Wallingford Schools Prove it Takes a Village to Enhance Security

Connecticut school district chooses Sielox solution to increase emergency response and protect students and staff

The staggering statistics accumulated over the last 20 years only reinforce the precept that providing a safe school environment is critical to the education process. More than a quarter of a million students have experienced gun violence on campus since Colorado's tragic Columbine High School massacre in 1999. These attacks have provided the impetus for school districts to mandate increased budgets for school security and investment in cutting-edge technologies that can heighten proactive defenses and reduce response time for first responders to help keep students, teachers and staff safe.

Looking to solidify its proactive approach to securing its campuses and improving potential response time by law enforcement in the event of an emergency, the Wallingford School District brought the community together following the Parkland, Florida school shooting that claimed 17 lives in 2018 to reassess its risk factors. The Connecticut area was no stranger to past school violence, so community leaders like Salvatore Menzo, Superintendent, Wallingford Public Schools, understood the urgency to improve his district's security posture and alleviate parent and staff concerns related to delayed response times by law enforcement that characterized the Parkland active shooter incident.

More than 150 parents, teachers and other town residents discussed the security and safety issues in a town forum that suggested they initiate active-shooter workshops and lockdown training for all schools. The school board moved forward in June 2018 by allocating $660,000 for security initiatives and added four security resource officers the next school year for another $480,000.

Menzo and his team brought in Security 101, one of the top security systems integrators in the Northeast to help them plan and implement their security solution. Security 101 is

a low-voltage electronic company specializing in providing integrated electronic security systems and are nationally recognized as one of the fastest growing integrators in the United States.

Sielox, a leading and nationally recognized access control solutions provider, was selected to partner with Security 101 for the Wallingford Schools project. Sielox offers an extensive portfolio of K-12 safety and security solutions, including access control and emergency notification and response systems that can be layered in any combination, or used stand-alone to meet a school's specific security and safety requirements.

Menzo said the system they selected allows school administrators to communicate via computer and mobile devices to first responders for all security breaches or medical emergencies. "This is the perfect solution for our community, allowing for quicker communication than cell phones or having teachers run from one end of the school to other," he added.

For Security 101 operations manager Patrick Mirto, his investment in the Wallingford School district went beyond a simple professional interest, as he was both a resident and parent in the school district.

"After seeing the aftermath of the Parkland shooting, our community really became more aware of some of the security issues we faced in our own schools. The community worked with the school district to help formulate a plan and consider technology solutions that would fit our needs and budget," Mirto explained.

The consensus was to implement Sielox's Crisis Lockdown Alert Status System (CLASS) in all of 12 of the public schools, including the two high schools, two middle schools and eight elementary schools. The system met the requirement for enhancing emergency response and notification time between the schools, law enforcement and emergency first responders .This highly effective tool can potentially save lives by issuing alerts during emergency situations and providing real-time information to emergency personnel via graphical maps, chat, email and text messaging. The system is also designed for ease of use using simple color-coded icons that make it easy for designated staff, security personnel and teachers to use.

"By working with the community during the grant approval process, Sielox helped provide a cost-effective and secure solution that worked for everyone," said Sielox CEO Karen Evans. "CLASS provides vital situational awareness to responders so the Wallingford School District can better manage emergencies with real time intelligence."

Mirto explained that the lockdown portion of CLASS integrates with existing access control and security systems already in place including the audible annunciation of a lockdown situation, blue strobe lights in higher decibel areas like gyms and cafeterias, and notification to the local police department. An added feature allows all school-issued devices to have access to the website and equips authorized teachers and administrative staff with personal logins providing them with the ability to initiate a lockdown.

The status alerts chosen by the district includes: All Clear, Medical, Class Disturbance, Missing Student and Check-in. The office staff in each school receives notification of every status change with each status alert assigned to a specific staff member such as medical emergencies being handled by the school nurse. The innovative Sielox CLASS

solution also requires individual teachers to check-in every morning. "Having teachers check in serves two purposes; it allows the teacher to tell staff 'we're good' while providing them with daily exposure to the system," Mirto said.

Each school in the district will have a CLASS server appropriately sized for the school. The AC-1700 boards will provide a hard-wired interface between CLASS and the school's existing systems. These technology systems include: NVR/storage systems; surveillance cameras; mobile devices; card readers, button panels and biometric readers; electric, wireless and magnetic locks; motion and other intrusion detection sensors; elevator and smart buildings controls; and interfaces to law enforcement communications and panic buttons.

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