

Saving Time with Automated Account Management

Schools, colleges, and universities no longer need to manage user account life cycles by using scripts or tedious manual procedures.

By Dean Wiech



Managing user accounts for students is becoming increasingly complex. Depending on the school and the classes students take, they may need access to such applications as file systems and to an electronic learning environment like Blackboard. If the school or district has a web portal, the parents may want access to specific information, such as grades and homework.

In the past, it was possible to manually set all account access once a year using a script, but that is no longer feasible from a time or budget standpoint because of the huge amount of data and the size of the population that needs to be

managed. Schools host a large number of users—students and teachers—whose information constantly changes due to changes in class schedules and transfers into and out of the school or district.

An automated solution helps address these user account management issues in several ways:

1. Errors. When accounts are created manually, they frequently have errors or are missing information because many people handle the forms. To mitigate these errors, information technology (IT) employees may need to go back several times to try to ascertain the correct information, which can be time-consuming.

Pinellas County School District in St. Petersburg, Florida, was one school district that addressed this issue. Before automating its account management process, the district's IT staff spent considerable time correcting account problems within its schools. Now, when an account is created in an active directory, it automatically populates the parent portal, the student information system, and any other systems required, eliminating a tedious and potentially error-prone manual process.

2. Account edits. Student accounts often need to be edited to add permission to access the Internet or other applications. That means asking the IT staff to make the changes manually.

North Hunterdon-Voorhees Schools in Anndale, New Jersey, established an automated solution. When the permission slip for Internet access is received, the registrar checks a box in the student's profile, and Internet access is granted. If students transfer to another school in the district, their information and files are easily updated and moved appropriately.

3. Delegation. Although not difficult, account management can demand a lot of the IT department's time. To free up the IT staff's time for higher-level projects, the district can delegate account management to other school employees.

At Tangipahoa Parish School District in Amite, Louisiana, not only was the district's IT staff spending valuable time on account management, but its human resources (HR), payroll, and student information departments were each making their own changes. It was nearly impossible to track who was doing what.

By automating its account management, the district's human resources department now handles all account management and can easily make changes that in turn update all the appropriate systems. User accounts in the HR system are automatically synchronized with the user accounts on the network. HR is now the only department that creates, updates, or disables student

and employee accounts, which makes the process easy and efficient.

4. Disabled accounts. When students transfer out of the district or graduate, their accounts must be disabled. In schools with hundreds, or even thousands, of students leaving each year, disabling their accounts manually can be time-consuming.

With hundreds of students graduating each year, Fitchburg State University in Fitchburg, Massachusetts, found it difficult to remove their accounts in a timely fashion. Inevitably, students who should have remained active, such as those continuing on to graduate school, were inadvertently deleted.

By automating its account management, school personnel can easily flag a student or employee and disable the account according to predefined rules. For instance, a predefined rule is set to allow graduating students to use their accounts for three months before they are automatically disabled. This procedure makes the process quicker and more efficient and keeps the active directory clean.

5. Mass creation. Students often require accounts in several different systems, such as e-learning, Google Apps, and library systems. Creating new accounts for all students in each of these systems and issuing credentials

is time-consuming. By automating the account management process, accounts can be created for several students very quickly.

Minnetonka Public Schools in Minnetonka, Minnesota, freed up the time of several full-time equivalents by automating accounts. Now, the process is much more efficient and only one employee is needed to handle account management.

Freeing Time to Focus

Thanks to intelligent solutions, schools, colleges, and universities no longer need to manually manage user account life cycles by using scripts or tedious manual procedures. The solutions house the scripts and manual procedures. Accounts can be automatically created, modified, or deleted in all applications within the school.

As educational institutions face tight budgets, strict regulations, and reduced financial support from the government, these tools can help mitigate exposure to additional unplanned expenses and allow internal IT staff to focus on more lofty goals.

Dean Wiech is U.S. managing director at Tools4ever, an identity and access management solutions provider (www.tools4ever.com).



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