



# Alabama Department of Education improves recovery time from 24 hours to 2 minutes with Dell AppAssure



## Customer profile

Company	Alabama State Department of Education
Industry	Education
Location	United States
Employees	500+
Web site	<a href="http://alsde.edu">alsde.edu</a>

## Challenge

Alabama State Department of Education was struggling with slow and failed backups and increasing tape costs.

## Solution

The department solved its problems by migrating from Symantec Backup Exec™ to Dell™ AppAssure which provides a cost-effective backup and disaster recovery solution for Microsoft® Exchange Server and Microsoft SQL Server®.

## Benefits

- Recovery in two minutes vs. a full day previously with increased user confidence
- Ability for IT to turn its attention from backup and recovery to comprehensive disaster recovery
- Quick and easy-to-use solution within the department's budget range

## Application areas

- [Disaster Recovery](#)
- [Virtualization](#)

“While I’m not from Missouri, I love their motto—Show Me. That’s how I approached all the hype and promises from other backup products. Does the thing work—does it really work? Dell AppAssure is a product that works.”

*Scott Crews, Network Manager, Alabama State Department of Education*

“I had a user call just the other day who was a bit worried that the file she’d lost was gone... I restored her lost file while we were on the phone together. Dell AppAssure is that quick and easy.”

Lloyd Nunnelee,  
Backup Administrator,  
Alabama State Department  
of Education

With over 33 departments, approximately 133 school systems and more than 500 employees, the Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE) is the state agency providing oversight for more than 1,300 schools throughout Alabama. From child nutrition to special education and from teacher certification to pupil transportation, ALSDE works closely with the county and city educational systems to guarantee that Alabama’s children get a solid education. Alabama is the only state in the United States that has a single student management system coordinating student grades, attendance, teacher reporting and systemic live enrollment.

#### Dealing with backup inefficiencies

With ALSDE’s forward thinking and commitment to its students, Network Manager Scott Crews and Backup Administrator Lloyd Nunnelee knew that the Symantec Backup Exec backup solution they were using just wasn’t making the grade.

“With Backup Exec there were two issues—the tapes were expensive and recovery was just too slow,” says Crews. “If you had to recover a file and you had the tape onsite, it might take two hours—on a good day.” Nunnelee goes on to say, “That’s the best case scenario. That’s only if the user knew when the file was last saved and we still had the information onsite. But after two weeks when we had taken the tapes offsite, it was a shot in the dark. At that point, it would take almost the rest of the day.”

While they fortunately never had a full server failure, ALSDE’s IT team was spending more and more time dealing with unworkable backup scenarios

and failures. They would perform daily incremental backups at night, with a full backup on weekends—which took about four to seven tapes—then put the backup offsite. These tapes would then be rotated every five to six weeks. But the tapes kept failing and the team couldn’t get a good backup more often than not.

“About once a week, we came in and found out that we didn’t get a good backup,” says Crews, “which is no small thing because we have apps like the child nutrition program running on

#### Technology at work

##### Software

Dell™ AppAssure

Microsoft® Exchange

Microsoft SQL Server®

VMware®

Windows Server®



Microsoft SQL Server, which is huge for federal dollars—schools go online and order their meals, produce and so forth.”

Not only that, but ALSDE’s Student Data System, which coordinates information among the schools and is replicated up to the state department, is critical, especially for migrant workers’ children. These children might be in one part of the state for a four-month farm season and move to another part for another season. ALSDE is able to keep a record if a student leaves or comes back in order to place them appropriately. Not having good backups of this made Crews and Nunnelee concerned.

#### **Where’s the data?**

The final catalyst came for the IT team when they had to restore email with Backup Exec for one of the assistant superintendents, and they couldn’t get the data back. “We all looked at each other and said let’s move on,” recalls Crews. “I said to my team we’re all smart folks, let’s start researching a better backup and disaster recovery product and see what’s out there.”

The team did a deep dive into products that promised better backup and disaster recovery results. But because education is too often the poor agency on the block when it comes to spending money, Crews knew that his staff needed to be smart about the product they’d choose—a solution that was advanced, quick, easy to use and not out of the ALSDE’s limited budget range.

In the end, only Dell AppAssure gave them the confidence that it was going to do what it actually said it would. “While I’m not from Missouri,” says Crews, “I

love their motto—Show Me. That’s how I approached all the hype and promises of marketing. Does the darn thing work—really work? AppAssure is a product that works.”

#### **Easier backup scenarios**

The key features that Crews and Nunnelee rely on daily include AppAssure’s intuitive administrative console and the ability to rapidly restore lost data.

“AppAssure is as easy as using Windows Explorer,” says Nunnelee, who has spent a good portion of his career wrangling difficult administrative interfaces with other backup products. “You just right-click, copy and restore the data. The cataloging is just so much better as well. AppAssure is so much easier to maneuver around in than other products I’ve worked with.”

#### **Rapid data restores save the day**

“The time to recover a file or email is under two minutes, and the panic or fear of the user is taken away,” says Crews. “We have different servers set at various intervals for our snaps, from 15 minutes to two hours, depending on what type of recovery point objective we’ve set for the server. And the speed of recovery every time with AppAssure... well, let me just say, this is fast.”

Nunnelee agrees, noting how some of ALSDE’s longer-term employees who remember what file restores used to be like, are just in awe of AppAssure because data recovery is no longer a two-day process. “I had a user call just the other day,” laughs Nunnelee. “She was a bit worried that the file she’d lost was gone and asked, ‘Do you think you

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can get it back?’ I teased her and said, ‘Well, I don’t really know...’ She started to get upset until I said, ‘Yep, it’s there.’ In other words, I restored her lost file while we were on the phone together. AppAssure is that quick and easy.”

ALSDE’s IT team can now turn its attention from worrying about backup and recovery, to focusing on creating a comprehensive disaster recovery process, using AppAssure to replicate data offsite. “AppAssure is not a product that you have to babysit; you don’t have to make sure it’s running,” says Crews. “With Backup Exec, we had to check and make sure it was running after a

weekend, or see if it ran out of tape, or reboot the server. AppAssure has shown us that this is it—it does what it says it does.”

Crews and Nunnelee are eagerly telling others how AppAssure has made the grade. At a recent Tech Ed conference, Crews made a beeline to AppAssure’s information booth and exclaimed to the gathered crowd, “Listen to these guys. They’re not selling a bunch of junk. This stuff actually works!”

Dell AppAssure gets an A+.

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