Mississippi School District Implements

Advanced Security Solution

For Franklin County Schools, a rural Mississippi district serving over 1,500 students grades K through 12, providing a safe and secure school environment is one of the highest priorities.

"A fundamental part of assuring the success of our students is to provide a safe and secure environment in which they can flourish," said Ray Carlock, superintendent of education at Franklin County School District. "We are particularly mindful of the difficulty in monitoring an entire school without being intrusive or distracting, or investing in additional personnel. We felt that any technology that could help us improve the efficiency of how we manage and monitor what happens in our schools would be of great interest."

As is the case with many schools throughout the country, Franklin's elementary school, middle school and high school relied on manually locked doors and a resource officer on staff to maintain security and respond to events. In light of local and national concerns for the safety of school buildings, the district understood that this was no longer sufficient to protect the community's most precious resource – its children. The district determined that the best way to assure students, staff, parents, and visitors were safe and secure while at school was to deploy an access control and surveillance system that could be centrally administered.

They turned to Franklin Telephone Company and its parent company Telapex, the local telecommunications and broadband service provider that is recognized for delivering cutting edge technology and innovative solutions to rural Mississippi, for input on how this could be accomplished.

Finding a Solution

A longtime supplier of services and community partner to the district's schools, Franklin Telephone Company immediately took stock of the needs of the school district and proposed an advanced system that would not only enhance the security and safety of the Franklin schools, but would also let them take advantage of mobile technology to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of controlling access and monitoring of all the school properties 24 hours a day.

Franklin Telephone, in turn, partnered with Clear2there, a leading provider of advanced video surveillance, smart-home, smart-business, and smart-farm applications, and M2M solutions for service providers and enterprises. Using Clear2there's flexible Viewbiquity Cloud Application Suite (VCAS) platform, Franklin Telephone developed a customized solution for each school building that addressed the needs of the building principal as well as the district administration.

School officials have the ability to view the video feed from any surveillance camera on any Internet-connected computer or mobile device. In addition, electronic door locks can be activated on a command basis and a time of day basis in order to assure efficient access at high demand times such as the beginning of the school day, but assure that positive authentication of visitors is possible 24 hours a day. School personnel have dedicated video surveillance monitors that allow them to view an entryway before remotely opening the lock to admit a visitor. These very same tools can also be controlled from a mobile device, enabling staff members to manage security processes from anywhere on the property.

"As an engaged member of the community, Franklin Telephone Company prides itself on delivering the latest technology and highest quality of service available to our subscribers," said Tom Griffin, general manager at Franklin Telephone Company. "We were very excited to provide the Franklin County schools with a superior security and surveillance solution that would not disrupt the school's mission to educate our children."

Security and Access Control in Practice

The new system enables school administrators to perform a number of security-related functions from their mobile devices. Among these are the ability to view video surveillance feeds, control door locks, manage building access and logging, and respond to event-driven alerts and notifications.

All teachers, staff, and district personnel carry an electronic key fob that is used to activate the locks to gain access. Each individual fob not only contains unique identification credentials that are logged with every access, the system also enables the administration to control the days and times that any individual is authorized to enter any particular building or facility.

An added benefit of the system is that district or school personnel can establish rules within the system to trigger automated notifications and actions. For example, if a door is opened outside of normal parameters, a text message or email including a snapshot from the appropriate camera and access log information can be sent to any number of destinations. This not only provides nearly instantaneous notice of an unusual situation, but gives the administrator the ability to take immediate action if necessary. Providing immediate access for firefighters or other first responders without physically being on site can also speed response times as well as avoiding the potential for property damage if a door must be opened forcibly.

As may be expected, the surveillance needs of each school building are different, but with the flexibility of the VCAS platform, Franklin Telephone was able to easily customize the solution to address the key needs identified by each building principal. At the elementary level, cameras are focused on the entryways, outdoor breezeways, and the parking areas. This enables the oversight of the areas of greatest concern to the principal, and assures positive identification of all visitors before they are allowed access.

At the upper grade levels, cameras are placed to not only monitor entryways, but also to enable the administration to keep a watchful eye on areas where students are moving or congregating such as courtyards, stairwells, and cafeterias. According to middle school Principal Chris Kent, the addition of the surveillance cameras and the video recording platform proved its value immediately through the elimination of potentially dangerous situations that in the past escalated to aggressive behavior.

"With the surveillance cameras we can now monitor student behavior in the school hallways and public areas with ease," said Kent. "This has allowed us to keep a close watch on more areas that have proven to be troublesome in the past. And when an incident does occur, the system gives us much more information about the cause and behavior of the individuals involved."

Deployed across the district's facilities, the components of the Franklin County School District new security system include:

- 14 cameras
- Intercom communications at each controlled entry
- Electronic key fobs or key cards for all staff
- Card/Fob readers at each controlled entry
- Key Pad for PIN-based access
- Remote unlock control

In addition to the card and fob readers installed at the controlled entry doors, a key pad for digital code identification has been put in place as well for visitors who have been provided access to the school. Moreover, a new intercom and remote-unlock buzzer allows the school administrator to communicate with and grant access to individuals who do not have an identification card or pass code.

"We continue to work closely with the school administrators to best understand how this solution can continue to evolve to meet the immediate needs of each campus," noted Griffin. "It is exciting to see that technology can have such a profound and immediate impact, and also to see the wheels turning in the heads of these educational professionals about what else might be accomplished with this versatile technology platform. This is truly a case where the sky is the limit – and our kids are certainly worth the investment."

Conclusion

The new security system implemented by the Franklin County schools not only met the fundamental goals of the school officials to provide a safe and secure learning and working environment, but goes well beyond those initial goals to provide a highly efficient method of managing and monitoring the schools.

Facility administrators can now easily control access into the schools and monitor entrances and exits in real time. Video surveillance can be viewed from any Internet-connected device, helping administrators create a safer environment by identifying anyone within the school perimeters engaging in any undesirable behavior.

Because of this technologically advanced system, the Franklin schools staff can promptly respond in the occurrence of a security breach, and the safety of the students and staff has been significantly increased.