

# Card-Based ID Systems Improve Attendance and Security

*A mandatory student ID system allows a district to improve classroom attendance while enhancing security.*

By Brett St. Pierre



Like many school districts, Dayton Public Schools (DPS) struggled to manage check-in processes for tardy students and to improve attendance. Covering about 53 square miles in Dayton, Ohio, DPS encompasses 30 school buildings and special centers, with approximately 15,000 students in pre-kindergarten through high school. The district had a wide variety of—and in some cases a lack of—standardized ID system capabilities, but it had only a manual process of handwritten passes for checking in students who arrived late.

Seeking to streamline those processes, DPS realized that it needed to institute a universal, mandatory

student ID system that would allow the district to improve classroom attendance while enhancing the security of its students and visitors. The solution was an automated student management system and desktop card printers with associated software for producing customized, multipurpose student ID cards. The system would enable campus officials at each school to issue ID cards to all students instantly. Implemented over the course of just two weeks, the solution was initiated in time for the start of the new academic year.

## Choosing the Solution

A key consideration for DPS was the ability to produce cards on demand,

in high volumes, at school sites throughout the district.

Today's leading printers, card materials, and software work together to solve that challenge, delivering fast, efficient capabilities for instant issuance, while optimizing card security by incorporating visual and logical technologies for multilayered validation. DPS had several choices for printer/encoder solutions, ranging from monochrome direct-to-card solutions that combine quality, reliability, and ease of use, to high-definition printing retransfer technology for contactless or contact smart cards, and on to high-throughput solutions that optimize performance and productivity. DPS had a number of requirements when making its selection of a printer/encoder solution:

- **Print a high volume of cards at fast print speeds.** Every year, DPS needs 15,000 IDs in just the first week of school.
- **Save money and training time.** Equipment must be intuitive to set up and easy to use, and it must eliminate the need for large capital investments or extensive training for system operators.
- **Prepare for future ID card needs.** DPS also wanted a solution that was field-upgradeable so that, as its student ID system changes and evolves, the district can modify printers to fit new requirements.

- **Achieve multiple uses with a single software application.** DPS wanted a solution that made it easy for it to design card templates, enter student data, and create photo ID badges. Additionally, the district needed to be able to synchronize student ID badge data with information in its student attendance and school records systems.



The best choice for DPS was a direct-to-card printer/encoder; 31 were deployed across the district to handle the 15,000 ID cards that needed to be created during the first week of school. The printers' modular design and small footprint were ideal features for a school environment where space was at a premium. The software that is used with the printers facilitates real-time data communication with most third-party database applications, simplifying the job of setting up external database linking.

### Implementing the Solution

With its solution in place, DPS was able to quickly and easily provide all students with IDs during the first week of the new school year. Now, when a student loses his or her badge or is newly enrolled in school, a new ID can be created and issued that same day.

The new DPS student ID is a white card that features the district's logo and mission statement. New visual security elements include a large color photo of the student and his or her name printed in large type on the front of the card. Those elements ensure more trustworthy authentication and make it easier for school personnel to easily identify individuals.

The ID card includes a bar code that is used in conjunction with the student management system. Students who arrive late to school or who are tardy to a class are scanned into the system, and a tardy pass is printed automatically. With the ID system in place, processing tardy students now takes 25% to 35% less time than before.

"Now that we have sped up the time it takes to create IDs and process tardy individuals, our students are in class more and therefore have a greater chance for achievement and success," says Richard Melson, director of the office of information technology at DPS.

### Future Improvement Opportunities

In addition to addressing its original challenges, DPS has found that the new system gives the district even greater functionality and versatility. Some schools have even tied the new ID cards to their media center for checking out books or tracking lunch purchases in the cafeteria. Elementary schools are also exploring ways to use the IDs to encourage positive reinforcement of good behaviors and for fund-raising initiatives that involve monitoring

purchases at participating stores and restaurants (a portion of which is donated to the schools). Additionally, cards could be used to monitor student field-trip attendance and to provide access to school sporting and entertainment events.

Soon, DPS expects to expand its use of the system to keep track of visitors. Currently, the district provides temporary printed ID passes, but it plans to eventually incorporate the scanning of government IDs, such as a driver's license, before granting visitors entry.

Visitor management is particularly important in the school environment and varies with the type of campus. For example, managing visitors in an open campus environment is very different than in single-entry environments, and yet it is just as important—if not more.

Visitor security begins with knowing who is on school premises and why. How that is accomplished depends on the type of environment. Procedures should include requiring all visitors on campus to wear a visitor badge that was issued when they checked in. Handwritten systems are simply not feasible because they don't offer adequate security, and they are not scalable enough to support campus expansion. Today's visitor management systems solve those problems and add other benefits, such as being able to capture visitor data more quickly, accurately, and automatically. They also make it easy to create long-term, durable visitor badges for volunteers and frequent visitors, simplifying guest check-in and check-out procedures. Optionally, bar codes can be incorporated into the visitor badges, facilitating guest check-in and check-out with a simple bar-code scan.

### Objectives Achieved

DPS achieved all of its objectives with the new ID card system and printers. The solution supports new, uniform district-wide student ID requirements and delivers fast printing of durable, versatile, high-quality ID cards at each school location. The system has provided DPS with a user-friendly interface and is easy to integrate with other school applications. DPS knows that security and attendance have improved with its new system, and there are many other ways to further leverage its investment.

"We are extremely satisfied with how adaptable the solution is on a per-school basis," DPS's Melson says. "Initially, the principals had one vision of how things were going to work, and now that they have the technology in their possession, they each use it a little differently based on specific needs of their school."

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