



**Faronics WINSelect and
Newburgh Enlarged City School District
Case Study**

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Faronics WINSelect and Newburgh Enlarged City School District

Background

Newburgh Enlarged City School District is located at “The Crossroads of the Northeast,” an area on the west bank of the Hudson River 60 miles north of New York City and 80 miles south of Albany. The district includes nine elementary magnet schools grades K-6, three junior high schools grades 7-9, and one high school grades 10-12.

NECSD is comprised of 2,200 staff and 13,000 students spread across 22 buildings. The network infrastructure consists of 4,000 workstations, 75 servers, 200 routers or switches, and 400 wireless access points. Dedicated to supporting the IT infrastructure, Newburgh Enlarged City School District has 7 Micro Computer Repair Technicians, 1 Network Engineer, 2 Educational Technology Liaisons, 16 Educational Technology Teachers, and 2 Voice Specialists.

Problem

Schools often need to deploy computers that offer a limited feature set—for example, a computer lab designed for young children, an information kiosk in a library, or an administrative machine that needs to be simplified. Limiting a computer’s functions is an important part of protecting a computer’s purpose. Having fully-functional computers placed in environments where only limited-functionality is required carries the possibility of computers being used by students in a distractive or inappropriate way.

In an effort to lockdown their student workstation functionality, NECSD implemented a Microsoft Domain Controller environment across twelve of its buildings to manage the security and permissions of the lab and classroom computers. The intent of using Group Policies was to lock computers down so that they only provided students and teachers with access to the instructional applications, resources, and educational content they needed.

Unfortunately, NECSD experienced several issues with this native Microsoft model. It lacked the flexibility to allow for differing levels of security and permissions within each of the buildings. The server model was decentralized, which made it harder to manage the hardware and software because of location and complexity. The limitations and complexity of this model prevented the district from moving to a single domain controller with centralized hardware, software, and mail — in this case, Microsoft Exchange. Furthermore, as students advanced grade levels and moved through the district’s schools, they expected their home accounts to move with them. IT staff had to recreate user accounts at the new location, and move the home directories for every user—an extremely time consuming process.

Finally, the overall investment in training and the learning curve involved was overwhelming. In particular, understanding Microsoft GPO’s, security, permissions, and folder redirection was a challenge for the IT personnel at NECSD. This meant the district had to provide several training sessions to IT staff members that were already overwhelmed with work. It also meant the Educational Technology Liaison and Network Engineer had to take time out of their busy schedules to instruct these courses.

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Solution

NECSD desperately needed a solution that was easier to manage, flexible, and scalable across the entire district. As a group, the IT staff looked at several commercial software solutions, and ultimately selected Faronics WINSelect for its ease of use, customization strength, and intuitiveness. “We’d been happily using Deep Freeze for a few years,” says Nelson Colon, Educational Technology Liaison for NECSD. “We discovered WINSelect when we visited the Faronics website for Deep Freeze updates, and started browsing through Faronics’ other solutions.”

Faronics WINSelect makes it easy to manage the functionality of computers in public access, kiosk, library, educational, and corporate environments, and empowers IT administrators with enterprise control over a workstation’s system settings. IT can quickly customize a computer’s capabilities by restricting user access to certain applications, websites, program functions, and system options. IT administrators can also dynamically configure systems without the hassle and complexity of Group Policies, and can easily limit the features of third-party programs such as Microsoft Office, Internet Explorer, and Mozilla Firefox. Advanced options include the ability to regulate user activity, and remove functions from within the Windows operating system and installed applications.

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Initially, NECSD deployed WINSelect in a test lab to test out the feature set. Impressed with what they saw, they then moved the deployment into one of the elementary school computer labs for a one-month evaluation. The lab consisted of thirty workstations, and the teacher was able to use Faronics Core Console to manage their enterprise deployment of WINSelect. Core Console is Faronics’ desktop management utility that provides centralized deployment and control options for several Faronics solutions, including WINSelect.

“I really didn’t see any other product out there that was as powerful as WINSelect, yet simple to learn and use,” says Mr. Colon. “It was also reassuring that Faronics, a name that we were already familiar with, was behind the product.” To NECSD’s surprise, WINSelect did not take much time to implement into the existing Microsoft infrastructure.



Key Benefits

Dynamic Preference Control

WINSelect makes it easy to control system settings and application functionality without any required knowledge of complex Group Policies.

Promote Workstation Productivity

WINSelect helps ensure that users have the tools and functionality they need to perform productive tasks, but removes unrequired or unwanted elements from the workstation.

Enforce Acceptable Use

WINSelect balances user privacy with organizational rules by helping to enforce Acceptable Use Policies without the need for surveillance.

Limit Workstation Access

WINSelect promotes shared usage of limited IT technology by limiting the length of time each user is able to stay logged on.

Results

Faronics WINSelect allowed the IT administrators of NECSD to easily tailor the operating system and application functionality of their student workstations to only include the features required for student work. It has also made it very simple to quickly lockdown a lab to create a limited-access or 'simple' machines that are perfectly suited for classrooms with young children. The children benefit from a simplified interface, and IT personnel are ensured that computers are free from unwanted application and web browsing activity.

“WINSelect has empowered our Instructional Technology teachers at each site with centralized control of the computer lab and classroom computer functions,” says Matt Quick, NECSD’s Network Engineer. “Since WINSelect does not require the administrator to have a high level of technical knowledge, it has also reduced our technical support workload in the instructional environment. Due to the simplicity of WINSelect, our technology teachers can quickly and intuitively create a custom environment for their buildings through Faronics Core Console without any help.”

NECSD no longer needs to depend exclusively on GPO’s to manage their 3,000+ workstations located throughout the district. Before, each building had a separate set of GPO’s to suit the needs of its users, which created a significant burden for the technology personnel responsible for their management. By using WINSelect, some of the system and software configuration options that were previously handled by GPO’s are now handled through WINSelect’s intuitive graphical interface. In this way, NECSD has found WINSelect to be a perfect complement to their Group Policy environment. The district can provide teachers with control of classroom computers without compromising the district’s Active Directory server.

“WINSelect has enabled me to eliminate any icons that are not appropriate for certain settings within my school buildings,” mentions Dan Olsen, one of NECSD’s teachers. “It has also allowed me to set up kiosk machines in the lab that will allow certain applications to print without having a negative effect on the users’ print quota.” Popular applications such as Microsoft Office, Internet Explorer, and Mozilla Firefox can all be customized to influence student interaction. IT administrators can even limit session lengths to ensure a ‘no loitering’ policy on computers, and restrict student access to storage devices and printers.

“As the Educational Technology Liaison, I look forward to finding different ways of utilizing WINSelect in our various computer labs,” says Mr. Colon. “Every school building in our district has such varied needs that require a lot of time and effort. This application provides us with a powerful yet easy to use tool to better manage our workstations. It allows the technology teachers and me to focus on our core responsibility— providing instruction, instead of having to resolve complex security issues and getting swamped by desktop troubleshooting.” ■



Faronics delivers software that helps manage, simplify, and secure desktop computers. Our products ensure users enjoy a trouble-free computing experience, and have freed IT personnel from tedious helpdesk requests. Faronics' products benefit educational institutions, healthcare facilities, libraries, government organizations, and corporations in over fifty countries worldwide.

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