

Schalmont Central School District



“The Meraki dashboard has really been a winner overall. It makes a huge difference on our end.”

–Terri McCreddie, Director of IT and Network Admin

Challenges

- Spotty wireless connection with multiple hardware vendors
- No visibility into network traffic
- Difficulty troubleshooting remotely
- Expensive solutions lacking support

Results

- Reliable internet connection for entire district
- Easy to configure and manage network via dashboard
- Enhanced visibility and simple, remote troubleshooting via live tools
- Cost-effective with 24/7 support
- Mobile app to manage network on the go

With over 1,800 students, more than 300 teachers and staff, and only one person in charge of the IT and network operations at Schalmont Central School District in upstate New York, it was imperative to find a reliable and easy to manage solution to support the school’s growing technology initiatives.

Schalmont’s network was difficult to manage, comprised of multiple vendors, lacked visibility into traffic or users, and had spotty wireless. With a school device deployment initiative being implemented throughout the district, Terri McCreddie, Director of Technology, knew that to be able to reliably support over 1,000 teacher and student devices, something needed to change. When it came time to replace the existing network infrastructure in the district, Terri wanted a cost-effective, reliable, simple, and future-proof solution. Terri is no stranger to the networking world; she has been in IT for over 15 years and is well aware of the offerings in the marketplace, so when she heard of Meraki, she was eager to learn more.

“We’re small and I’m the only network person, so being able to diagnose right through the dashboard has just been so amazing and helpful.”

–Terri McCreddie, Director of IT and Network Admin

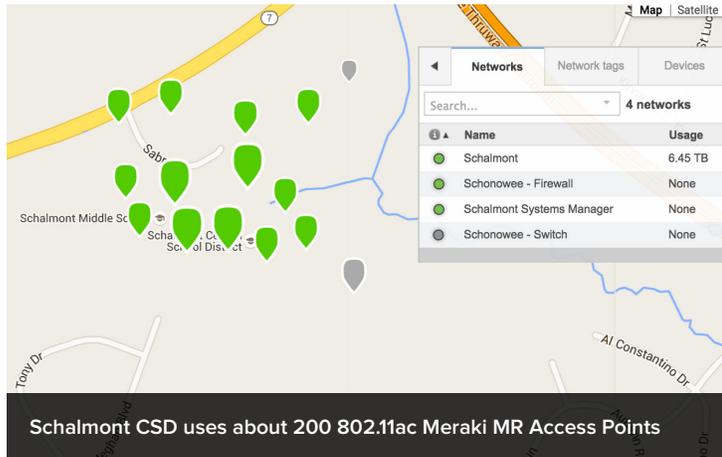
CPI worked with Terri over the course of 8 months to ensure that Schalmont’s network received the attention it deserved. Engineers were brought in, discussions occurred on which models of hardware to choose, where to place them, and suggestions were made on how many APs and switches would be required to support the school - everything Schalmont needed and more. Terri declared that her experience with CPI was “just incredible from the get go.”

“I go into the dashboard and look for things that aren’t the right colors: is it green, yellow, or red? It’s so simple for me.”

– Terri McCreddie, Director of IT and Network Admin

With the help of CPI and a dedicated team of engineers, Terri was able to purchase and install Meraki without a hitch. The Cisco Meraki solution offered Terri everything the school needed and then some. Not only did she encounter a cost-effective solution with a reliable support team, but the ability to manage all hardware in an easy to use, cloud based dashboard interface was just what she needed. Unlike Schalmont’s prior solution, which provided little to no visibility into the network, the Meraki dashboard provides live data on clients connected to the network and their activity. The ability to easily search for a client name or device type and find that information within seconds has provided valuable insight on the network usage.

Along with enhanced analytics, Meraki makes it easy to troubleshoot remotely. The live tools available on the access points and switches enable previously time consuming tasks like cable tests to be completed in minutes.



Schalmont CSD uses about 200 802.11ac Meraki MR Access Points to support reliable wireless access throughout the district. Terri used the dashboard to easily control access to the network depending on student or teacher status. To ensure privacy of important resources, the business office is on a separate SSID. In the elementary and middle schools, teachers and students share an SSID and access the network via a pre-shared key, while the high school is utilizing an SSID for student devices brought from home. Students who agree to the terms of the BYOD network are given credentials and can seamlessly access the web. Through the dashboard, Terri is able to quickly create these credentials for each student, without the need for extra steps or programs. In the future, Schalmont may offer an open SSID for guests visiting the school.

“I have dual roles - I’m the director and network admin - and I don’t have a lot of time to do either job. Being able to see what the problem is immediately in the dashboard is so helpful. It saves me a lot of time.”

– Terri McCreddie, Director of IT and Network Admin

After experiencing the simplicity and ease of use of the Meraki APs, Terri added Meraki switches to Schalmont’s network. One of Terri’s favorite features in the dashboard is on the switches. Network topology provides a dynamic map of the physical links throughout the network and is an efficient way to see if or when there’s a problem somewhere in the network, just by the color of the point on the map, which saves a lot of time with troubleshooting. Terri explained, “If I click on one of the points in the topology, that takes me right to the switch. I can quickly see what’s active and what’s not, I can see the VLANs assigned to each, and I can quickly change them if something is incorrect. This information is at my fingertips

all the time, without digging - all of those links have saved me so much time.” Built-in live tools on the switches are another time saver. Anything from a simple ping to a cable test can be done in seconds to minutes, from anywhere in the world, as long as the dashboard is accessible.

The teachers and students at Schalmont CSD are also utilizing Systems Manager, the Meraki mobile device management platform. Systems Manager is installed on student iPads and school district-owned cell phones. Through the Meraki dashboard, Terri can see how the devices are being used, when they were last turned on, the storage and battery life available, where they are – as Terri confirms, “Systems Manager does everything.” When the iPads were deployed, it was simple to push out apps and textbooks through the dashboard. “The dashboard interface has been an amazing time saver for us,” Terri said.

Digital learning is one of the main tenants at Schalmont CSD - the goal being to start student education with technology early. The Meraki solution enables this goal by providing a reliable and secure network for teachers and students alike.

For more information on how to implement Meraki in your network environment, contact John Perfetto, Client Business Manager at CPI.

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