# Ames Community School District

**Ames Community District Implements Access Control One School at a Time**

Like many schools across the country, the Columbine shooting incident motivated Ames Community School District in Ames, Iowa, to re-evaluate security measures at all of its schools. Once administrators decided to implement electronic security, they selected a networked access control system that will link all of the schools together.

Due to budget constraints, the district's proposal called for a long-term project in which the card access system at each of its 10 schools, as well as two other buildings, would be slowly implemented. To date, Per Mar Security of Ames, Iowa, the security company handling the project, has installed cards and readers at three of its schools. The company just finished a fourth installation in September.

## CASE SUMMARY

**Location:**
Ames, Iowa

**System:**
Software House:
RM readers
C•CURE 800

## Loss of Keys Prompts District to Go to Cards

Throughout the years, the schools at Ames Community School District have not had serious security problems, says William Schoenenberger, director of technology for the district. But working proactively, administrators wanted to make sure an incident like the one at Columbine would not happen there. So, addressing the district's issue of missing building keys, administrators decided on an access control system to avoid paying for keys that could eventually be lost or stolen.

The Department of Public Safety has long been a loyal Software House customer, starting in the late 1980s with the replacement of its old manual key system with the installation of the now retired Software House C•CURE 1Plus Security Management System. In 1999, the system was upgraded with Software House RM readers and a C•CURE 800 system with the badging option. The flexibility that C•CURE 800 offers is popular among the students, faculty, staff, and contractors, who use magnetic stripe cards to enter dorms and administrative buildings, and to charge meals in the campus cafeteria. Dormitory doors are locked 24 hours a day and are accessible only by swiping an access card or registering with the front desk, which is staffed 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

"One of the major problems was that there were a number of folks who had keys to buildings, such as former employees, with some keys believed to have been missing for about a decade," Schoenenberger says. "All of a sudden, it became clear to us that no one had an idea of exactly how many keys were out."

The cost of replacing keys, Schoenenberger says, is considerable. So administrators wanted a better way of determining who had access to buildings, while maintaining some type of flexibility. Many of the schools are heavily used for after-school and community activities. "Our staff has 24-hour access to the building, so we wanted to continue to allow them access, while denying access to others."

## Detailed and Complete RFP Helps Win Job

In May 1999, the school district issued its proposal for an access control system. At the same time, it issued a separate proposal for CCTV cameras at its only high school. That particular installation was done by another security company and is not integrated with the access control system. However, administrators could consider doing that in the future. (By October 1999, the CCTV installation at Ames High School had been completed.)

As mentioned, for the district, the installation is considered a long-term project, so it accepted Per Mar Security based on a long-term commitment. "We had at least four companies turn in proposals, and Per Mar gave the most detailed and complete proposal," Schoenenberger says. "Our process is for the school district to go through an evaluation process of all the request for proposals [RFPs] first, then eliminate the ones with serious flaws and get down to the last two proposals. The last thing we looked at was cost."

Lorne Mauch, senior sales consultant for Per Mar, says he was not involved with the first three installations, but is now handling the long-term project. His involvement began with the school district's fourth installation, which was recently done at Wilson-Beardshear Middle School.

Although he does not have specific information on the previous installations, Mauch says the fourth installation was essentially the same as the past

projects. "The only difference with this installation is that it will have a burglar alarm system interfaced with the access control system."

The fourth installation started in early August and was completed early September, shortly before the start of the school year.

## Installation Similar to Company's Past 3 Projects

Ames Community School District is comprised of 10 schools, with two buildings for faculty and administration. The district has approximately 4,700 students from pre-Kindergarten to grade 12.

Like the previous three installations, Per Mar installed HID cards for access and ID badges and readers, with C•CURE software by Software House (formerly under the Sensormatic name). Other pieces of equipment include door control panels, electric door strikes and door position switches from various manufacturers.

Per Mar started the installation with two electricians it contracted to do the wire molding for the doors and about 90 percent of the wire routing. This process took about a week, Mauch says. Then, a locksmith was contracted to handle the door locks and touch sensor bars. This process took about two days.

Once this work was completed, Per Mar technicians came in and installed the rest of the equipment, including door contacts, card readers, request-to-exit motions, and motion sensors, as well as devices for the burglary system. Wilson-Beardshear, a special education school, is the only school in the district that is not used after-hours, but has had some break-ins in the past, according to Mauch. The total timeframe for Per Mar was about 60 man-hours.

## System Is Low Maintenance, Efficient, Expandable

The number of doors that are tied into the access control system varies at all four schools, but they are all tied into the school district's computer server, where the software is installed. Schoenenberger and a small staff work in small groups at each of the four schools and are responsible for programming permanent settings and schedules in the software, as well as issuing cards to faculty and students, scheduling door openings and manage day-to-day activities.

Schoenenberger says the initial training for the software took about six hours. So far, the software has been upgraded once a year by Per Mar as part of the installation contract.

The annual cost of the upgrade for the school district is $5,000, but, luckily, it does not pay for that out of its budget. Says Schoenenberger, "We have a unique situation where we have electronic insurance for the school district's hardware, not carried under the contract with Per Mar."

At all schools, students use the access control cards as ID badges only, while faculty and administrators use them for 24-hour access to the buildings. (Some special education students are able to use the cards for access into some doors.) During school hours, vendors are also issued cards that grant them access during the time they are at school.

Schoenenberger says the school district is now taking advantage of the cards in other areas for students, such as for checking into the library. Although the cards are already being used by some students to receive lunch, eventually all will be able to do so. They will also be able to use it at the schools' media center.

In the future, students will be able to check out library books with their cards.

"So far, the system has functioned very well," Schoenenberger says. "I believe the system surprised everybody in terms of how well we have been able to control access into buildings. It's allowed us to move into other areas." He adds that, eventually, the school district wants to set up students into groups, and, on any given night, authorize that group access into a building after school.

During the early days after the system was first installed, the school district had bought thin cards that eventually would break. "Now with the new thicker cards," Schoenenberger says, "we can include photos and change the photos on the cards while not interfering with a student ID number."

## Lessons Are Learned From Project

Mauch says the school district has given Per Mar a five-year timetable for the entire project. Although the fourth installation was deemed successful, the timeframe for the installation period was considered a crunch period.

"Per Mar is busy throughout the year, so we don't have a peak period. The crunch time is in the summer months, especially August, when school districts decide to install security," he says. He adds that the biggest challenge is getting the school district to make a decision in a timely manner.

The total cost for the first three installations was approximately $75,000, Mauch says. The fourth installation cost the school district $27,000.

So far, the long-term arrangement has worked out well, contend both Schoenenberger and Mauch. Both also add that future installations are expected to be very similar as well. "A lot of school districts, depending on budgets, are adding card access to buildings for their security so they are controlling point of entry with electronic locks," Mauch says.

Schoenenberger says the lesson the school district has learned from this project is that it needed heavy-duty locks. "School staff and students are very hard on doors. If you don't have door openers, then they must be extremely heavy-duty, so we came up with the term 'prison quality,'" he says.

An important factor to note is that, unlike most school administrators, Schoenenberger had some knowledge of security technologies before putting out a proposal. He knew some of the terminology due to his time in the military reserves. "Most administrators are not that knowledgeable about security," he admits.

Schoenenberger adds that Per Mar has been good at determining the type of equipment deemed fit for the project. "The sales representative did his homework and went through the project in detail with what needed to be done, even down to which motion sensor to install. Putting security in schools is another expense on our very tight budget. But we do it because it's prudent and good to do so."

*by Sylvia Alarid*
*Originally Published: September 2002, Security Sales & Integration*