

# ALWAYS CONNECTED

FOR ONE OF LONG ISLAND'S MOST WIRED PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICTS, STAYING AHEAD MEANS STAYING ONLINE—WHICH IS WHY AMITYVILLE UNION FREE SCHOOL DISTRICT PARTNERS WITH CSDNET TO BUILD AND PROTECT ITS NETWORK.

Dr. Mary T. Kelly knows the sure sign of a successful technology: people start taking it for granted. As Superintendent of Schools at Amityville Union Free School District, she oversees one of the most advanced and integrated school-district networks on Long Island. From science to social studies, every discipline is enriched by access to the Internet. “Online technology is now ubiquitous—it’s like electricity,” Kelly says. “You don’t even notice that you have it until something goes wrong.”

When Hurricane Irene hit in August 2011, Amityville’s power stayed up, but its Internet went down. “All of a sudden, we realized that *everybody* in our district was reliant on it,” Kelly says. “Instruction was interrupted for a number of days, and we simply can’t afford that. That’s when I started to think about ways we could really protect our network.”

Kelly and Amityville turned to CSDNET, the technology partner with which they had built so much of their network in the first place. “We started brainstorming ways to do it, based on what we already had in place,” she says. “The infrastructure was sound to handle what we wanted because they were in tune to my desire to always be ready for growth and for change.”

A year later, when Hurricane Sandy crashed ashore just before Halloween 2012, Amityville’s Edmund W. Miles Middle School—which houses the district’s primary network operations center—was rendered powerless. “But as a result of CSDNET’s work, this time we had two network operations centers,” Kelly says. “Everything just rolled over at our other operations center at another building. We



were able to maintain network connectivity and Internet access, even our phone system—everything was up and running and working seamlessly.”

This success, Kelly says, is only the latest milestone in the district’s fruitful five-year relationship with CSDNET. “From the beginning, it’s been a partnership,” she says. “They understand the vision and the mission of the school district, that it’s not just about technology, but about creating the optimum learning environment for our kids.”

## LEARNING LEADS TECHNOLOGY

An educator since 1994, Kelly taught high-school social studies before working her way into administration. Since joining Amityville six years ago, as Assistant Superintendent for Data and Technology, she has seen her role as “making 21st-century learning opportunities a reality” for her students, by building the district’s network piece by piece; providing resources, training, and support for the teachers who utilize it; and using information about students to help inform instructional practices.

“It’s all about teaching and learning,” Kelly says. “Technology is just a tool to help meet that objective. It’s about creating a modern learning environment for students, and

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helping them thrive.” All of which is to say that technology itself is not the mission, but “it is mission critical for us,” she says.

Today, technology is shaping the education of the 3,200 students in Amityville’s five public schools, from pre-K through grade 12. For example, video-conferencing technology allows Amityville Memorial High School anatomy and physiology students to participate in a virtual autopsy at the University of Saint Louis, while kindergarteners go on virtual “field trips” to the San Diego Zoo and interact with staff there. The Internet also powers everyday essentials like the district’s student-management system, many instructional support tools, and the smart boards teachers use in every classroom. “So much of the interactive content that the teachers are utilizing to do their jobs is via the Internet,” she says.

### BUILT ON TRUST

“Over the last six years, we’ve built this network piece by piece, and it started with

CSDNET,” Kelly says. When she arrived, the district had been contracting with another firm for tech support and monitoring of switches and servers, but CSDNET made a proposal that would save money and, in case of a disruption, cut response time from days down to hours. That first transaction was the start of an ongoing relationship.

Kelly has worked with CSDNET on a number of projects from routine to “huge”—from upgrading switches to improving wireless Internet to transitioning the district’s entire phone system to voice-over IP—a move Kelly says has cut phone costs by about 75 percent—and installing video-conferencing capability in every building. And through it all, the network has continued to grow. “When I first got here, we had maybe 10 megabytes of bandwidth,” Kelly remembers. “Now, we have two pipes of 100 megabytes each, with two different ISPs”—the “disaster-tolerance plan” that worked so well when Hurricane Sandy hit.

For Kelly, working with CSDNET has been about much more than just products and services. “CSDNET is more than a vendor to us—it’s a partnership,” she says. “That’s extremely important for a school district. It can’t be a situation where once you buy a product the relationship ends. It has to be an ongoing supportive relationship.”

“That’s part of CSDNET’s culture—developing those relationships and developing that trust,” Kelly says. She also admires the firm’s commitment to getting things done right, and in the cases where something goes wrong, “I pick up the phone and it’s addressed immediately,” she

says. “CSDNET does business with many different clients, in the public and private sector, but they always make me feel like I’m the most important client to them.”

### CLEAR SKIES AHEAD

With confidence that CSDNET has provided, Amityville is only getting more wired (or, rather, wireless): The district is currently piloting an iPad initiative at various grade levels for ESL students and students with disabilities. There is a STEM grant initiative for the middle school that is all online. Another middle-school project, done in conjunction with a school in South Africa, enables students to communicate digitally online and via video conferencing.

Kelly wants to continue to use technology to create rich learning opportunities for students while, at the same time, increasing efficiency and lowering costs. Expanding the district’s servers and cloud storage, her next goal, will reduce hardware costs and allow her to focus more resources on expanding students’ online access, such as from home or the local library, or via mobile technology.

“We want to increase their opportunities to learn when they’re not in school, to open the doors of Amityville so that kids can see and interact with the whole world, using technology,” Kelly says. “And in all of that, the partnership with CSDNET will be absolutely critical.”

## A PROVEN PLAN

- 3,200 students at Amityville’s five schools interact daily with the network CSDNET helped build and protect.
- CSDNET’s “double-pipe” disaster-tolerance system allowed the district to be one of only a few in the region to keep the Internet up and running as Hurricane Sandy hit.
- Amityville’s ongoing partnership with CSDNET is enabling it to further reduce hardware and software costs while increasing student access to the Internet—and the world beyond.