

Security system grows with needs at Granite School District

Through a series of improvements to its access control system, the Granite School District continues to expand its ability to provide greater security for its students, teachers, and staff. Building on basic door hardware such as exit devices, the District now is incorporating greater use of electronic security.

Granite School District, located in Salt Lake County, Utah, operates 61 elementary schools, 16 junior high schools, 8 high schools, as well as other special schools and programs. With 68,075 students, Granite is the largest district in Utah and is among the largest public school districts in the nation. Granite is also one of Utah's largest employers, with more than 7,500 full and part-time employees. The District boundary encompasses 305 square miles.

According to Assistant Foreman, Safety Systems/Police Electronics, Mark Peterson, the District's security system began about 40 years ago with a burglar alarm system. Access control started with a basic speaker and electronic latch at the District's police office and was upgraded to a proximity card reader as the need for greater security developed there. The use of electronic access migrated to the schools, along with the addition of cameras and digital video recorders (DVRs) after the Columbine incident raised awareness of the need to enhance security. At the beginning, Peterson says, each high school and secondary school received two or three cameras. Today, he adds, most buildings have between 14 and 25 cameras.



Granite School District's administration building also houses the Granite Technical Institute and leases some space to Utah State University, requiring 24/7 access that increase the need for access control.

Securing the exterior doors at each elementary school was done by upgrading from mechanical keys to proximity card readers on main entrance doors, as well as others that provide access from regularly used areas such as parking lots or playgrounds. Peterson notes, “We started by giving each school the option of equipping four doors. Now some have as many as eight doors that are controlled by cards, but we typically leave only the main door open for public access. Visitors must report to the office, which is located near the front door. If we need to go into a lockdown, the principal or custodian only has to lock one door.”

The District also is starting a program to add electronic access control to its secondary schools, which allow access to authorized individuals after school hours on a limited basis. Granite School district continues to keep its access control and burglar alarm systems separate. Because it has its own police department, the District monitors the systems around the clock. Peterson points out that the security system reports over telephone lines directly to police dispatch, rather than through the District's computer network. He says, “As good as networks are, we don't feel they are as reliable as a copper telephone line. Also, if a network goes down at one of the schools, the information still comes through.”

Specifying for Long-Term Value Pays Off

Keeping the access control hardware for close to 100 facilities operating properly with only two technicians and a supervisor presents a challenge. With limited staff and continually growing security requirements, the District began looking for ways to improve security while obtaining better value as its access control system expanded.

One way the District ensures that it gets the best value for its security investment on new construction and renovation projects is to maintain control over the Division 8 hardware specifications by breaking them out from the overall project. Peterson explains, “The principals get involved in deciding what openings to use, but we're the engineers and architects when it comes to deciding what equipment to use on the openings. We try to standardize on the solutions we use based on performance. We have about six access control options we can use per opening.” By looking at the overall cost of ownership the District has been able to standardize on products that have proven to be dependable and long-lived while still maintaining a competitive bid process for the hardware. Peterson adds, “We just don't have time to learn about every possible type of hardware and stock spare parts for all of the. In the field, our technicians can perform any needed service or repair without going back for parts.”

Moving from basic door hardware into electronics, the District confirmed the wisdom of specifying on overall value rather than price alone. Foreman, safety Systems/Police Electronics, JonScott Fasselin says, “We started out looking at the least costly products to get the job done, and it didn't work out. We found we had to go back time-after-time to adjust or replace them.”

Technician Tom Penney says, “We don't have time to deal with callbacks, so we need something that's reliable and dependable when we install it.” One feature that has saved time and expense is the availability of an electronic latch (EL) kit to upgrade mechanical exit devices when moving into electronic access control. Instead of replacing the entire device, the installing technician can simply install the kit and wire the device. Penney adds, “Their design saves us a lot of time because we can cut the devices to length. With some of our older buildings, there was no standard for door sizes, so when we need to replace an old device, we can just take a 36 inch and cut it to 30 inches or whatever size we need. That way we don't have to carry a lot of different sizes on our trucks or go back to the shop for another size device.”



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Granite School District also uses EPT power transfers, which route the power for the EL devices from the frame to the door. Peterson says door loops are often used on existing applications, but on any new construction, the doors and frames are prepped for the power transfers. Auto Operators are used where ADA accessibility requirements must be met, although Peterson says they are not specifically required by Utah law. Instead of integrating them into the access control system, they generally are used on the main door that is left unlocked during normal hours. In one case, to meet the needs of the District's Young Parents Program, the operator can be controlled by an access card outside of normal hours. Most of the time, the parent pushes a button, and the office staff activates the door operator to let them in. The door is monitored by an intercom and camera for identification and the door operator makes it easier for parents with strollers or small children.

In many cases, card readers are mounted directly on the door they control, rather than on the frame or adjacent wall. Technician Penney explains, "Instead of wiring through the mullion or frame, we just drill another hole in the door a little bit above where we pull the wires for the exit device. It's a lot easier, especially with existing construction where the jambs are filled with concrete and we have to drill through it." He adds that having the reader on the door makes it easy for the user to know which door to open when there is a pair of doors.

To maintain a competitive bidding environment, the District sends RFPs to hardware distributors who bid on providing the door and access control hardware and service under one-year contract with an option to renew for three years. On new construction, the hardware is purchased through the contracted distributor, rather than as a part of the building contract. The building contractor simply provides the doors and frames with the proper prep for the hardware designated by the District.

The District continues to refine its approach to security as needs and available solutions change. One possibility recently under discussion is the use of wireless lock on portable classroom buildings to provide security without the need for continual rewiring.

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