

WHITE PAPER
VISITOR MANAGEMENT

School Safety Is Paramount To All School Districts



Creating a safe environment for learning is paramount for any school district, and one of the most vital aspects of safety is knowing who is in your school at any given time. Depending on the size of the district, you can have hundreds of visitors every day: vendors, volunteers, and those who are picking students up, so Visitor Management is an incredibly important aspect of school safety, and not something that should be left to chance.

It's up to you to know who these people are, if they should be in your school, and if they should be picking up a particular student.

There are a number of companies that offer visitor management services, but they typically supply hospitals, corporations, and factories, and then add K12 into their mix. But schools are different than those industries: schools have a unique set of issues that need to be addressed, like integrating student data with School Information Systems (SIS) such as PowerSchool or Infinite Campus, or including provisions for student pick up. It's important to find a vendor that focuses only on K12, to make sure you get the most experienced visitor management partner.

It's also important to consider three areas of visitor management: accuracy of the data collected; matching a visitor to a sex offender registry; and knowing which person is picking up whom, and if they are allowed to do so.

How Accurate Is Your Data

Some VM systems require time-consuming manual data entry: a visitor presents his or her ID, and an office staff member types the information in. Some schools use OCR (optical character recognition) technology, a common method of digitizing printed text so it can be electronically uploaded, edited and searched. However, OCR recognition is still not 100% accurate, even where clear imaging is available.

And who knows how accurate this data is? The person could be presenting a fake ID, or an outdated one with an old photo. How can you be sure?

An easy way to get accurate data is by scanning a visitor's state-issued Driver's License, which provides the most current data available. Efficient visitor management systems scan the PDF417 barcode on the back of the license and automatically populate the information into the school system. A current and accurate photo is then captured via web cam.

PDF417 is the standard selected by the Department of Homeland Security as the machine-readable technology for the RealID Act of 2005-compliant driver licenses and state-issued identification cards. It is extremely difficult to hack, and is one of the most secure and precise ways used to identify the person connected to the ID.

Once this information is uploaded, a visitor pass or fob can be issued. The person is now listed in the school database, and his or her presence is tracked when they arrive and when they leave the school. This is especially helpful for administrators who need to know how much time volunteers are spending in school.

Sex Offenders – Click with Confidence

There are over **700,000** registered **sex offenders** in the United States, and it is **vital** that administrators **identify** any visitor who's registered in a sex offender database before they can be **allowed** into a school.

Granted, many of these people are convicted of nonviolent crimes, but there are those that are prohibited to be within a specific distance of a school, and it could spell disaster if one of these people were allowed in.

Each state, many Indian territories, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the US Virgin Islands maintain separate sex offender registries, while the Department of Justice maintains its own separate database for federal offenders. There are a lot of registries, and not all of them are cross-referenced.

Some visitor management systems buy their databases from a third party, which may contain inaccuracies, or the information could be out of date. Often, photos aren't updated, so if a person committed a crime 30 years ago, and the database showed their photo at that time, their appearance probably has changed with age.

However, some school districts use a service that integrates, verifies, and updates all of the available databases downloaded from each available registry, on a daily basis. This data is collected through the Department of Justice's National Sex Offender Registry database, individual state offender databases and third party service companies, and is used to create the most comprehensive registry available to K12 today.

When using a Visitor Management service like this, upon reading the PDF 417 barcode on a driver's license, the system automatically searches for a match between the registered visitor and publically-available sex offender records. Automated searches are based on last name, first name and date of birth, when available.

All possible matches are displayed to the system operator or displayed on a dashboard at the administration office.



Visitors scan the PDF417 code from the back of their license, identity information will automatically populate.

When a registered sex offender attempts to visit a school and there is a potential match, an alert is sent directly to a visitor management station and displayed on the application screen to the station operator. They may also be sent to an individual station or to all of the stations within the District. The alerts may be a scrolling banner at the bottom of the screen, or they may be a pop-up that mandates that the operator closes the message box. A sample alert might read, "Call 911" or "All Doors Must Remained Locked" or something similar.

Then, the operator can view the sex offender data and determine if the visitor is the actual person in the database or not. They may have the same name or address, and it's important to distinguish first-hand if the match is accurate. Administrators then have the option to allow a person into their school.

Tracking Student Pick-Up

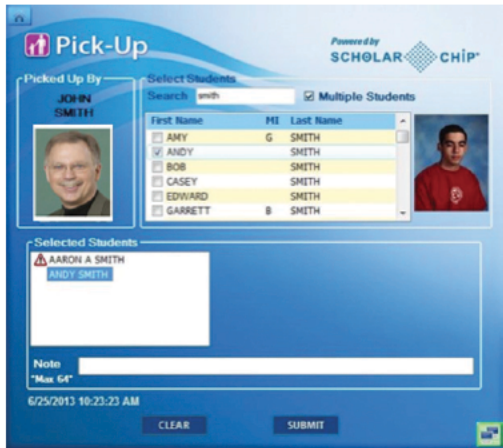
It can be a daunting task knowing which parent, guardian, aunt, uncle, brother, sister, neighbor, or friend can pick up a particular student or students, on a specific day or days. Often, it is student information data that drives the process, meaning that a student's electronic record shows which people have authority to pick him or her up.



There are many sex offender registries, and not all of them are cross-referenced. Daily registry updates are the most comprehensive.

But there is now a more efficient process which makes it easier for administrators as well as visitors coming to a school. The system connects the visitor to student data (rather than the other way around), which makes the process quicker and more streamlined.

So, when a visitor scans the PDF417 code from their license, personal information will automatically populate, including any notes attached to any student(s) data regarding pick up. The system operator will get an automated alert stating which student(s) that person can take with them, along with any customized comments.



Student Pick-Up feature: a student can only leave school with an authorized guardian.

For example, there may be a contentious divorce between the Smith's, and Mary's dad can pick her up only on Wednesdays. When Mary's dad scans his license as a visitor, he will be directed to the office; he will not be able to automatically register and go to Mary's classroom. A staff member can then verify that he is at school on a Wednesday, therefore he is allowed to pick Mary up.

Or, perhaps Ken Miller's older brother, Louis, isn't allowed to take Ken out of school for any reason, so when Louis shows up, the operator will be notified and will not allow Ken to leave with Louis.

The information is automatically attached to the internal SIS, so when a visitor comes to pick up a student, the visitor is already approved (or disapproved) for pick up, which makes processing this data simple and easy. And because SIS information is updated daily, the visitor management system is also updated daily.

Standalone vs. Web-based Systems

There are two approaches to K12 visitor management today: a standalone system or a web-based system; it's important to realize the advantages and difficulties of each.

Hardware: A standalone system is comprised of a touch-screen all-in-one computer, camera, printer, credential scanner, optional card reader, keyboard, mouse, battery back-up, and software access, installed as an all-in-one "appliance" based product that is ready for use upon delivery. The station is durable and appropriate for a rugged K-12 environment.

Often, web-based systems typically use an existing school PC and require that each piece of hardware is purchased separately. The PC could be an older model that requires upgrades, the printer and other peripherals would need drivers installed, etc. The PC would be taken out of service, configured and dedicated as part of a District's visitor management program. Unlike the standalone, this system can be a burden on a school's IT manager for implementation and administration, which can be expensive.

Speed: a dedicated VM station can process many times more visitors in a given timeframe than a browser-based service.

Security: A standalone station runs in its own computing space and does not utilize a school's authentication, which makes the entire system more secure.

Availability: web-based VM operates with the vagaries of Internet access. A network could go down, WiFi could go offline, storms can interfere with data speed, and a district's visitor management system would be inoperable.



Web-based comes with software to be used on a school computer.

Standalone comes with software, badge printer, touch screen computer, keyboard, barcode reader, camera, and a metal column to contain and protect components.



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