



"We took a look at iTERA and thought it couldn't possibly be as good as advertised, but it turned out to be every bit as good."

Allen Rawlings, iSeries Administrator

Business Profile

Company Name:
Crown Point Community School Corporation

Headquarters:
Crown Point, Indiana, USA

Industry:
Education

Business Size:
7,600+ Students
Seven elementary schools, two middle schools, a high school and an alternative school.

Business Environment:

- Responsible for the public school system, kindergarten through grade 12
- Must keep student records and other data easily available for many years
- State audits business continuity preparedness
- Highly controlled, publicly funded budget

Implementation Team:

Vision Solutions, Competitive Support Options, Inc. (CSO), and Crown Point Community Schools Corporation

Vision Solutions Products:
iTERA HA™

Critical Issue

Crown Point Community School Corporation (CPSC) depends on its systems to manage its financial operations, keep student records, route school busses, and more. CPSC currently has approximately 13-years worth of student records on its systems. If it relied solely on tape-based backups to protect that data, recovery times would be lengthy. What's more, because backup jobs are typically run nightly, up to 24-hours worth of data may be missing from the most recent backup tape, which would leave that data vulnerable to irrecoverable loss in the event of a disaster.

Results

- Easy and fast implementation.
- Role swaps completed in less than five minutes.
- Requires minimal day-to-day management.
- Gained peace of mind.

Technologies

- RDS financials, student information system, bus routing and other software
- IBM i/DB2
- iTERA HA
- 2 x IBM i Power 8203 E4A (one production, one backup)

Business Challenge

Systems are essential to every enterprise whether it's a for-profit business, a charity, a government agency or department, or an educational organization. And every enterprise has a critical need to protect data and keep it available. The Crown Point Community School Corporation (CPSC) is no exception.

A number of people depend on the data in CPSC's systems. Through a variety of online systems, parents and students can access data via the Web and counselors at the school can do scheduling online, among other applications. If there is a problem, people notice. In the past, within five minutes of the system going down, more than 40 parents called in to complain. As a result, CPSC set an objective of always being able to be back online within no more than 15 minutes.

In addition, CPSC is regularly audited by the State of Indiana. A recent state audit identified the need for a better backup plan for CPSC's data.

CPSC evaluated a variety of options for improving data protection and availability. Included in the consideration set was everything from maintaining a single production system, but moving backup data offsite faster than it was then doing, through to implementing high availability software to maintain real-time replica data and applications on a hot-standby backup server at a remote location.

As is usually the case for most public and municipal organizations, money was an object. CPSC needed a solution that would address its data protection and availability requirements and fulfill the gap identified in the state audit, without exceeding the allocated budget.



Solution

CPSC contacted its IT supplier, Competitive Support Options, Inc. (CSO), to ask for its suggestions. CSO recommended iTERA HA from Vision Solutions. After reading about the features, functions and benefits of the iTERA HA, CPSC was somewhat skeptical. It didn't think that iTERA HA could possibly deliver everything it promised. However, closer evaluation proved that it could.

And the price was right. CPSC was already planning to upgrade its production system, so there was the price of at least one new server to consider. "The cost of the iTERA HA software and two new servers was within what we had budgeted for, so we decided to go the whole nine yards," said Allen Rawlings, iSeries administrator at CPSC.

Now, CPSC runs two IBM i-based servers. The primary system is located in Crown Point's high school. A backup server is situated in CPSC's central office. iTERA HA maintains real-time redundancy between the two so the backup is ready to take over operations whenever necessary.

To minimize downtime due to disasters or any other cause, you need more than just redundant hardware, applications and data. You also have to be able to perform a "role swap" rapidly. This transfers the production role to what had been the backup system so it can quickly assume responsibility for all operations when necessary.

iTERA HA includes a "virtual role swap" feature that allows organizations to verify that the backup system is ready to assume the production role and to test the role swap function, without actually transferring users to the backup system. However, Rawlings wanted more. He wanted to be absolutely certain that the backup system would be ready to take over operations in the event of an emergency. Consequently, CPSC tested a real role swap outside of business hours.

iTERA HA passed the test with flying colors. There was a little preparatory work that had to be done to validate that the backup system was ready to assume the production role, but the actual role swap was successfully completed in only 30 seconds.

CPSC's goal is to never be down for more than 15 minutes. Thanks to iTERA HA, the corporation now believes that it will be able to be back online after an emergency in less than just five minutes.

The implementation of iTERA HA was quick and easy. The corporation filled in a pre-installation information sheet and returned it to Vision Solutions. A Vision technical expert who was temporarily granted access to CPSC's systems then remotely installed the software.

Next, CPSC sent some people on a training course at a nearby Vision facility. During the training, Vision remotely turned on iTERA HA.

Now that the solution is up and running, it requires very little day-to-day management. Rawlings reports that he averages about 15 to 20 minutes a day checking to make sure that iTERA HA is running properly and cleaning out the logs, which he usually does weekly.

The greatest benefit that CPSC receives from iTERA HA is peace of mind. "From 1993 to now, I've never missed a payroll run," explained Rawlings. "This makes me much more confident that I never will."



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