

Case Study: Sioux Falls School District



South Dakota School District Enhances
Entrance Safety with Visitor Aware

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The Challenge

Sioux Falls School District in South Dakota needed to replace its outdated and inefficient visitor management system to maintain a secure learning environment for its students and staff. With an outdated UI and difficult-to-maintain proprietary hardware, the district needed to update its system to keep school buildings safe.

The Solution

The district replaced its existing system with Visitor Aware, a modern visitor management system that enables the district to establish a standard, efficient check-in procedure for all guests. Using iPads loaded with the software, the district has the flexibility it needs to set up cost-effective kiosks at all of its school buildings.

Updating Systems, Enhancing Security

School safety starts at the front door, and for David Osterquist, security coordinator for Sioux Falls School District, that means having security measures in place that work when you need them most. With 24,000 students and 3,000 employees across 38 buildings, knowing who is coming in and out of schools is a key component of the district's safety strategy.

"Over the year, we've found that being able to monitor people coming in and out of our school buildings allows us to provide the safest possible environment for our students and staff," said Osterquist.

While the district had a visitor management system in place, after a decade of use it was beginning to show its age, with an outdated user interface and proprietary hardware that was difficult and costly to maintain.

"Our staff found it difficult to use, and when driver's license scanners failed we struggled to get new ones," Osterquist explained. "On top of that, we often experienced software glitches where people couldn't access the system."

When the system failed, the district went back to using a notebook on the countertop where guests would write their name, present an ID, and write the time they checked in. While this let school officials know if someone was in the building, it didn't offer any way to validate their identity against national watchlists to prevent unwanted guests from entering a building.



Simple Visitor Screening

With a former career in law enforcement and the responsibility of coordinating preparedness training and assessing safety at district facilities, Osterquist knew faulty equipment could lead to unnecessary risk. So he began his search for a replacement.

When the district evaluated which software to employ, it wanted to ensure the interaction with the user interface was as smooth and seamless as possible for clerical staff and incoming visitors. It also needed a way to keep potential threats out, while accounting for visitors within their buildings should an emergency arise. This led Osterquist and other district leaders to Visitor Aware, a visitor management system from Singlewire Software.

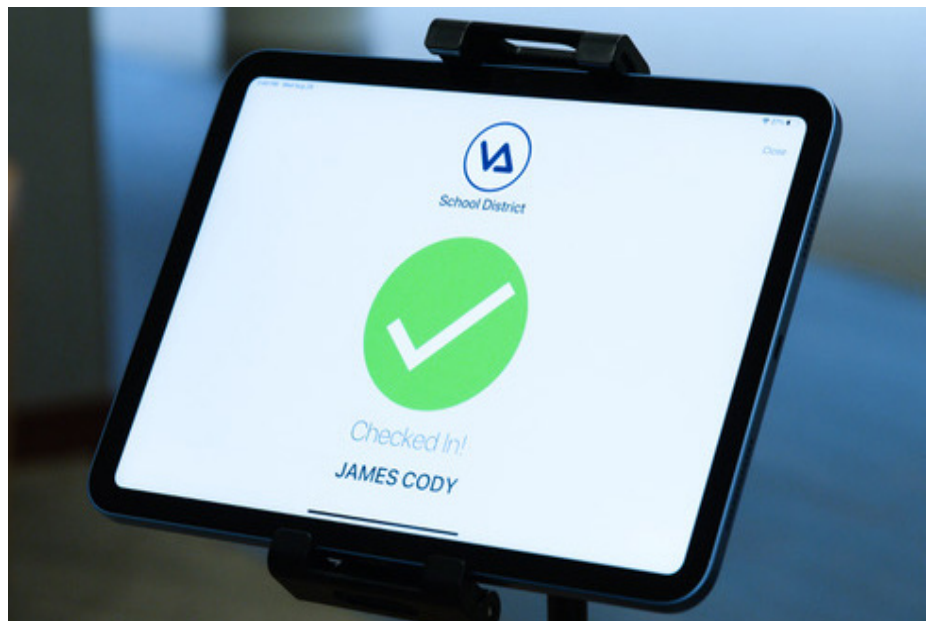
“Visitor Aware is very simple to use and doesn’t require proprietary hardware,” said Osterquist. “It’s user-friendly for school staff and visitors, and the fact that it leverages facial recognition streamlines the check-in process so much. We have had nothing but positive reviews from guests.”

Sioux Falls uses iPads installed with the Visitor Aware app that guests can interact with to complete the check-in process. When someone enters a school building for the first time, clerical staff will help walk through how to use the app, which involves identifying themselves as a visitor, selecting the check-in option, having their photo taken, scanning their ID and having a badge printed to admit them entry.

Quick and Easy-to-Implement Software

Once they made their decision, Osterquist worked with the district’s IT team and in less than two weeks, was able to implement Visitor Aware in all of the district’s school buildings. One of the primary reasons Sioux Falls selected Visitor Aware was because at the time it was the only solution that did not require purchasing a proprietary device that had to be installed in buildings that had to be purchased from that vendor.

“When you have something so simple, where all you need to do is purchase an iPad, stick it on a stand, download the software and the camera does the rest, that’s super easy,” Osterquist said. “Almost anyone can figure that out, and that simplicity and ease of use were the deciding factors in selecting Visitor Aware.”



The ability to leverage iPads for check-in also enables the level of flexibility the district needs to implement the solution.

“Flexibility is beyond important,” Osterquist explains. “Each of our buildings is different. Some are decades old, while others are newer. Our high schools have locked vestibules with a welcome window behind glass, but some schools don’t have a welcome window. With Visitor Aware we’re able to position the check-in station where it makes the most sense given the design of the building.”

Creating Safer Schools

That flexibility enables the district to create check-in stations that screen guests against national sex offender databases, government watchlists, and customer-banned visitor lists the district creates to help maintain a safe learning environment.

"If students and staff feel safe in school, they're going to be able to learn and teach more effectively," said Osterquist. "Visitor Aware helps us provide peace of mind for everyone who walks through our doors."

If a guest is flagged by Visitor Aware, the software provides several options for notification. Schools will notify on-site school resources officers (SROs) and school administrators should an issue arise. Notifications are typically sent as text messages to these staff members' phones or their email.

"The notification process is a huge win for us," Osterquist explains. "Our old system didn't have anything like that available. Clerical staff would have needed to make a phone call to reach someone. Now our SROs or administrators can immediately know when there is an issue and support our clerical staff."

With all of the improvements over its old system, the district was concerned about cost, but Osterquist was surprised when they selected the system.

"Choosing something more modern, and with a better interface, we thought we would be paying more," Osterquist said. "But in the end, Visitor Aware is costing us less per year to operate and it's infinitely better."



Positive Community Feedback

Those improvements have led to positive feedback from staff, parents, and other members of the community.

"Guests think it's super simple," Osterquist explains. "When they understand that once they're in the system all they need to do is take their picture and the badge is printed, they realize what a huge benefit it is for them."

Of course, it's not just the time savings that are a huge benefit to the district and its community. Ultimately, the safety measures the district is gaining are the biggest advantage.

"We had a large event at an elementary school and used the pre-registration feature," said Osterquist. "Our staff was on hand to help facilitate the check-in process, and multiple people thanked them for scanning visitors so they knew their kids were safe. They understand that if we're letting predators into our school buildings, that's a big problem. But being able to screen every guest who comes through our doors to make sure unwanted visitors don't gain access to our students, that's a huge win."

For more information about how your school or district can enhance entrance safety with Visitor Aware, visit www.singlewire.com/visitor-aware.