

Chenango Forks School District Upgrades to KENWOOD DMR System for Improved Coverage and Immediate Connectivity Throughout Their Campus



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PROJECT OVERVIEW: Chenango Forks School District consists of an elementary, middle and high school located on a large campus. When communications became less than dependable with their former analog radio system, they upgraded to a KENWOOD DMR system to assure a reliable system for day-to-day and emergency communications.

Built by historic innovators, famous as the hometown of Rod Serling, this city is now known as a hub for technology, academics and the arts. Binghamton, New York, with a population of a quarter million, is in a valley, surrounded by rolling hills at the confluence of the Susquehanna and Chenango rivers. Binghamton is home to the Chenango Forks Central School District, with more than 1,300 students on a sprawling campus housing an elementary, middle and high school.

When troubling gaps in radio coverage became more frequent throughout the Chenango Forks campus, especially between the elementary school building and the middle/high school facility, Michael Pavlovich, Director of Operations and Finance for the district, knew that it was time for an upgrade.

“We mostly had analog radios, with a handful of digital portables, and one repeater,” said Pavlovich. “Obviously, in this day and age, we could not tolerate the coverage gaps. If we had a situation when a student

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– Michael Pavlovich, Director of Operations and Finance, Chenango Forks Central School District

needed intervention or there was some other emergency, the lack of communications could have created a crisis.”

Pavlovich contacted several vendors, remembering, “We were struggling with getting quotes. Although we had Kenwood radios, we did reach out to other vendors. And those vendors were not listening to us about our requirements.” Familiar with Kenwood radios from a previous job in education, Pavlovich contacted their local Kenwood dealer, JPJ Electronic Communications in Binghamton. He asked David Whaley, JPJ’s General Manager, to come out to the campus and evaluate the situation.

“David came on site, walked the entire campus, looked at our existing equipment and helped us identify areas with coverage gaps,” said Pavlovich. “They loaned us equipment on a trial basis and when that equipment worked, they gave us a quote, came out, installed everything and even helped with the implementation process with staff. JPJ was truly there for us from start to finish.”

The installation was an upgrade from the mix of analog and digital radios to a completely digital system. “With digital,” said Whaley, “you gain capacity, gain audio quality and get so many advantages you wouldn’t with analog. You can have multiple conversations simultaneously and

you can set aside emergency channels. In the old system, there was one repeater at the high school and the elementary school couldn’t always reach them. If two people were talking, it tied up the repeater. Basically, they were doing radio-to-radio communications, and it wasn’t working. Until we described the upgrade we had in mind, the district wasn’t aware of all the capabilities of digital.”

“Now there is no gap in communications,” said Pavlovich. “We have clear radio communications between the two buildings and also between the buildings and the buses. It’s seamless. We’re very comfortable with our choice of Kenwood digital radios.”

JPJ implemented two Kenwood TKR-D810 DMR digital repeaters, one at the middle/high school building and one at the elementary school. The

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Chenango Forks Central School District STEAM Academy building. Photo by Keystone Associates

school staff uses NX-1300DUK2 portables, with NX-3300K2 portables dedicated to administrative staff including teacher aides and support staff, for a total of 75 radios. "We also installed a patch at the high school building with an outdoor antenna that bridges their DMR radios into the existing bus repeater system, a previously installed Motorola DMR Tier 2 system," said Whaley.

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Chenango Forks Central School District

While there was some adjustment to the sound of digital voice, people became used to the radios in less than a month. The district's two school resource officers were involved from the start with the upgrade, said Pavlovich. He added, "Our SROs are ecstatic with the new radio system."

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Whaley said that Chenango Forks decided not to do an optional dedicated emergency channel. "They have an operations channel for each school, an administration channel and a coordination channel. That way, administrators have direct contact and their own talk group on the repeater. With DMR radios, in an emergency they can use the priority interrupt feature if needed, but other than that, everything is on the operations channel," said Whaley. "The administrators can move to the operations channel to give instructions to the various departments, coordinating immediately. Then they can go back to their respective operations channels. Before the upgrade, their biggest challenge was coverage. They have such a big property and when people were outside of the buildings during an evacuation, for example, they couldn't use their radios."

Pavlovich observed that "The radios are comparable to other digital radio brands. But having JPJ as a partner makes the difference for us."

"DMR is the way to go with schools. It's easy to set up, you can do a lot of interconnect and if you have multiple buildings, it's ideal," said Whaley.

"I always tell these schools, when you do fire drills and mockup incidents, make sure to really test your radio communications procedures. You want to find problems now and not when there is an emergency," Whaley said.

"JPJ was, start to finish, great to work with. They engaged early with our concerns, and they came up with a solution for us that is working," said Pavlovich.

LOCAL DEALER PARTNER:

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