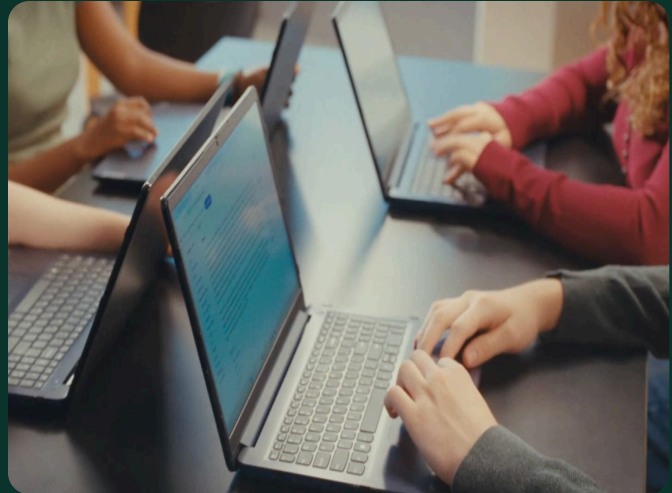# Eagle County School District: *transforming learning, access and security*

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Solutions
SaaS and Web Apps, BYOD Workforce, Safe Browsing, Zero Trust, Privileged Access Management

Meet Eagle County school district

Mountain district transforms student safety by enabling secure mobile access to sensitive data from any device, anywhere.

Nestled in Colorado's mountain country and home to world-renowned destinations like Vail and Beaver Creek, Eagle County School District spans 1,700 square miles of challenging terrain. The district manages an extensive digital footprint with limited technical staff: over 16,000 devices connect to their networks daily, processing nearly 77,000 gigabits of data on an average school day. Every student from kindergarten through 12th grade now has a district-issued Chromebook, making internet connectivity and secure browsing absolutely mission-critical.

"Almost everything that happens in our schools needs the internet," explains Jack Donnelly, Chief Technology Officer. "Students access their learning materials over the Internet. Attendance is taken and entered into the student information systems over the net. Security cameras are linked and access control systems are programmed over the internet. When the internet is down, schools are out of business and learning just ceases to happen."

Security protocols blocking critical data access

Within the university, nine Schools and Colleges bring diverse technology needs and operate with some degree of autonomy. These range from the Conservatory of Music to the School of Engineering and Computer Science to the School of Dentistry, among others. This environment requires a flexible and scalable technology strategy to meet a wide range of needs, while providing a common baseline of secure access.

Adding to this challenge are a number of data privacy requirements: Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) regulations covering student records, Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) laws for medical records in dental and medical programs, Payment Card Industry Data Security Standard (PCI DSS) for financial transactions, and the California Consumer Privacy Act (CCPA), which defines data privacy standards for institutions in California. Compliance efforts must include both the security architecture and operations, along with systems to capture audit records that demonstrate compliance.

> *"We struggled to find a solution with the traditional technology that would allow us to support our users in a secure way. And then we found Island, it was a game changer."*
>
> **Jack Donnelly,** CTO, Eagle County School District

Eagle County faced a common but critical challenge: how to maintain strict security controls around sensitive student data while enabling rapid access during emergencies.

The district had previously tightened access to their student information system (SIS), which contains sensitive data for all current students and historical records dating back to 2000. Access was restricted to district-managed devices connected to the internal network or via VPN — a logical security measure, but this also created dangerous delays in urgent situations.

"One assistant principal was on the way home from school when a call came in that there was a problem," Donnelly recalls. "Her choice was to turn around and drive back to the school, or continue on home, boot up her laptop, log into the network, VPN in, access the information and then respond to the problem."

But emergency access was only the tip of the data accessibility blockage challenges faced by Eagle County students and staff:

Infrastructure strain The district's move to give every student a Chromebook during COVID more than doubled their network load. They now support over 12,000 district-managed and 4,000+ personal devices. On an average day, 77,000 gigabits of data flow through their network.

Lost learning time With 70+ circuit outages during the 2023-24 school year, every disruption meant lost instructional time across all 6,300 students.

Content filtering "whack-a-mole": Students constantly found creative workarounds to bypass filtering systems. "It's becoming a distraction in the classroom," notes Donnelly. "There are YouTube videos that show students how to set up a VPN on their school devices so that they can access sites that they're not meant to access through protected traffic, and we can't content-filter that. It's like a whack-a-mole situation."

Teacher productivity Teachers use a spectrum of online resources, including YouTube, various educational websites, and emerging AI tools, but the existing security structure made access time-consuming and unreliable. "Teachers have a whole group of kids that they need to be interacting with face-to-face," said Dr. Katie Jarnot, Assistant Superintendent for Eagle County Schools. "They can't be constantly disrupting teaching time to be messing around troubleshooting technology."

Device management complexity The district explored deploying VPN clients onto unmanaged mobile devices for emergency access, but found this approach difficult to manage while still presenting significant security exposure. They needed a solution that could deliver instant, secure access without the operational overhead.

As Jarnot explains, "Every single thing we do has to be what's best for kids. Technology can't impede that." Eagle County needed a solution that could simultaneously strengthen security, simplify access, reduce infrastructure complexity, and enable students, teachers, and administrators to focus on their core mission: education.

The Solution

Island, the Enterprise Browser: Zero Trust meets zero friction

In Donnelly's first week as Eagle County's new CTO, he was tasked with finding a way to securely access the SIS from mobile devices. He began an extensive search for a solution that met security and usability requirements, and the Island browser immediately stood out.

"We seriously struggled to find a traditional technology solution that would allow our staff and students to access our systems in a secure way," said Donnelly. "When we found the Island browser, it was a game changer."

After a competitive evaluation, Eagle County selected Island for its unique ability to provide enterprise-grade security controls directly in the browser without requiring complex infrastructure changes or endpoint management. The four-month phased deployment focused on continuous user feedback and ensuring minimal disruption to daily operations.

The deployment initially focused on enabling school administrators to access the SIS from their personal mobile devices - unmanaged phones and tablets - with full security controls in place. This approach eliminated the need for VPN configuration on personal devices while maintaining complete visibility and control over data access.

> *"Island is more of an operating system. It's odd to call them a browser because they're way beyond a browser... It's a remarkable solution."*
>
> **Jack Donnelly,** CTO, Eagle County School District

Life-saving response time in real emergency

Island was deployed across the entire district at the start of the 2024-2025 school year, and proved its value almost immediately: A middle school student was injured at football practice, and initially appeared to be unable to move their arms or legs.

This time, though, the same assistant principal – who was once again driving home when the call came in – was able to pull over and immediately access the student's information through Island on her mobile phone. She pulled up emergency contact information and medical details, then contacted the student's parents while driving back to school. When she arrived less than 10 minutes later, both paramedics and the student's parents were already on scene.

"Thankfully, this has a great ending – it was a temporary kind of injury. But you better believe that the student's parents were deeply affected," said Donnelly. "Our school administrators were thrilled with the ability to respond so quickly and effectively, and the parents could not have been more effusive in their appreciation."

"As an administrator, if there's a school threat and you need to find a student, you need eyes on that kid, like, immediately," said Assistant Superintendent Dr. Katie Jarnot. "With Island, you can instantly pull up the student information system on your phone, and you just go."

Enabling teachers to focus on students, not technology

Beyond emergency access, Island addresses a fundamental challenge in education: removing technology-based barriers so teachers can focus entirely on student connections.

"Being a teacher is like being on stage. You've got your group of kids, things need to happen and they need to happen correctly, right when you need them to happen," explained Dr. Jarnot. "So it can't just be, uh oh, our classroom technology suddenly is not working."

The district recognizes that every minute teachers spend troubleshooting tech is time lost from their core mission: creating connections with students that inspire learning. Island's reliability and ease of use have enabled teachers to focus on their mission, not their platform.

Future-proofing with expanding capabilities

Donnelly sees significant potential to expand Island's role across the district's security architecture. The district's additional infrastructure costs include approximately $75,000-$80,000 for content filtering solutions and another $40,000 for security awareness training and phishing education.

"I think the Island Browser enables us to look at those technologies and perhaps replace them with functionality and features that are available with the Island browser," Donnelly noted. "We can spend less time managing operational issues and more time creating the best possible educational experience for our students."

He is confident that Eagle County schools will find even more ways to use Island. "We deployed Island right before the 24-25 school year." Donnelly said. "I saw a recent demonstration that is so far beyond what it could do just a year ago. The Island browser just keeps getting better."

With Island's Enterprise Browser, Eagle County School District has achieved:

Emergency response capabilities that enable administrators to access critical student information within seconds from any mobile device, dramatically improving student safety outcomes.

Zero trust security without complexity, eliminating the need for VPN management on unmanaged devices while maintaining complete control over sensitive data access.

Technology that serves teachers, not the other way around, enabling educators to focus on student connections rather than troubleshooting systems.

A path to infrastructure consolidation, with potential to replace content filtering, security training, and other solutions through unified browser-based controls.

Scalable security for 16,000+ devices, managing both district-issued and personal devices through a single, consistent security layer.

> *"Most classroom learning these days happens in the browser. Island enables us to create a frictionless and safe educational experience for the students."*
>
> **Jack Donnelly,** CTO, Eagle County School District

Results

Response In Seconds, Not Minutes

Access critical student information instantly from any mobile device during safety incidents.

$100K Future Savings Made Possible

Consolidate content filtering and security training costs with unified browser-based security.

16,000+ Daily Devices Secured

Protect student and staff browsing across managed and unmanaged devices, on and off the network.

Frictionless Deployment

Four-month phased rollout with zero operational disruption.

Island