectively, Bevans’ vision entailed creating a secured and ubiquitous WiFi network that would need to span the nearly 30 miles of square footage where the Rock Island School District residential community lived.



- PreK-12 public school district
- Encompasses the City of Rock Island and the Village of Milan in Illinois
- Cradlepoint, Inc. IBR1700 and AER2200 Wi-Fi routers
- Built-in Verizon LTE and a 5G hardware upgrade

Choosing reliable technology partners

A longtime Verizon customer, Rock Island's first call was to Verizon, who also recommended a team-up with Source, Inc. to deliver Cradlepoint, Inc. devices. Bevans and his team worked to implement all the necessary security protocols that would make the massive network extension feat possible. As Bevans notes, "If I wouldn't have had the Verizon cellular I wouldn't have been able to spread the network out as far as I did."

Implementing the solution, and quickly

With Source, Inc. and Verizon, Bevans was able to deploy a combination of forty Cradlepoint, Inc. IBR1700 and AER2200 Wi-Fi routers with built-in Verizon LTE and a hardware upgrade path to 5G connectivity that covered the necessary radius of the residential school district community, and protect for future capabilities. The routers were deployed both inside and outside various buildings and homes, and Bevans named the WiFi network: ROCKFI. Bevans: "I wanted it to stand for something: Reaching Our Community's Kids With Fidelity."

Once the installation sites had been selected, implementation was quick and simple. The routers were all preconfigured so all that one had to do was simply plug it in, turn it on, and connect to the RockFi network. From start to finish, the project took a mere three weeks to fully deploy. "Verizon has always provided great support, but with this project in itself, everybody had to pick up the pace," said Bevans.

But the real winners, in the end, were the near 80% of Rock Island Milan School District's students and families who would have otherwise lost out on a years' worth of instruction.



Staying prepared for the future

While the pandemic is over and students are back in school buildings, the RockFi network is still in place in the event it is needed again, such as for winter weather, which is most often the cause of school closures in Illinois.

Verizon applauds such agencies as the Rock Island Milan School District for continuing to be an "outside the box" technology partner. RockFi rocked it.

“I wanted something that we could own and that we could use again if we needed to. I can just turn a Cradlepoint on and we're ready to go. Boom.”

**Troy Bevans, Director of Information and Technology
Rock Island Milan School District**

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