



Newfield Schools Use Virtru to Close the Inequity Gap for Data Protection



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**Sunshine Miller, Director of Technology for
Newfield Central School District**

Why Newfield Schools Chose Virtru

New York state’s Newfield Central School District (NCSD) has undergone massive technological change over the past year: It became a one-to-one district, providing each student with a laptop or tablet to help navigate the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic; it transitioned to Google Workspace for email and collaboration; and it adopted Virtru encryption to protect student privacy and support compliance with New York’s Education Law 2-D.

The Result:

With Virtru, the Newfield Central School District is able to:

- **Achieve New York Ed Law 2-D compliance** for student data, in motion and at rest.
- **Adopt an affordable yet powerful encryption solution** on a tight technology budget.
- **Close the inequity gap for student data protection**, ensuring comprehensive security and privacy for the county’s poorest school district.
- **Adapt to a virtual schooling environment** with an unprecedented number of communications transitioning to digital.
- **Bring educators up to speed quickly**, with easy-to-use tools and best practices that equip them to protect their students’ data.

Encryption, Equity, and Privacy for Every Student

Sunshine Miller, Director of Technology for Newfield Schools, and the district’s IT team are deeply connected with the mission behind their work: Ensuring equal opportunities for all students, equipping them for success, and protecting their privacy and well-being. “Our team is working hard to ensure the entire district is protecting students’ data,” Miller said. “We’re hyper focused on protecting our students’ data, privacy, and their livelihoods for when they graduate and leave our halls.”

But protecting that data is easier said than done, especially for a district with little funding. “We do not have a big tech budget,” Miller said. “We don’t have a big general budget for the district at all. We have a very high level of students with special education needs, and a very high level of students that come from poor homes. So, there are lots of thorns on the rose here.”

For NCSD, finding an affordable encryption solution for the district was a priority. The administrators and the IT team knew that, especially in a virtual schooling environment, safeguarding communications both at rest and in transit would be critical, especially if the district was going to meet New York's Ed Law 2-D requirement. The IT team searched extensively and discovered Virtru, which provided its full suite of encryption for Google Workspace at a price the district could afford.

"We did not think that we would be able to afford encryption for the district," Miller said. "But Virtru has been great for us. I am so happy that we've actually been able to afford encryption – and that we've been able to afford it for the whole district. It's very rare that a company gives you the full product, at a reasonable price that a school district like ours can afford."

Miller noted that many school districts face an uphill battle when it comes to data protection. New York Ed Law 2-D, like many state-level cybersecurity regulations, is an unfunded mandate – meaning districts don't receive additional funding to implement the required technology. This puts smaller, less-funded districts at a disadvantage when they're already stretching to make ends meet.

"The administration and IT team believe that something as important as data protection should not be reserved for districts that can afford it," Miller said. "And, unfortunately, it is. That is the determining factor a lot of time – but with data privacy, that's a real inequity. Virtru has filled that inequity gap for us, and that's so important."

Extending Ed Law 2-D Compliant Encryption Across Google Workspace

Newfield Schools rolled out Google Workspace to administrators and students during the pandemic. Teachers, administrators, and students alike needed a simple, efficient, and secure way to share information. With Virtru, they were able to add an essential layer of encryption to ensure compliance and empower employees to share data securely.

"Our entire district had to come on board with lots of new technology at once. We didn't have a learning management system, so we launched Google in the middle of all of that. And so while they're learning how to use Google, we also had kids that had never had a device in their entire school career," Miller said, referencing the district's transition to one-to-one status, allocating one tech device to each student. "With the framework that we have to come into compliance with, data should be encrypted both at rest and while in motion. We had 'in motion,' of course, under control with the email encryption service that Virtru provided. But, with Google Workspace encryption, now we have at-rest encryption, which is amazing."

"Anyone on our campus that is working with personally identifiable information can actually start a document as an encrypted file," Miller noted. "If we are sharing records that need to be secured, anyone district-wide can encrypt a document to ensure that data and privacy is protected."

Educating the Educators: Student Privacy and Emerging Technology

The onset of the pandemic upended education, and teachers suddenly found themselves teaching in remote and hybrid schooling environments and, understandably, seeking new ways of engaging their students from a distance. Ed Law 2-D teaches us that even though apps may be technically free, there are times when there are strings attached.

"It's like the Wild West of apps out there, and if you're a teacher, you're just desperately looking for the thing that's going to help you get through every day of virtual schooling. But, then you have kids signing up on those apps, and then they're getting clickbait or they're getting advertisements," Miller added. "The snowball grows so quickly. That was something we really had to rein in."

The IT team at NCSD found themselves taking up the teacher mantle, working together to educate the educators.

"We had to help people understand that 'free' is not free. It may be a 'free' application, but a real learning curve came from the understanding that, oftentimes, free apps are 1. collecting data, and we don't know what's happening with that data. And 2. They're probably advertising to our kids. It was an 'Aha' moment for some teachers," Miller said.

“As a team, we also had to show them what the fallout is when data privacy is breached. When you’re going through a pandemic, we’re all living minute to minute, moment to moment. Especially in the virtual teaching realm, you have to draw everyone’s attention back to how harmful it is to a student that may have their identity stolen.”

Students are 51 times more likely to be victims of identity theft, the impact of which can then follow them for years. “Protecting student privacy should be the number-one goal in an educational institution,” Miller emphasized.

About Newfield Schools

Newfield Central School District is located in central New York state and consists of elementary through high school . Newfield Schools’ mission is to educate, provide opportunities, and foster individual excellence in academic, vocational, fine arts and technical learning.



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