May 22, 2012 — When Monroe County Schools, TN, purchased their first ENA Live accounts last year, they had the standard expectations: administrators would use the cloud-based videoconferencing solution for meetings and teachers would use it to take their classes on virtual field trips. That certainly has come to pass. But that’s definitely not all that’s happened, says Technology Director Gary Sharp and Data and Instructional Technology Coach Jessica Thomas, who’ve purchased about 140 accounts for the district to date.

ENA Live, it seems, has taken on a life of its own in the district, taking its users places its original proponents couldn’t have guessed just a few short months ago.

“ENA Live usage happens without us even knowing about it,” explains Sharp. “Teachers and our other staff are connecting to one another with the solution and oftentimes we only hear about it after the fact.” It’s taken on a life of its own and the two technology advocates couldn’t be happier about it. When asked for examples, the two colleagues laugh about the sometimes surprising ways the solution has been used—like the week before Easter when so many users were watching chicks hatching from one elementary classroom that the district’s bandwidth usage nearly topped out!—and very nearly finish each other’s sentences.

**Telemedicine: Multiplying Resources at Minimal Costs**

Probably the most resounding success the district’s experienced thus far with ENA Live is with its telemedicine program. By leveraging the power of the solution, an already very progressive school health system had become even better by multiplying resources at minimal costs.

Monroe County Schools offers a clinic in all 12 of their school sites, staffed by a mixture of full-time, part-time and “floating” registered nurses (RNs), licensed practical nurses (LPNs) and nurse practitioners. Chota Community Health Services (CCHS), a Federally Qualified Health Center—that is, a community-based organization that provides comprehensive primary and preventive care to anyone regardless of their ability to pay or health insurance status—is the program’s sponsoring medical provider. While the RNs and LPNs are school district employees, CCHS employs the medical director for the clinics and the nurse practitioners who travel to the clinics and provide medical care (with parental permission).
On a daily basis, the medical staff sees everything from minor abrasions, cuts and contusions to ear infections, urinary tract infections, pharyngitis, sinusitis, gastrointestinal illnesses and flu to severe asthma attacks, seizures, diabetic emergencies, and severe allergic reactions. Since it was created 12 years ago, the staff has even diagnosed appendicitis, hepatitis, fatal brain tumors, cardiac emergencies hyperlipidemia. Today, the district health system has become a model for the entire region.

In fact, back in 2010, CCHS CEO Dr. Barbara Levin, COO Laura Harris and Monroe County Schools Health Supervisor Sonia Hardin spoke before the U.S. Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee.

When the technology department introduced Hardin — who was the only nurse to 4800 students when she joined the district in 1989 — to the resource-magnifying possibilities of ENA Live, she knew she had to pilot it. The state of Tennessee allows providers employing telemedicine services to bill insurance companies at the same rate as regular face-to-face visits; federal stipulations requires that the telemedicine services be rendered in real time for reimbursement. Monroe County Schools’ health program and ENA Live were a perfect fit.

“The greatest benefit of using videoconferencing is the access to care in a reasonable timeframe,” explains Hardin. “It allows us to provide medical care in the schools without requiring parents, or our school staff, to take off work in order to seek care. If a child is experiencing ear pain and the nurse practitioner is not scheduled at that particular school at that particular time, the nurse can link a telemedicine visit to a nurse practitioner at another school. The child can be seen for the ear infection using the digital otoscope, the practitioner can call in the prescription for treatment and the child is started on antibiotics as soon as the parents can pick it up. Without telemedicine, that same ear infection might progress with increased pain and maybe even lead to an emergency room visit in the middle of the night. Telemedicine cuts costs in two ways. One, the parent isn’t losing work time. Two, if the parent must wait until after work to seek medical attention for his or her child, more often than not—especially in rural areas such as here where there are very few after-hours clinics—the emergency room may be the only medical care available. The cost to insurance companies for emergency room visits is much higher than a visit to our clinics.”

Beyond the substantial cost savings of using ENA Live in lieu of hiring additional nurse practitioners, telemedicine solves another resource challenge for the district. Quite simply, says Hardin, even if the district had the funding to hire more nurse practitioners, there are no other nurse practitioners to hire in Monroe County.

The district health department likes the solution so much, it plans to purchase other enhanced video equipment and add-on devices such as telephonic stethoscopes. To see how much the staff likes ENA Live, Sharp says all one needs to do is walk into the health department’s main office. “They are burning up the airwaves talking to each other,” he says. “They even use it for one-to-one conversations and meetings instead of e-mail, instant messenger and the phone.”

Driving Instruction Home
This past year, Sweetwater High School Principal David Watts contacted Sharp to request that he download the ENA Live software to a student’s laptop. The junior would be homebound for an extended period of time and wanted to continue taking her AP U.S. History and Advanced Mathematics courses via videoconferencing. Sharp was only too happy to oblige and the solution was the next best thing to being there: the student successfully completed her courses from home. Since hearing about it, teachers and administrators from other district schools have been clamoring to provide the same long-distance classroom access to their homebound students.
“We see a lot of opportunity here,” says Sharp, “and we’ll be expanding on this in the near future.” He and the director of homebound students have been discussing how to best accomplish this. The director plans to purchase some mobile units of laptops on carts that can be deployed to classrooms that need to broadcast instruction to homebound students.

**Hands-On Teaching Goes Online**

A great example of what’s possible when teachers have ENA Live at hand to connect and collaborate—ad hoc and on short notice—is a certain virtual lab session that took place this year in the district. Teacher Donna Trentham’s Tellico Plains Junior High science classroom is not equipped to dissect frogs but CTE (Career and Technology Education) teacher Patty Thomas’s Sequoyah High School classroom is. So Thomas very graciously performed a frog dissection while the junior high students watched in awe over ENA Live.

Convinced of the instructional potential of videoconferencing, the district’s CTE director is interested in having two Health Occupations classes taught by one of the department’s teachers next year.

**When it Takes a Virtual Village**

Videoconferencing is frequently touted as an effective, inexpensive method of bringing in outside experts and Monroe County has certainly proven it. This spring, Sharp and his department trained 30 special education instructors on how to use ENA Live. “Special ed teachers work closely with one another, sharing and discussing issues they face with their pupils, and they also do a lot of cross-referencing with psychologists and other professionals outside the school,” explains Sharp. “I have a feeling that our special ed educators will be using the solution a lot in the future.”

Similarly, Coordinated School Health professionals could also consult with psychologists, doctors, dieticians and other outside experts via ENA Live. District counselors frequently meet with students and videoconferencing would drastically cut travel time and improve productivity. “The counselors’ primary concern is privacy. You can’t do this over Skype,” says Sharp. “ENA Live is secure, so it’s an ideal tool for this.”

**Ready, Set, Record and Stream!**

With ENA Live, users have the ability to record and stream conference sessions. Monroe County’s technology staff demonstrated this feature to district teachers this past March during Tech Week. The week’s theme was “Bring Your Own Technology,” and teachers were encouraged to create lesson plans each day that incorporated technology or experimental learning into the classroom. Students were encouraged to bring their own laptops, tablets and smartphones to meet instructional goals. On Friday of that week, the technology team gave away a $2000 “classroom technology makeover” by drawing. The staff recorded the drawing on ENA Live and e-mailed the link to every teacher in the district.

“The recording was just a near way of showing our educators that the record and stream feature is an option that can be employed in instruction and communication,” says Thomas.

One educator, Vonore Middle School Principal Debi Tipton, had already discovered how handy the feature is. Tipton prefers that her morning announcements have a personable touch for her students and be as convenient as possible for her teachers. Therefore she records each morning’s announcements the afternoon before on ENA Live. She also invites different students to her office each afternoon to lead the Pledge of Allegiance on the recording. The next morning, the school’s classroom teachers play the announcements over ENA Live when their students are settled in and ready. The students pay better attention when they can see Principal Tipton’s face as she speaks and they enjoy seeing their peers reciting the pledge along with them.

“The record and stream feature of ENA Live is extremely useful,” says Thomas. “Our schools are very interested in applying this to any number of things: graduation ceremonies, ball games, special events, etc.”

**More Places Left To Go**

Sharp and Thomas believe that videoconferencing usage will continue to grow in their district. That fact that the growth could come in unexpected ways doesn’t bother them a bit. When asked to predict what lies in store over the next year, Sharp has a ready answer: “You’ll have to come back in a year and ask.”

Our guess is that whatever happens, it will be a success. Yes, indeed. 98¾% guaranteed.