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## SyAM Power Management Solution Boosts Performance, Productivity and Savings for Texas School District

### Overview

When you're a key member of a school district's instructional Technology team and the Superintendent has tasked you with reducing energy usage across all schools, you look for applications that not only support that directive, but can also help you to better do your job. In partnering with SyAM Software and implementing its power management solution, Timothy Etzler, District Instructional Technologist for the Kingsville Independent School District, found everything he needed to satisfy both the Superintendent's mandate and boost his own productivity.

As currently constituted the Texas school-based District consists of eight schools including a high school, a middle school, an intermediate school and several elementary and primary schools.

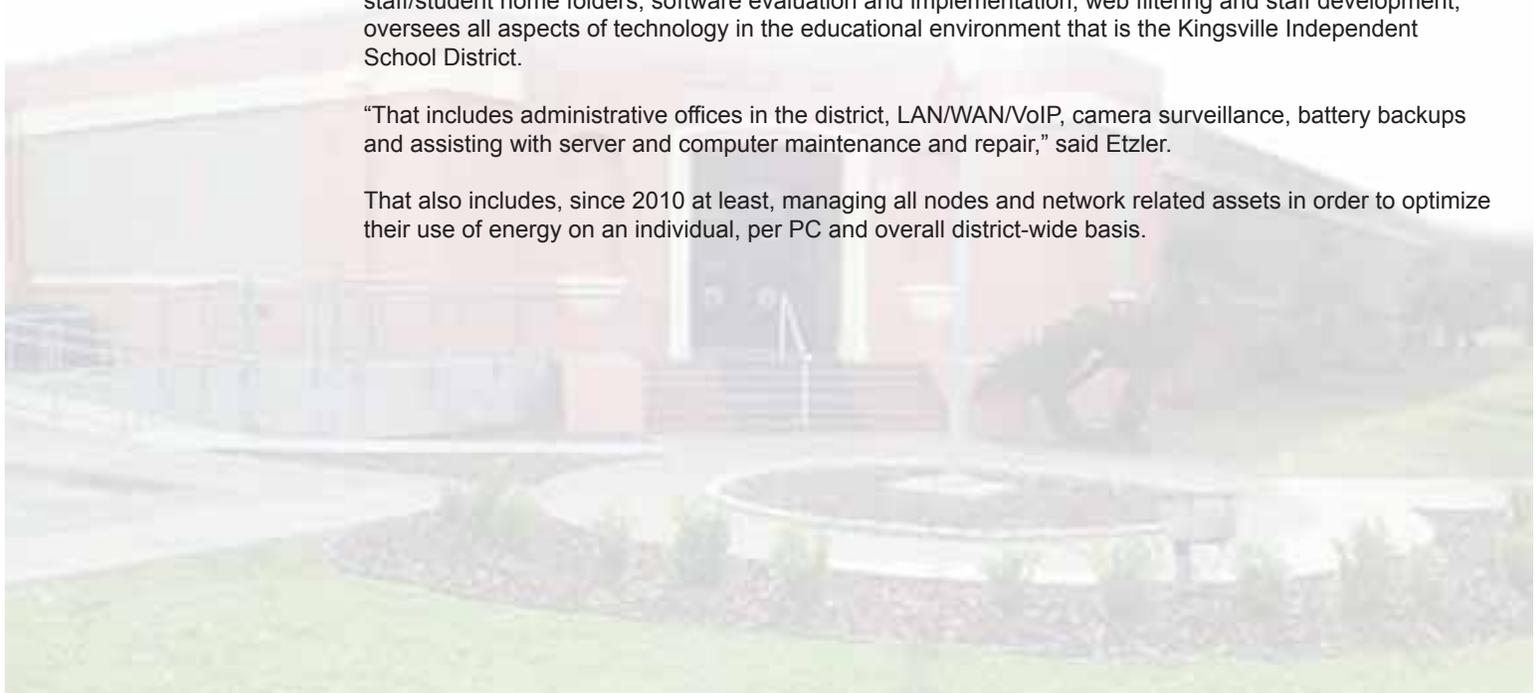
“In our district we support more than 3,500 physical assets — PCs, laptops, Netbooks, servers, Kindle Fires and iPads and more than 4,000 users. Above and beyond our efforts to keep those devices up and running, as well as secure, there are also various updates that we have to push out on a regular basis, aligning PC uptime to the schedules of our staff and teachers, as well as finding ways to encourage energy efficiency,” said Etzler. “By using SyAM power management solutions to automate updates and to help reduce our energy costs, our team can spend more time on preserving overall network availability, uptime and performance.”

Nestled between the sparkling Texas Riviera to the east and the rugged Brush Country to the west, Kingsville is where modern industry meets the history of the Old West. A centennial city, Kingsville is steeped in tradition and rooted firmly in the unique legacy of South Texas. Founded by Henrietta M. King and named after Captain Richard King, Kingsville is surrounded by acres of flourishing wildlife and natural beauty. Kingsville has grown to include Texas A&M University-Kingsville, Caesar Kleberg Wildlife Research Institute, Coastal Bend College and Naval Air Station Kingsville.

The district's Instructional Technology Team, for which Etzler is responsible for managing Active Directory, staff/student home folders, software evaluation and implementation, web filtering and staff development, oversees all aspects of technology in the educational environment that is the Kingsville Independent School District.

“That includes administrative offices in the district, LAN/WAN/VoIP, camera surveillance, battery backups and assisting with server and computer maintenance and repair,” said Etzler.

That also includes, since 2010 at least, managing all nodes and network related assets in order to optimize their use of energy on an individual, per PC and overall district-wide basis.



## Challenge

As Etzler recalls, it all started with a phone call from Nick Thickers, president of SyAM Software, to Dr. Juan Diego Vazquez-Cruz, Director of Instructional Technology for the Kingsville Independent School District.

“The timing was impeccable, actually,” said Etzler. “We had recently been tasked by the School Superintendent’s office to manage our technology resources in ways that would enforce energy management, enable seamless third party installations and reduce our overall energy consumption, thereby reducing the impact of the district’s energy bill. So the outcome of their [Dr. Vazquez-Cruz and Nick’s] dialogue had immediate value.”

But first there was the small matter of proving that the need was both real as well as addressable using the SyAM solution.

“Up to the point of that discussion between the Dr. and Nick we mostly relied on memos and emails, requesting that teachers shut down their computers at the end of their workday, but using that methodology, of course, was purely voluntary,” said Etzler. “There really was no way for us to enforce that policy since we had neither the visibility nor control to do so at our fingertips. So we needed to try something else.”

That “something else” Etzler tried was to average how much total wattage the districts’ computers, servers and monitors used on a day by day basis, weekly and monthly basis.

“At the time our baseline said that computers were ‘on’ from 7am to whenever each day. But from where I sat the statistics we compiled using that profile only supplied partial information. We needed to conduct a seven day, round-the-clock audit of all our assets to ensure we were getting the full picture,” said Etzler.

Encouraged by his initial findings, Etzler booted up his remote control IT manager one weekend to learn firsthand just how many PCs had been left on over the weekend, decidedly non-work hours for staff and teachers. The numbers surprised even him.

“In our system if the icon is green, the PC is live. Once I did my count and double checked it I found more than 500 computers had been left on over the weekend. I compiled and formalized my findings in a report and suggested that if we used SyAM’s power management application and solution, we could turn off our computers at 5pm and we would save \$20,000. Once the Dr. and the Superintendent read, reviewed and evaluated my findings that’s when they said to ‘go for it’ and that’s how SyAM was approved for use here in our district.”

## The Solution

In bringing him and his team up to speed on the solution Etzler praised SyAM’s hands-on support and training.

“The training was great, especially the webinar support, which was fully hands-on and in real-time,” said Etzler. “SyAM could see what we were seeing and advise and recommend best practices based on our environment, customizing the solution for our specific needs, which was appreciated.”

As Etzler explained the SyAM technician installed and setup Active Directory, training his staff in parallel on how the software worked. Moreover, the footprint enabled by the technician as he worked to install the software was transparent, a feature appreciated by Etzler.

“Installation, implementation and deployment was a very seamless process that was pushed out over district computers in a matter of days and without disrupting teachers while they were using their computers during classroom instructional time,” said Etzler. “That process continues seamlessly through today as we add more computers to the network.”

One of the many features of SyAM’s power management solution that Etzler found particularly helpful was its auto-discovery capabilities.

“With auto-discovery I can leverage my asset, location and functionality profiles of individual campuses and find the IP range peculiar to that campus,” explained Etzler. “I can then place it into auto-pilot mode, so to speak, and let it do its thing to identify which machines [PCs, other devices], that didn’t receive criteria such as power management policies, antivirus, updated applications or whatever, which location they’re in and what function they serve.”

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He added, "I can then run the next group for the next campus, and so on and so forth, enabling me to identify every endpoint device within an IP range and to know, unconditionally, they either did or did not receive the applied updates. So it's really easy to set up the power scheme, turn auto-discovery loose to find the computer name and push out the power schemes to them accordingly."

As Etzler found, the SyAM solution also takes advantage of the district's VLAN structure.

"In a network structure like ours each campus has its own VLAN where each VLAN has its own desktops, laptops and so on. In turn, I can manage each device separately, primarily based on location and whether the device functions as a desktop, laptop or Notebook. If I'm asked to add a device into an existing group – such as a new teacher or staff member comes aboard – I can use SyAM power management solution to assign that device [e.g. desktop, laptop] to the correct group or container," said Etzler.

In turn, explained Etzler, this enables him to manage campus devices – including teacher issued desktops – more granularly.

"For example," said Etzler, "In each school I have a container or VLAN for desktops and another for laptops and using SyAM I'm able to set up different power scheme settings for each. I can set them up to shut down at 5pm in the day, or 9pm if we're doing our weekly updates. In the latter case we do memo our teachers and administrators to let them know that once a week we'll be pushing out updates and once those have been applied, we will shut down their computers automatically."

SyAM also helps Etzler support recently enacted district-wide security policies.

"The TEA [Texas Education Agency] recently mandated that a teacher's monitor and desktop need to be secured when they walk away from it, either logging it off or locking it down, depending on the number of minutes [three minutes for the former, five minutes for the latter] than the keyboard had been idle," said Etzler. "That was another group in the power management scheme I was able to assign and automate using SyAM power management solution."

Additionally, with SyAM supporting both the process and QA on the backend, Etzler has used the solution's third party installation feature to push out and maintain current versions of Java, Adobe Flash, Adobe Air, Shockwave, and other utilities for all PC and related assets.

"This has freed up the time our techs use to address, manage and solve on major problems rather than wasting valuable time on minor application installations and upgrades," said Etzler. "In that way and so many others SyAM saves time as well as money."

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## The Benefits

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When asked to detail the overall benefits of SyAM to his instructional technology team Etzler cites outcomes both quantifiable as well as “soft.”

“I’d have to include the performance, application management and reduced cost of energy usage high on that list,” said Etzler. “That and for us helping us to identifying units that are having disk space or connectivity issues, what software has been installed on district computers and whether that software is authorized or unauthorized.”

As part of its due diligence to prospective school districts they partner with, SyAM researches and helps to put into place, when available, rebates from local and regional power utility companies to ensure that once a school or district has enabled its power management application that the resulting savings are optimized based on those new usage benchmarks enforced by the SyAM solution. That was also true of the Kingsville Independent School District implementation.

“We get a discounted price on our power, approximately fourteen cents per kilowatt once the SyAM savings have been worked into the numbers,” said Etzler.

Those rebates, combined with the daily number of hours the district PCs are now powered down (including making sure they’re offline throughout the weekend, every weekend) have enabled the district to save 225,000 kilowatt hours annually for a total energy savings averaging \$20,000-\$25,000 per year.

Those savings are documented and reflected in a report that Dr. Vazquez first reviews which Etzler then supplies to the Superintendent’s office. The resulting report demonstrate that when it comes to the district saving money on energy usage, the SyAM solution has moved the bar from proof of concept to proof of savings at levels that have more than satisfied the district’s initial charge to Etzler and his team.

“When you take into account an entire school year, with savings averaging for each computer at \$40 a day and multiplied by a 227 day school calendar, it [the SyAM solution] has paid for itself in less than a year’s time.”

In fact, Etzler is such a fan of SyAM that he has shared his experience with the quarterly technology meetings in the districts’ educational service centers, a meeting where no vendors are allowed to physically participate. Instead, it’s a chance for IT personnel to share ideas, best practices and outcomes that have assisted them in doing their jobs better and more productively.

“Generally we’re not there to champion one vendor over another, rather to share our experiences and what’s worked for us and how that solution might be broadcast to other schools,” said Etzler. “But since everyone in this group is dealing with similar energy usage issues and trying to wrap their heads around it in order to do it better, I’m proud to be able to share my knowledge of and experience with SyAM, my ultimate go-to partner when it comes to reliably, confidently and convincingly managing the long-term power needs of district assets.”



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