

Electronic Access Control for Modern-Day Schools  
By Michael J. Mahon, Sielox Regional Sales Manager  
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Electronic access control systems provide structure and security to deter problems. The system's report capabilities allow authorities to know which doors are locked, giving them control over who can enter your building. At the same time, the system protects the assets inside — computer labs, IT rooms, and even items from the staff locker room. All of this can be incorporated into an electronic access system, which also provides a complete audit trail of who entered and when.

Protecting Primary Grades

Obviously, primary schools have different management situations from high schools and colleges. One helpful aspect is that children in the primary grades do, to some extent, expect to be managed. That makes it especially important that unauthorized adults do not come in contact with them.

This begins, of course, with controlling the entrances and exits to buildings. The buildings need to be opened at certain times, and all occupied school buildings should be secured within minutes after the bell rings. During school hours, all doors should be secured, and latecomers and visitors should be made to apply for admission at the properly overseen door nearest the office, where they sign in via the electronic system.

Visitor Management Through Electronics

Management becomes more complex in a larger school district, but any size school has visitors to manage, especially when children need to be picked up. One reliable method is to control visitors with an electronic system. The visitor's photo can be captured, along with a signature, if a child is to be signed in or out.

In preschool and K-4, relatives often come in to pick up children. Through the electronic system, school authorities can match the live image of the applying adult to the authorized stored image and a picture of the child. City schools and daycare centers frequently use this method. The system can also store messages to ensure only certain people are authorized to pick up a child. The electronic system can also include a "watch list" of local undesirables supplied by the police department.

Saving the Rekeying

Faculty and staff also need to gain admission. Schools that have not gone the electronic route often have no idea (and no true control over) how many keys are out. The electronic system saves greatly by removing the necessity and cost of rekeying.

#### Events Control

For special events, the electronic access control system can be set to control where people can enter, automatically relock the doors at the end of the predetermined time, and record that the doors are locked. Programming covers many eventualities — systems can be programmed to deny access, they can be set up at the beginning of the school year to include holiday periods, days off, and weekends, and times, days, weeks, and months can be restricted or varied for each session or in mid-session should the need arise.

#### CCTV Tie-In

Today's electronics offer the capability of tying CCTV cameras to the security system. This becomes a very important extra deterrent. The projected intrusion comes up on the event screen of the access control system, and can be automatically forwarded to a PBA, an email, and the police.

#### Photo ID

The electronic system can and should include photo ID capability. ID cards for even a small staff are a very sensible precaution. They can also provide a sense of security to the smaller children, who are taught that the ID shows that the adult wearing it is in authority and reliable.

In middle school, high school, and college, photo ID badging expands to be a useful tool for students. They use their badges in the library, cafeteria, perhaps the locker room. Some enterprising school systems have extended it to acceptance by local food shops and other merchants in town.

#### What About the Budget?

Grant money may be available through the Department of Homeland Security or the state. An experienced access control integrator can work with the board or administrator to help find this money.

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