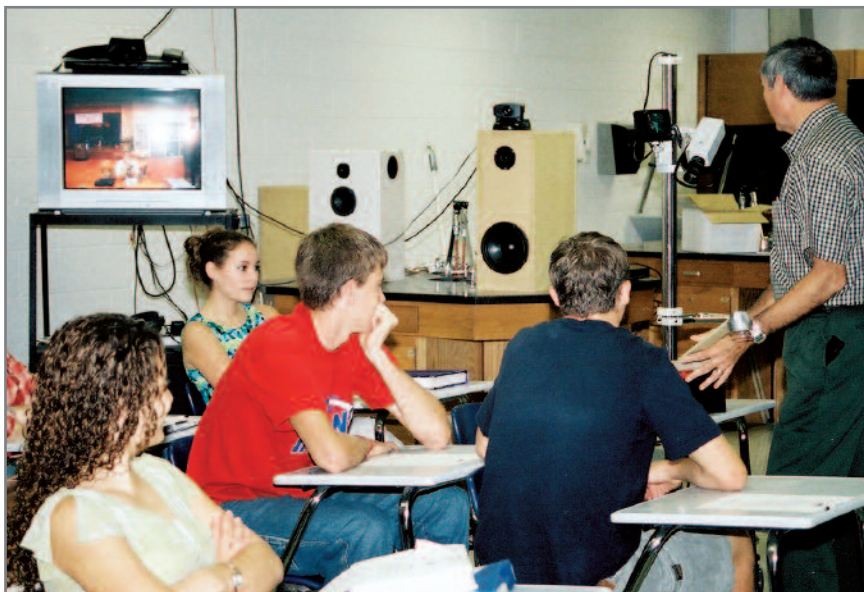


TANDBERG CUSTOMER PROFILE

Region 14 Central West Texas Schools



- Increased course offerings to more students in more schools
- Increased cultural experiences with virtual field trips
- Better access to more certified teachers
- New community education programs and public entity partnerships

“A whole gamut of events and activities are held now that couldn’t be offered before because of the distance involved. And since this is visual communication and not simply traditional distance learning, the experience is more real-life, more profound.”

TOMMY BEARDEN
DISTANCE LEARNING CONSULTANT
REGION 14

THE CHALLENGE: DISTANCE, DOLLARS, AND A PASSION FOR BETTER EDUCATION

Let’s say that one or two students in a small, rural school need to take an Anatomy and Physiology class to graduate with honors or gain acceptance to the university of their dreams. How can the district afford to hire a qualified professional to teach such a small class? In most cases, it can’t. So families face agonizing decisions about where to send their children. Some simply transfer their kids to other schools. Others move out of the school district entirely, further decreasing enrollment and reducing the tax base from which the schools are funded. And the frustrating cycle continues...

This represents a real challenge for school districts in remote, geographically dispersed and poor areas. And few areas are more remote, dispersed and depressed than Region 14 Educational Service Center (ESC) in Central West Texas. Head-quartered in Abilene, the region covers 13 rural counties in an area of 12,155 square miles, a territory larger than some states. It provides educational services to 43 schools districts, consisting of 148 campuses, 3,806 teachers, 208 administrators and approximately 45,000 K-12 students.

In Region 14, many graduating high school classes have fewer than 10 students. At these schools, they play “6-man” football because there just aren’t enough students enrolled to field a full 11-player team. At such small, rural schools, it has always been difficult to provide students access to diverse cultural experiences, advanced science classes, foreign-language education and other special programs. Without these offerings, students in these schools will be left behind, and the educational gap will grow. Even if schools wanted to share teachers — say, a Physics teacher who instructs at one school in the morning and another in the afternoon — the distance between schools usually prohibits this arrangement.

Clearly, Region 14 required a solution to bridge the gap of time, distance and funding.

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Region 14 Central West Texas Schools



THE SOLUTION: REACHING ACROSS THE MILES WITH VIDEO COMMUNICATION

In early 1995, Region 14 ESC began researching ways to provide the quality and quantity of educational options necessary to realize their students' potential and keep parents sending their kids back. That's when Region 14 turned to live video communication.

"After I went to a trade show in 1995 and saw what videoconferencing could do, I started to believe this might be the answer to some of our challenges," says Tommy Bearden, distance-learning consultant, a high school principal at the time. "Over the next two years, we investigated our options and developed plans for offering distance learning through interactive video communication. Then, in October 1997, with our infrastructure in place, we brought in one class of college algebra for two students at Stamford High. It was the start of something that has grown enormously."

Encouraged by early successes, Region 14 expanded its video communication capabilities. During the summer of 2000, after investigating numerous vendors, Region 14 installed four TANDBERG Educator II systems. From that humble beginning, TANDBERG's presence in Region 14 has grown to 69 systems in 2003, with endless growth possibilities in sight.

The West Texas Telecommunications Consortium (WTTC) coordinates and oversees a telecommunications network that provides the high-quality transmission capability for interactive video communication. A six-member staff from Region 14 and the WTTC supports the promotion and use of distance learning. And that use has escalated — with 31 % of high schools in the region using video communication for sending and receiving high school courses, 50 % for taking college courses, and 69 % of the district using it to take "virtual" field trips.

Video communication offers significant financial savings as well. One cost-saving practice involves using distance learning for staff development. Previously, schools had to use full-day substitutes when they sent teachers for half-day enrichment classes on the other side of the Region. "Now, the school can hire a half-day sub and the teachers can attend the workshop by video in the morning and be back in their classroom in the afternoon," Bearden explains. "Those cost savings really add up over the course of a year."

"TANDBERG has become a valued partner," Bearden says. "Its technical expertise and the quality of its products have kept us coming back year after year for help in expanding our distance-learning programs. I measure video equipment manufacturers on three key elements: (1) Is their equipment teacher friendly? (2) Is their equipment dependable? and (3) Do they listen to concerns of their customers? TANDBERG gets an A+ in all three areas."

THE RESULTS: "JUST LIKE BEING THERE IN PERSON"

Consider Kelly Martin, who teaches Spanish to 10th and 11th graders every day in her Stamford High classroom. But her class also includes students from Rule, Blackwell, Sidney and Hermleigh high schools — up to 120 miles away — who participate through interactive video communication.

Says Martin, "Sure, it takes some getting used to, but not long — for me or the students. Soon, it was just like being there in person, as if we were all in the same room together. The technology fades into the background so the educational content comes through."

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Region 14 Central West Texas Schools



Dottie Norwood, superintendent of Moran School District, says, "In our small schools, we just don't have the funds to pay for teachers to provide many upper-level classes, especially when only one or two students need those classes. It's a smart business decision for our district to acquire those courses through video communication, so we can provide the greatest opportunity for our students' future success."

In addition to core curriculum provided through visual communication, Region 14 is also using video to take students on virtual field trips, including face-to-face meetings with kids from Brazil and England to discuss matters of culture, education and reaction to terrorism.

However, adults aren't the only ones creating these field trip opportunities. At Stamford High School, the students themselves are planning, scripting, developing and producing virtual field trips for other students across the country on a wide variety of subjects, including "Cotton, The Plant of Many Uses," "Follow Wheat from the Field to the Table" and "Safe Use of Farm Chemicals."

Beth Kittley, a teacher in the Rule School District, also appreciates the opportunities video communication gives her children that they couldn't otherwise experience in this town of about 650 residents. "Not only does videoconferencing provide the important classroom instruction my children need, it also allows them to interact with the world outside our small town," she says.

Others in the region besides teachers and students have enjoyed the live video communication experience. Region 14 parents of visually impaired children enrolled in the Texas School for the Blind in Austin have communicated with their children through video communication. Farmers and ranchers have received pesticide training through video. School board members have been trained by video, and practice activities for state-mandated testing of elementary students are conducted using the technology as well. Fifth graders receive tobacco-awareness education and adults take tobacco-cessation programs through interactive video, and teachers even receive aerobic and cardiovascular exercise instruction this way.

Says Bearden: "A whole gamut of events and activities are held now that couldn't be offered before because of the distance involved. And since this is visual communication and not simply traditional distance learning, the experience is more real-life, more profound."

THE FUTURE: IMAGINATION IS THE ONLY LIMIT

Through visual communication, Region 14 has enjoyed overwhelming success in educating and enriching students and teachers, and new ideas emerge all the time. Already, programs are being developed for adult education, including programs in small-business development, child-care training, volunteer firefighter training, Spanish for employers and website development for small-business owners.

These innovative approaches to visual communication open up a world of opportunity for residents of the entire region. This is important because the technology has the potential to save small rural schools, which in almost all small communities represent the largest employer as well as the pride and the heartbeat of the community. When a community loses its school, the decline of the community often follows. Visual distance learning enables small school districts to deliver quality educational services cost effectively and make their curriculum competitive with urban school districts.

"Distance learning is limited only by our imagination and our willingness to use the technology," says Bearden.

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