Reliable network management on a budget

Business issue
Operating within a conservative budget and with limited IT staff, the Memphis school system sought a way to reliably manage its voice/data/video network consisting of 2,000 devices serving 118,000 students on a 24/365 basis.

Strategy
The network is the "critical element" in running the schools and serving both students and administrators, says Linda Mainord, director of information technology for Memphis City Schools. With the $35.4 million network completed in May 2001, "it is poised to deliver to our children any kind of technology we want," Mainord says.

Facing the same challenge shared by many organizations, however, Mainord's staff went looking for expert network management that is reliable, efficient and economical. They found a solution in the alliance between IBM, one of the world's largest IT services providers, and NetSolve, a leading provider of remote network management services.

IBM and NetSolve went onsite in Memphis to check out the network configurations that needed monitoring, with the focus on availability.

"When schools and universities use a network to deliver class material to students, it's very important that they concentrate on their competency -- in this case, education -- without having to worry about the network," says Dr. Ed Harrison, director and managing principal, U.S. Network services practice of IBM Global Services. "We can ensure that the network stays up for them while they concentrate on doing their job. Furthermore, we can manage their network at a lower cost than they can."

To spot problems in the making and correct them before anything goes wrong, remote monitoring of the Memphis schools network is done over the Internet, and network status information made available via a Web portal. Monthly consultation reviews with IBM Global Services personnel allows the Memphis IT team to review the network's performance and weigh any recommendations for improvement. If increased traffic indicates a network
expansion, for example, alliance personnel will offer advice on what might be done and what technology is available.

Results
"IBM and NetSolve brought us a solution that reduces our risk, ensures our network reliability and gives us a cost-effective, fixed monthly fee," says Mainord.