iboss

IDEA Public Schools moves to Zero Trust with iboss

See how IDEA Public Schools uses the iboss cloud to provide secure Internet access to their students and staff

About IDEA Public Schools

IDEA Public Schools is the largest charter network in Texas, serving over 84,000 students across 145 schools. With a history dating back to 2000, IDEA has built a reputation for academic excellence and a 100% college acceptance rate among graduates for more than a decade. This commitment to student success drives the organization to prioritize both instruction and data protection, ensuring that young learners and educators alike benefit from a secure environment.

As learning expands beyond physical campuses, IDEA needed a strategy to support its growing reliance on cloud applications and ensure that students and staff could access resources safely from anywhere. That search led them to iboss and its firewall as a service approach, opening the door to a cloud-first solution that enables zero trust, granular security controls, and simpler access management for third parties.
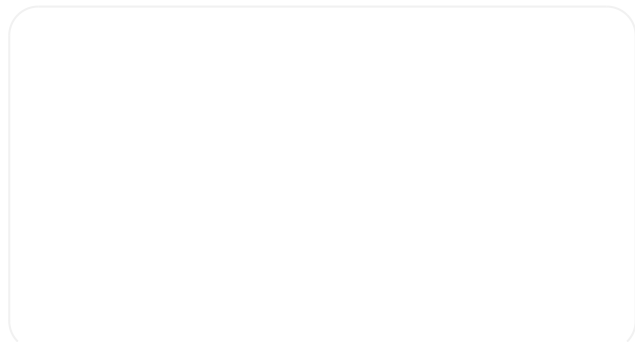
145
Schools

84,000+
Students

4
States

The Challenge

Adapting to a Rapidly Changing Tech Landscape and Meeting Strict Security Needs

IDEA faced a rapidly changing technology landscape. Instructional tools, business applications, and communications platforms all moving to the cloud. Traditional hardware-based firewalls and DNS filtering alone were no longer sufficient. Students and staff required quick and secure connectivity without the bottlenecks of outdated, on-premise architecture.

IT leaders also needed to protect sensitive data from every angle. External vendors and contractors regularly accessed IDEA's systems, but these interactions introduced potential entry points for threats. There was a clear need for an identity-based security posture, ensuring that any user or device could only reach the specific data and applications they were authorized to access.

On top of that, IDEA wanted to allocate costs effectively through the E-Rate program and maintain compliance with USAC rules. This required a seamless transition from a four-walled firewall approach to a cloud-based model, making sure there were no gaps in security coverage during the migration. Protecting students and staff remained top priority, but the IT team also had to ensure that teaching and learning could continue at full speed.

The Solution

Shifting to Zero Trust Firewall-as-a-Service with iboss Cloud Security

iboss provided the answer by delivering the E-Rate FWaaS that shifts data traffic to the cloud for inspection, enforcement, and control. Instead of relying on a single on-premise appliance, IDEA leveraged iboss policy enforcement points. This model ensures that every user session is inspected based on zero trust principles, limiting exposure and providing faster detection and response. The deployment also made it possible for IDEA to tap into dedicated IP space, simplify whitelisting with vendors, and uphold strong security when working with third-party contractors.

iboss integrates into existing environments, whether on-premises or in cloud platforms like AWS and Google Cloud. IDEA's IT team found it straightforward to adopt these services while maintaining performance, giving students and staff a smooth online experience. The combination of zero trust and cloud-based security positions IDEA to embrace new technologies, such as AI and advanced analytics, without compromising on safety.

The Results

Keeping Students Focused and Safe While Evolving Traditional Architecture

Leading the mission to provide the technology foundation, vision, and support for IDEA Public Schools is Marlon Shears, the Chief Information Officer for the office of Information Systems and Technology. The iboss cloud gives Mr. Shears and his IT team at IDEA Public Schools the tools they need to meet compliance and affordably support a wide range of devices across their expansive network of schools. IDEA Public Schools network administrators are able to provide secure Internet access to their devices, with consistent security policies, whether onsite or offsite.

At IDEA Public Schools, we are stewards of the student and teacher data. We take cybersecurity at the utmost importance and are always looking to layer our security posture, we turned to iboss for an enterprise solution approach. We needed to have a plan for security any place, anytime, and be proactive while still reducing attack surface. This is why we looked to Zero Trust with iboss compared to other firewalls that supported us in the past.

Marlon Shears
Chief Information Officer | IDEA Public Schools

IDEA Public Schools replaced their traditional firewalls with iboss E-Rate FWaaS solution, adopting zero trust principles for granular control and faster threat detection.

As a school district known for innovation, iboss was the only choice for IDEA Public Schools. Not only does the iboss cloud solve their existing architecture challenges, but the zero trust makes it easy to quickly detect threats, comply with CIPA and preserve federal funding.

Highlights

Here are some of the key areas where the iboss platform demonstrated strengths that aligned well with IDEA Public Schools' business requirements:

Adopted zero trust principles for granular control and faster detection of threats

Adopting zero trust principles ensures that every user, device, and connection is continuously verified before accessing any resource, rather than assuming trust based on network location. This approach is especially critical in K-12 environments, where students and staff frequently switch devices, connect from various locations, and rely on multiple cloud services. By enforcing granular access controls and faster threat detection, IT teams can quickly isolate risks, limit potential breaches, and maintain uninterrupted teaching and learning. The result is a security framework that aligns with the fluid, tech-driven landscape of K-12 education while safeguarding sensitive student and staff data.

Shifted from traditional firewalls to iboss firewall as a service for cloud-first security

Switching from a traditional firewall to iboss E-Rate FWaaS enhances K-12 cybersecurity by shifting traffic inspection and enforcement to the cloud. This ensures continuous protection for students and staff, whether they're on campus or accessing resources remotely. By replacing hardware constraints with a scalable, distributed model, it becomes easier to implement zero trust principles, reduce attack surfaces, and meet strict compliance requirements for K-12 schools.

Ensured E-Rate cost allocation and compliance with USAC regulations during deployment

By ensuring E-Rate cost allocation and complying with USAC regulations, schools can secure critical funding for advanced cybersecurity solutions without straining their budgets. This financial support makes it easier for K-12 districts to deploy and maintain robust protection—like firewall as a service and zero trust security—while meeting regulatory standards designed specifically to protect student data.

Introduced dedicated IP space for seamless vendor whitelisting and simplified contractor access

Introducing dedicated IP space helps K-12 schools tightly control and monitor external connections, allowing them to whitelist only authorized vendors. This ensures contractors can access the resources they need without requiring invasive security setups on their personal devices, reducing risk while maintaining robust protections for sensitive student and staff data.

Secure Internet access for all popular platforms from any location

When a user takes their iPad, Chromebook, Macbook, or Windows laptop, onsite or offsite, the cloud connector stays connected to the iboss cloud continuously. The user experiences uninterrupted Internet access and consistent security policies, across devices and from any location.

Detailed and granular reporting with alerts for high-risk activity

The iboss cloud includes detailed event logs for auditing and reporting as well as real-time dashboards that help you quickly identify high-risk network activity. Choose from several, pre-designed layouts or manually drill-down into the details with flexible and granular filtering controls.

Complex policy definitions with inheritance and layers

iboss has an enterprise-class policy system that allows you to quickly apply the same set of base rules to multiple child policies. More specific rules or policy layers can then be added, allowing you to tailor the same base rules to different networks and groups. These time-saving capabilities are essential to large enterprises, where manually applying the same rules to a large number of policies would require an unacceptable amount of redundant work.

SSL decryption that adds visibility into HTTPS traffic

With the included support for SSL decryption, you can selectively inspect encrypted HTTPS traffic. SSL decryption gives you more visibility into your traffic and enhances your filtering options. This enables you to block websites or applications that are causing distraction or are placing your organization at risk.

Comprehensive malware protection

Instead of relying on only one anti-virus vendor to provide malware protection, iboss uses an optimized combination of malware engines and threat feeds from industry-leading vendors and research labs. Multi-engine approaches offer more-thorough protection because each malware engine uses a different methodology. One engine often detects what another one misses.

About iboss

iboss is a cloud security company that provides organizations and their employees secure access to the Internet on any device, from any location, in the cloud. This eliminates the need for traditional security appliances which are ineffective at protecting a cloud-first and mobile world. Leveraging a purpose-built cloud architecture, iboss is designed to make transitioning from security appliances to cloud security a seamless process. iboss is trusted by more than 4000 organizations worldwide, spans over 100 points of presence globally and is backed by over 110 patents.

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