

External Access to MMSD's Network

There have been different ways MMSD staff (& students) can access MMSD computing services from sites external to district property. These services have included access to the Internet, Internet email &/or district Novell and AS400 servers.

Need to add info on VPN & the removal of the external analog modem pool.

Regarding email service, anyone can access their Eudora now, via the Internet, anywhere in the world. It's not what I would call "really elegant", but it works & I have used this approach, when I have had to be out-of-town. Therefore, I think there should be no question on this issue. I think you are actually responding to questions you may have gotten regarding MMSDs support of remote access to the Internet.

MMSD has maintained 2 analog modem pools. The 1st (using 48, 24K lines) was set up ~1996 as a modem pool external to our network firewall to enable MMSD staff free remote dial-in access to the Internet. The 2nd (using 96, 56K lines) was set up ~3 yrs ago as a modem pool inside our firewall to enable MMSD staff remote dial-in access to our network, specifically to enable staff to perform MMSD-related work, such as IEP data updates from home.

Both of these modem pools require budget support, equipment space and technical support of Technical Services staff. The former was initially set up as an aide to encourage MMSD employees to use the Internet and enhance their technical skills, at a time when there were few local ISPs. Now, there are several pages of them in the Yellow Pages, and prices are very competitive. We can no longer afford to allocate tech staff time, equipment space nor a budget allocation to support remote access to the Internet through these old and slow modems in competition with the private sector, so we will discontinue this service as of the Monday after school ends this spring.

We will continue to support the 96 line, faster modems inside the firewall to support remote access to district data for district-related work for another year.

Meanwhile, as a more elegant and more secure 3rd approach, we put into production last Feb., our VPN (Virtual Private Network) system to improve the way remote users can access district services from home. Our VPN enables remote users who have their own ISP, to log in to the Internet and then pass through our firewall with our VPN software to utilize district services and district data. We deployed this to make the most secure and effective way for teachers who wished to remotely perform grade reporting. Ultimately, because this method of access to our network is the fastest, with fewer steps for end-users, but also the most secure way to access district services, we intend for this approach to replace our 96 line modem pool within a year or so. This will also have the added benefit of saving money, space and tech time required to support the 96 analog line modem pool.