Case Study
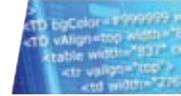
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Access control technology offers security and convenience

Sielox

The students have been cooperative and the system is working well at the Fairview School System in Bergen County, NJ

The Fairview New Jersey School system's access control system was installed during the 2008 summer vacation. Teachers and students returned for the fall term to find the Fairview buildings protected with a Pinnacle access control system installed by Security 101 of Eatontown, NJ, a company that has installed access control systems in a number of school districts in the New York Metro area.

The new system is providing even more than the administration expected and is considered a wonderful security addition for the district. The students have adjusted very well to access control, as have the teachers, support staff, parents, and the community in general. Many parents have reported how pleased they are that the district made this effort to keep children safe.

Before selecting a system, a number of alternatives were considered to best suit the district's needs. Safety is an extremely important consideration for the younger children, grades K – 8; Fairview eighth graders go on to the nearby Cliffside Park High School.

"My access level has been perfect; I've had no issues or problems. I like the peripherals that were given to me, and I've had no trouble at all entering or leaving any of the physical areas."

About the system

Fairview has, in all, about 11,000 residents. There are some 1,200 children in the school system, about fifteen administrators, 110 teachers and a school librarian. Three separate school buildings operate in the district. A vacated parochial school building is currently being leased with an option to purchase.

Thirteen doors are controlled. The No. 3 School has four entries, the annex has four entries, and Lincoln School has five entries. The access control system is not installed in the leased building. If that building is purchased the system will be added after the building is brought up to Code.

Sophisticated electronics

The district's sophisticated computer system meets and in some instances exceeds the norm for similar school systems. Web-based programs are used for instructional, educational and office work; two data servers are in use and Word, Excel and PowerPoint are employed on a regular basis.

The school buildings are connected wirelessly, with T-3 and fiber lines run within the buildings. The district has a sophisticated connectivity to the Internet and is essentially an XP professional environment.

In charge of electronics

Jim Marini has been with the school system for twenty-three years. For the past sixteen he has been in charge of Fairview's electronics in terms of hands-on installation, maintenance and upkeep. "I am concerned in the deeper involvement of communications and technology," Marini says. "My job is to provide consistent connectivity, an outside source, and keep the machines running."

Smooth, clean installation

The Sielox Pinnacle access control system was installed over the summer of 2008 and put in use with the start of school in September. "We have been working with construction since I've been here," Marini notes, "and this is the smoothest and cleanest installation I've seen." On completion of installation the integrator provided a thorough briefing on the system, which Marini followed up with a tutorial for teachers and administrators.

Working as required

Marini says access control has been working just as expected since the installation was completed. "My access level has been perfect; I've had no issues or problems. I like the peripherals that were given to me, and I've had no trouble at all entering or leaving any of the physical areas."

The new system is set up for five access levels. The superintendent, principals, custodians and security staff have physical keys to get in as well as their access cards, but do not use them except in emergencies. Access for administrative staff and teachers is arranged for regular school hours plus a margin. Coaches and some others also have extended evening and Saturday hours. Substitute teachers have limited access via a special card; each school has its own coded, single-day substitute cards.

Special contractor key cards are set up for the plumber and electrician to cover the possibility of off-hours emergencies. All students have and must wear their photo ID badges, created through the Pinnacle system.

"Access control makes my job easier," Marini sums it up. "I'm cataloged visiting the various sites, and this tracking is a good thing because administrators can always find me when they need me. It builds more structure into the system and more camaraderie with the staff. The children have been very well behaved in regard to the system."

"It's a great addition"

Assistant Superintendent **Joe Olivelli** is the Pinnacle system administrator with the title "Teacher on Special Assignment." It's his job to track the details of the system, keep records and create and distribute cards.

The new access control system, he reports, "Is a great addition to the school for the protection of the children. We can use it to limit access to whatever door or doors we want visitors to use at whatever time we want them to come in, or we can lock out the school entirely, which is done daily during school hours."

When school is in session, parents and other visitors must come to the specified entrance, be admitted, sign and log in and obtain a visitor's pass. These cards have no access code; they just identify the holder as a visitor.

His records, Olivelli notes, will always show when someone comes into a building. "If it's employees, we can find out what time they swiped in. If a break-in occurred when an alarm wasn't functioning, we could still determine which door was violated."

Olivelli has been in charge of the system since it was turned over to the school district in September 2008. In several ongoing sessions, the integrator's technicians walked him through the various areas of his new responsibility: how to take photos, designate and change access levels, interpret system readings and pull up reports for any desired dates.

More options for the upper grades

The photo ID badges worn by all the students will be expanded for students in grades six, seven and eight. The cards can be programmed to cover activities like school trips. The library still employs a preexisting program for checking out materials, but this may eventually be moved to the Pinnacle system.

Forward-looking backward-compatible technology

Enterprise-capable Pinnacle™ software from Sielox, Runnemede, NJ provides total control of the entire access control network, plus the ability to upgrade or reconfigure controllers, readers, proximity cards and other hardware. It incorporates agile methodology for software development.

It integrates readily with existing electronics, and does not demand future investment except for expansion.

A perk of importance to the school system is the company's firm policy of offering backward-compatible technology to vigorously support its legacy products. Sielox allows its users to update, so as new technology is introduced and tested any specific access control system can, if desired, be moved in that direction while maintaining the previous investment.

The last word

Robert Ryan of Security 101 notes, "There is always some reluctance on the part of staff when a new system is put in. At Fairview it was very slight, and quickly disappeared when they saw how well the system works."

Lea Turro has been with the district 28 years, and serves as principal of Lincoln, one of the four schools in the district. "I love the new system; I think it's great," she says. "It gives us an added sense of security because you can keep track of everything.

"The teachers really like the system. They can arrive early, even come in on Saturdays and holidays."

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