A+ for the simplified admin of 130,000 K–12 PCs

Chicago Public Schools saves time and effort with an easy-to-use PC image management tool, enabling limited IT and local school staffs to do more with less.

Chicago Public Schools

K-12 Education | United States

Business needs

Keeping 130,000 PCs user-ready for 371,000 students and 35,000 staff across more than 500 sites of Chicago Public Schools is a tall order for the district's seven-member IT team.

Solutions at a glance

- Client Deployment
- Dell ImageAssist

Business results

- Keeps PCs updated and more secure
- Standardizes a base PC image across district
- Eliminates license fees for other imaging tools
- Frees up IT staff for other tasks

Cuts PC imaging time by

75%

Saves at least

2,000

hours a year in staff time

"Doing more with less" has long been a mantra in most U.S. K–12 schools, which face ever-tightening budgets. That's also the case for the seven-person Client Services team of Chicago Public Schools. They keep more than 130,000 Windows PCs, 160,000 Chromebooks, 25,000 Macs and 80,000 iPads updated, so some 35,000 staff can go about the vital mission of educating 371,000 students in the district's more than 500 schools.

According to Paul Valente, who heads both Client Services and Managed Services, keeping the Windows PCs user-ready goes beyond updating each disk image of Windows OS and applications. "When a PC gets corrupted or infected with a virus, we just wipe and reload it," he says. "Our priority is to get it back into the hands of students and teachers as fast as possible to minimize the interruption of education."

Improving disk image management

Doing so isn't easy. "District schools are increasingly wireless, each having just one or two wired drops, so network reinstalls of a multigigabit image aren't practical," Valente says. Fortunately, he and his team are experts with Dell ImageAssist, a free tool from Dell Deployment Services for managing Windows disk images, including applications and settings.

Valente reports that his team finds the Restore and USB Creation features of Dell ImageAssist especially useful. "Ransomware recently locked up about 1,900 PCs, so we had to load USB sticks with disk images that staff could use to restore infected ones. It takes us just 15 to 30 minutes with Dell ImageAssist to do what once took hours, and loading the image is so easy, anyone can do it."

When Valente started using Dell ImageAssist a few years ago, his team was managing 10 disk images with different Windows versions. Since then, they used the tool to help reduce the number to a single 64-bit Windows 10 image, except for a few Windows 7 machines that needed to run specialized applications. "Dell ImageAssist helps us manage our base Windows 10 image across all of Dell's PC platforms — OptiPlex desktops, Latitude laptops and Precision workstations," Valente says.

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> **Paul Valente**
> Managed Services Support Lead & Client Services Team Lead, Chicago Public Schools

Better than other tools — and free

Valente encourages others to use the tool. "We've seen all major vendors' tools, and none is nearly as robust or as well thought out or works like Dell ImageAssist," he says. "It saves so much time, is so easy to use, and it's free, so it eliminates license fees other vendors charge."

Valente estimates Dell ImageAssist cuts image-building time by 75 percent, helping his team generate at least 2,000 hours a year in time savings and freeing them up for other tasks.

Having used the tool to update the district's PC base to Windows 7 after Windows XP support ended in 2014, his team plans to use it again to move the base to Windows 10 over the next two years. "We have to migrate another 120,000 PCs, so we'd be crying if we didn't have Dell ImageAssist to help us," he says.

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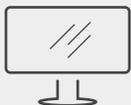
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