

A CLEAR2THERE CASE STUDY

MT. VERNON SCHOOLS SELECTS CLEAR2THERE TO SUPPORT ACCESS CONTROL AND VIDEO SURVEILLANCE NEEDS ACROSS ITS CAMPUSES

Mt. Vernon Community School Corporation (MVCSC) in Fortville, Indiana is committed to providing a positive educational experience tailored to meet the children's evolving stages of cognitive development. MVCSC wants to prepare children for challenges and opportunities—both inside and outside of the classroom. To help support that mission, the district prides itself on creating a technology-rich environment for students and staff. MVCSC has implemented a one-to-one (1:1) digital learning initiative, providing students in grades K – 12 with individual access to computing devices, including iPads and Chromebooks. The district has equipped its bus fleet with wireless access and external cameras, and will be launching a smartphone app that provides parents with a real-time view of bus locations and arrival times. MVCSC leadership has also recognized the benefits of deploying access control and video surveillance technology across its campuses to enhance safety and security for students and faculty.

THE CHALLENGE

School leaders across the nation are entrusted with maintaining a safe learning environment for students. A key concern in achieving this goal is effectively monitoring and controlling who is allowed to enter school buildings—both during and after school hours. MVCSC acknowledged the challenge of consistently managing access to its multiple facilities, and in early 2015 began a process to address the issue.

Greg Rollo, director of technology for MVCSC, was tasked with selecting and implementing an appropriate system that would not only secure the buildings, but would also provide a platform for expanded functionality as budgets and time allowed.

"The initial goal was to implement key-card access control in all of the buildings," noted Rollo. "However, we also knew that integration of our existing and new surveillance cameras into the same platform would be highly desirable. Though we had a key-card system working in two buildings, the remainder of the facilities still relied on keys."

Rollo worked with NineStar Connect, the school district's provider of electrical power service, internet access, television, and voice telephone services, to select an appropriate access control system for the schools.

NineStar Connect was formed in 2011 through a merger of a telephone cooperative and a power cooperative, and is one of the nation's only independent full service telecommunications

and power service providers. The company's service area includes eleven counties in Indiana.

THE ACCESS CONTROL SOLUTION

"The team at NineStar was very helpful in identifying our needs, and in developing an implementation plan that would meet our budget and functional goals," said Rollo.

The streamlined installation, maintenance and integration of the Clear2there access control system offers cost-savings benefits, enabling organizations to intelligently leverage the investments made in existing network infrastructures. An aspect of the Clear2there access control solution that Rollo found particularly attractive was the minimal equipment requirements.

"Other companies we spoke with wanted to do a complete rip out and replacement," explained Rollo. "With some of our buildings being only five or six years old, that cabling was still in very good shape. NineStar assessed the situation and said they would use what we already had in place wherever possible, which we really appreciated."

"The servers necessary to operate the access control system are located in the secure NineStar datacenter, so the school district does not have any additional capital or operational expenses associated with maintaining the system," said Ross Ferson, chief technology officer for NineStar. "This serves the budgeting process and mitigates the need for additional staff time that is often associated with new technology implementations."

"The Clear2there software is cloud-based and maintained by NineStar, so they can easily interface into it," explained Rollo. "In the event we do have an issue, they can view the problem and quickly take care of it."

"I can also sit and budget the Clear2there system right now and reliably know what it is going to cost me for equipment and my support contract," said Rollo.

All district personnel are issued key-cards that are integrated with ID badges. The cards are programmed with specific access credentials that enable the personnel to enter appropriate buildings. The district implemented a grouping scheme to assign specific access times as needed. Examples of the grouping include, restricting bus driver access to school hours, or providing coaches and extracurricular sponsors with late-night access.

NineStar provides the access control services through the smart-premises platform developed by Clear2there. This platform employs a simple gateway device at each site, along with application servers in the NineStar datacenter, that deliver a seamless operational and management experience. The system provides secure access from any internet-connected device including smartphones, tablets or computers.

"The middle school principal was particularly excited about being able to use his smartphone to unlock the school door for parents as they arrive for meetings," noted Rollo. "In addition, administrators can remotely open a building in the case of emergencies without driving to the school."

Rollo described just such a scenario, when a principal received a call from a custodian about a gym door that was still unlocked at midnight. "Our custodian didn't have access to the iPad at that time to lock the door himself," said Rollo. "Our principal, while still on his phone, simply opened the interface, hit the button, and could actually hear the door lock, and the building was made secure."

Rollo also reported that district maintenance personnel estimated that the cost to change the locks on a building due to the loss of a master key was more than the cost of issuing key-cards. And, if a key-card is lost, it can simply be deactivated in the system with no widespread impact.

Another critical element that played into the selection of the system was the simple user interface. Building administrators and front office personnel have a simple icon-based application on their computers and smartphones that enables them to grant access to a visitor with a simple click or tap.

THE VIDEO SURVEILLANCE SOLUTION

The integration of video surveillance technology was the next step for MVCSC. The district has introduced Clear2there video surveillance systems across its campuses, including its high school, middle school and three elementary schools.

With their old video surveillance system, administrators could review the recording of an incident, but had a difficult time seeing what was happening in real-time.

Rollo knew the deployment of Clear2there video monitoring would enable staff to remotely verify the identity of visitors prior to granting access, as well as providing improved oversight throughout the schools. And, the video would be viewable within the same simple application interface, so the users would not need to learn anything new.

In the past, using their old video system, administrators would need to contact Rollo or a member of his staff to obtain video footage. Now, principals can easily retrieve and review video content independently.

"We had an incident where two students ran into each other in the parking lot, and we received a request from the police for that video footage," recounted Rollo. "With Clear2there, our principal could find the target footage and save it very easily to a DVD or USB drive to share with the police. It has made things easier for the district technology staff, because it has taken something off our plate, and given our principals the ability to quickly and conveniently obtain what they need."

The remote accessibility capabilities of the Clear2there video system have also facilitated more efficient collaboration between district administration and school principals.

"Our administrators need access to door and camera systems at anytime from any device," said Dr. Shane Robbins, MVCSC Superintendent. "We can simply access the app to quickly identify an issue within minutes of being notified of a situation."

The system has also enabled better supervision and protection of MVCSC schools by security staff and local law enforcement. "They can log in to the camera system using the credentials we have provided," said Rollo. "This allows them to sit outside of a school and do a door or camera check, and then drive to the next building and do the same thing."

With plans in place for the ongoing expansion of its Clear2there access control and video surveillance systems, Rollo looks forward to continued engagement with the team at NineStar.

"I can't say enough about NineStar and the partnership we have with them. With many other companies, it's just a job, and they may have four more jobs to run to after you," said Rollo. "With NineStar, they take the time to understand our schedule and work to avoid causing any interference for our staff. Whether it's on a Sunday, or after school at 5 p.m., they always want to do what works best for us. That's refreshing, and those are the qualities I look for in the companies we choose to partner with."



CLEAR2THERE
2904 West 10th Street
Sioux Falls, SD 57104

Tel: 888.201.7075
Email: info@clear2there.com
Web: www.clear2there.com