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Customer

Denver Public Schools (DPS) is comprised of more than 200 schools, including traditional, innovation, magnet, charter and pathways schools. Serving one of the fastest growing school districts in Colorado, the DPS safety department is constantly working to create a safe and secure environment for over 90,000 students, 15,000 staff members 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.

Led by Chief Michael Eaton, the department has over 140 team members including investigators, armed patrol officers, dispatchers, emergency preparedness professionals, and campus security officers. In addition to training district staff in emergency management, DPS protects their stakeholders from harm and offers guidance to school administrators to enhance school safety in a wide variety of situations.

“At the core of all our efforts in safeguarding our students, faculty, and staff, is our campus security protocols, and perhaps most importantly, our access control system,” said Eaton.

Some of the major requirements DPS needed in their access control system included flexibility and scalability. After much research, DPS discovered Open Options and named them as their access control partner of choice in 2013.

“When looking for a security technology provider, it was essential for us that we found a partner, not just a provider,” said Melissa Craven, director of emergency management for DPS. “Open Options provides a solid access control solution that has allowed DPS to grow over the years. The system we invested in seven years ago looks nothing like the system in use today.”

As security for a school district has many layers, having an access control system with an abundance of features is critical. “Open Options has provided this for the district and more,” said Craven. “There is still more to be done in building the most robust system in K-12 education, and I feel confident Denver Public Schools can accomplish that with Open Options.”

Best-of-Breed Solution

While an access control system serves as the primary component of a security system, coupling it with additional technologies – such as video management, wireless locks, visitor management, and more – allows for a well-rounded solution that covers multiple aspects of campus security.

For over two decades, Open Options has partnered with Mercury Security to provide a true open architecture access control solution that focuses on delivering a comprehensive set of both software and hardware features to the end user. Open Options' flagship access control platform, DNA Fusion, interfaces with a host of other systems, including intelligent locks, video management systems, critical communications, elevator systems, visitor management, and many more.

"DNA Fusion essentially allows us to tie all of our security technologies into our access control system, which plays a critical role in our day-to-day security processes," said Craven. "For instance, the ability to call up live video on an alarm or door forced from the events grid helps us to assess and respond to the issue in a quick and efficient manner."

DPS utilizes Bosch for intrusion detection and Video Insight as its video management platform, both of which work seamlessly with DNA Fusion. Other technologies include Open Options' OpenDX database exchange software, which provides DPS an easy-to-use interface for configuring the data they want to transfer into the DNA Fusion access control system, and Fusion Web, Open Options' remote security management solution.

Communication & Response Protocols

The DPS communications center handles over 20,000 calls for service each school year and also monitors all radio communications between their command and patrol staff. The center trains extensively with the Denver Police Department for a wide range of situations. Through their radio communications system, they are able to communicate with every police district in the city as well as Denver dispatch. The center also works in collaboration with jurisdictions across the metro area, US Department of Homeland Security, FBI and Secret Service.

"Communication is key, especially in the event of an incident or potentially violent situation," said Craven. "Having the technology and protocols in place to efficiently communicate with outside emergency response teams is crucial to the safety of our schools."

Lockdown, Lockout & Other Threats

In order to further streamline their security processes and procedures, DPS monitors all the components of their system across campuses from a single location. This significantly cuts down on response time in the event of an emergency, as all decisions related to campus lockdown or other high-threat situations are centralized.

Being an urban school district, lockdowns are not uncommon for DPS. With the implementation of DNA Fusion and creation of a custom Graphic User Interface (GUI), the DPS dispatch center is able to remotely place a building in an emergency state with a single click. Once information is received by their dispatch center, they are able to implement the emergency protocol.

"With the implementation of the custom GUI, we have been able to reduce the amount of time it takes to secure a school from six minutes to only two minutes. Seconds count during critical incidents and this capability gives us hundreds," said Craven. She continues, "The safety and security of our students is paramount to what we do and our partnership with Open Options is a tremendous asset to our objective."



Often times, school security goes beyond lockdown or lockout situations. Because of this, DPS also practices “Shelter-in-Place”, a safety drill that occurs when there is a hazard of a tornado or a severe weather warning, and it has been determined by the Department of Safety – with the assistance of outside agencies – that evacuation or early dismissal could possibly place students in danger.

Similarly, a lockout takes place when a threat has been identified in the area of a school. All exterior doors are locked to prevent any hazards or threats to enter the school, and no entry or exit to the school is allowed during this response.

Looking to the Future

“As threats to campuses continue to evolve, inevitably so will our security system,” said Craven. “We are committed to providing the most up-to-date technology available to safeguard all our campuses and the students, faculty, and staff who inhabit them every day.”

As DPS looks to the future, they will be adding door position stations to all exterior doors, allowing operators to monitor perimeter security. If a door is unsecured, an alarm will sound at the school via the DNA Fusion web client. Should the alarm persist, the Department of Safety dispatch center will be notified. Conversely, once the door is secured, the alarm can be silenced.

With the upgrade of their intrusion systems, DPS will be able to monitor their alarm system through DNA Fusion. This will allow the dispatch center to arm and disarm the system from the console. It will also allow staff to use their access cards to disarm and arm the building at the entry. They will be able to do away with alarm codes and tie this technology into each individual’s access levels.

Graphic mapping is also something DPS will be implementing due to Open Options’ ability to integrate with numerous VMS and intrusion systems. This will bring all of DPS’s technology together in an extremely user-friendly format, where operators can easily view and address events through strategically placed interactive icons and easily access all card readers, cameras and intrusion points on the maps. This will drastically improve an operator’s ability to determine a false alarm versus an actual event and will aid in officer safety when responding, as well as asset protection.

“Over the last seven years, the partnership between Open Options and Denver Public Schools has only deepened,” said Craven. “From installation to the expansion of the system, Open Options has been there for every step, year after year, and we look forward to continuing to grow together.”