

# Quest for the Best:

## California School District Boosts In-Classroom Collaboration with NEC Projectors

### Facility:

- Merced Union School District

### Vertical:

- Education

### Location:

- Central California

### Challenge:

- Replace aging equipment and standardize projector technology across the entire district

### Solution:

- NP-M323W projector

### Result:

- Successful installation of 550 projectors across seven school campuses



When a Central Valley, Calif., school district's classroom projectors began to fail, its IT department – in keeping with its mission to never settle for the status quo – seized the opportunity to standardize equipment across the entire district with an enterprise-grade solution that would enrich learning for years to come.

Located in the agricultural heartland of California, the Merced Union School District (MUHSD) serves approximately 10,000 students across seven comprehensive sites. The area faces challenges such as high teen pregnancy rates and high unemployment rates, but it also boasts an educational community that is actively working to help improve students' prospects – and providing them with cutting-edge technology is a major part of that.

MUHSD's IT department's vision is to develop a college-like environment that will help students compete in a technology-based global economy, and that has meant changing the focus from learning to use technology to using technology to learn.

"We're trying to provide opportunity, both in the classroom and outside of it," said Anthony Thomas, Director of Technology at MUHSD. "We provide our students with the technology to help them compete with anyone from anywhere. We live in an area where opportunity is important, and we believe you can change a community by caring and by giving kids the ability to dream beyond what they know."

This includes ensuring a "one-to-web" learning environment in all of its schools, meaning each student has access to the Internet from some kind of device via the district's network, which is one of the fastest in the state of California. All students are provided with Chromebooks that are used for homework assignments as well as in class, and teachers and students collaborate via in-classroom projectors – but the current projectors were aging, and beginning to fail.

"We had a lot of outdated or broken projectors," said Virginia Bryant, Information Technology Assistant at MUHSD. "What we wanted to do was standardize our projectors, and have one projector model for the whole district."



## Searching for a Solution

To choose a new projector manufacturer, the IT department had a vendor fair to compare four different manufacturers.

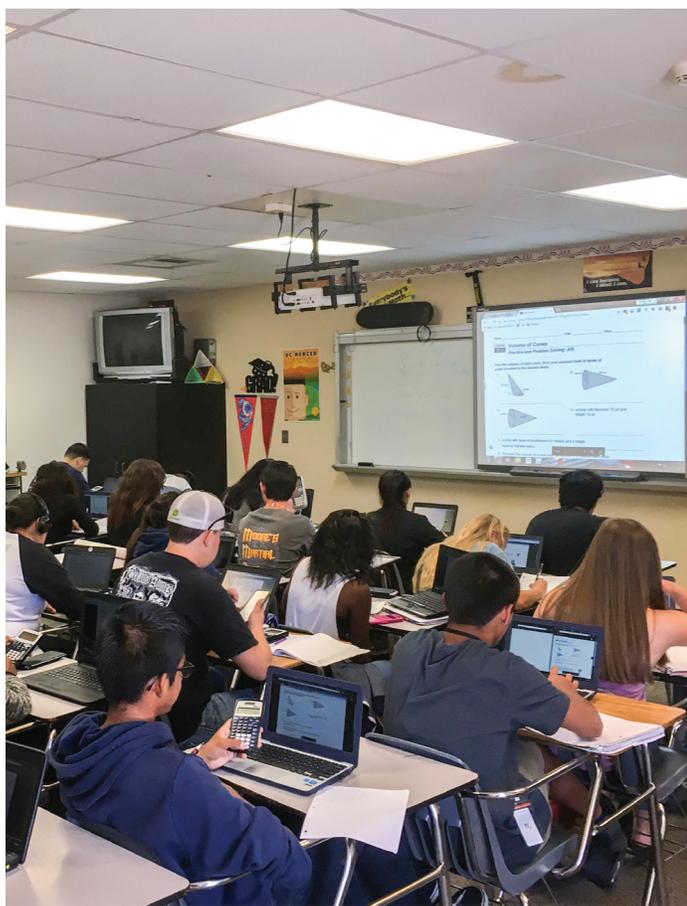
"Vendor fairs are key," Thomas said. "You want to be able to try things out and make sure it fits what you need, and we wanted our whole group to decide together on this technology, because they have to support it each day."

The IT department had a number of must-haves for the new projectors - for starters, it was important that a projector was bright enough that all students could see it, even if classroom lights were on.

"The brightness was a huge factor," Bryant said. "We wanted to ensure that the students way in the back could see as clearly as those in the front."

The district also wanted something that fit into the existing mounts installed across various classrooms and learning spaces, to eliminate the need to retrofit or replace mounting equipment.

MUHSD also needed projectors that did not require a filter, due to the district's location in the Central Valley.



"We're in an agricultural community, and the rooms get very dusty," Thomas said. "What we found with the old LCD projectors is that you need a filter, but they get clogged. When you have almost 600 projectors across all the schools, it gets difficult to go out and clean the filters on a regular basis."

Instead of LCD, MUHSD experimented with a few digital light processing (DLP) projectors and found they worked well, which helped determine which projectors to consider. During the vendor fair, the IT department put its various options into classrooms to see how they worked in real-life applications, and an NEC Display Solutions NP-M323W projector became a frontrunner.

"The NEC projector performed very well," Thomas said.

MUHSD was also impressed with NEC's service standards; Thomas said that the NEC sales rep was the only representative for a projector manufacturer who came to the district for in-person meetings.

"We look at customer service very highly," Bryant added. "She came out, and became part of our team, and what she said was what we got. The service we got from her and NEC was amazing."

The NP-M323W also met the brightness criteria and did not wash out, even in classrooms with a lot of windows, and it fit all of the various styles of mounts the district had without requiring retrofitting. Another plus was its durability.

"With us being one-to-web, teachers use projectors all day, every period, five days a week," Bryant said. "Teachers use them to project to a screen, and students present and share info electronically, or collaborate via Google Docs. We try to stay away from paper when possible."

Because the projectors are in such heavy use, Thomas said they ran the prospective replacements through a "torture test."

"Sometimes our teachers forget to turn projectors off, so we left them on [to simulate that]," he said. "One of the cool features configured into the NEC projectors is that they turn themselves off after a while, but even before they turned off automatically, nothing happened to them [despite running for so long]."

Another plus was that the projector speakers were powerful enough to support distance learning, which is becoming a priority for the district.

"Distance learning helps students collaborate from classroom to classroom, site to site and district to district," Thomas said. "Usually speakers in projectors are not very robust, but these work well with the video conferencing camera system and mic pod we use."

After the vendor fair concluded, the NEC projector was selected because it met the MUHSD IT department's high standards for a technology solution.

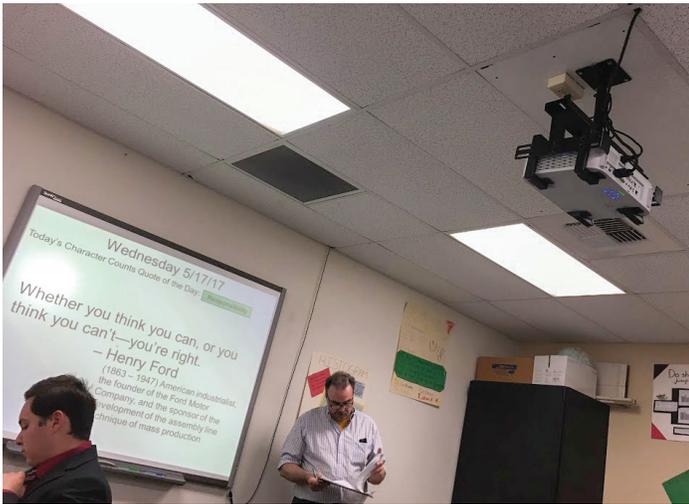
"We want instruction to happen seamlessly, and part of that is buying an enterprise-class solution," Thomas said. "We want to 'set it and forget it,' and that's one of the things about NEC that impressed us."

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"If you're doing a job, you want to do it well, so we want to make sure our classrooms are outfitted with the most professional, up-to-date tools we can give to teachers," he said. "We're more focused on instruction than on technology."

Bryant added that ensuring student success is the most critical part of any school district technology selection.

"It's basically all about the students and what their needs are," she said.



### A Successful Installation

After MUHSD selected the NEC projectors, for the purchase, the district used an integrator with whom it had an existing relationship: CDW.

"NEC is a trusted AV partner of ours who have been in the market for a long time, and they're our go-to for DLP projectors," said Ryan Miller, one of the MUHSD account managers at CDW.

MUHSD purchased 550 projectors in January 2017 and began installing them on a rolling basis when it received them in February 2017.

"We have about 30 left to install [as of April 2017 ]," Thomas said. "We're doing the integration in house, and our techs say it takes about eight minutes to switch them out with the old ones. They're pretty happy it goes by quickly."

MUHSD teachers have been pleased with the new projectors as well.

"I've gotten a couple of emails from teachers who comment on the quality and clarity of the picture, compared with what we had before," Thomas said. "It's easier to make adjustments on the lenses when zooming in and out and moving from side to side, and there were some keystone issues with the old projectors that we don't have now."

Thomas added that the projectors easily adapt to the district's various types of classroom screens, and that the menu is more intuitive than the one on the old projectors.

"We learned during the vendor fair that this menu was something the teachers liked," he said.

Thomas said it was important to MUHSD to find a technology with which the teachers were comfortable.



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