

A photograph of a female teacher smiling and interacting with students in a classroom. She is holding papers and has her hand raised as if gesturing. The background shows other students at desks.

Vestavia Hills City Schools

How School Security is Changing

ABOUT VESTAVIA

School District • 11 Doors •
150 Credentialed Users • 9 Campuses

CHALLENGES

On-prem Access Control • Poor Support •
Antiquated Software • Disparate Systems

GENEA'S SOLUTION

Cloud-based Access Control • 24/7/365
Direct Support • Door Scheduling and
Door Groups • No-cost Integration with
Milestone Systems Video Cameras

BENEFITS

Centralized Access Control &
Video Management • Streamlined
Credentialing Process • Reliable
Support • Detailed Access Data

With physical security concerns becoming increasingly prevalent in schools around the United States, IT teams are looking for new ways to improve the safety of students, staff and administrators. Cloud-based access control helps schools centralize their security by connecting to video surveillance cameras, automating user credentials and providing actionable access point data.

THE CUSTOMER

Vestavia Hills City Schools is a K-12 school district located about seven miles outside of Birmingham, Alabama. Approximately 7,200 students pass through the doors at Vestavia every day, and with nine different campuses, the district's IT team has their hands full.

“Security is one of the key things we think about every day,” said Keith Price, the district's director of technology. “We want to provide a safe, nurturing place for all students, faculty and community members. It's very important to us to have the trust of the community.”

However, when his tenure began, Vestavia operated with an outdated, on-premises access control system. They needed to modernize.



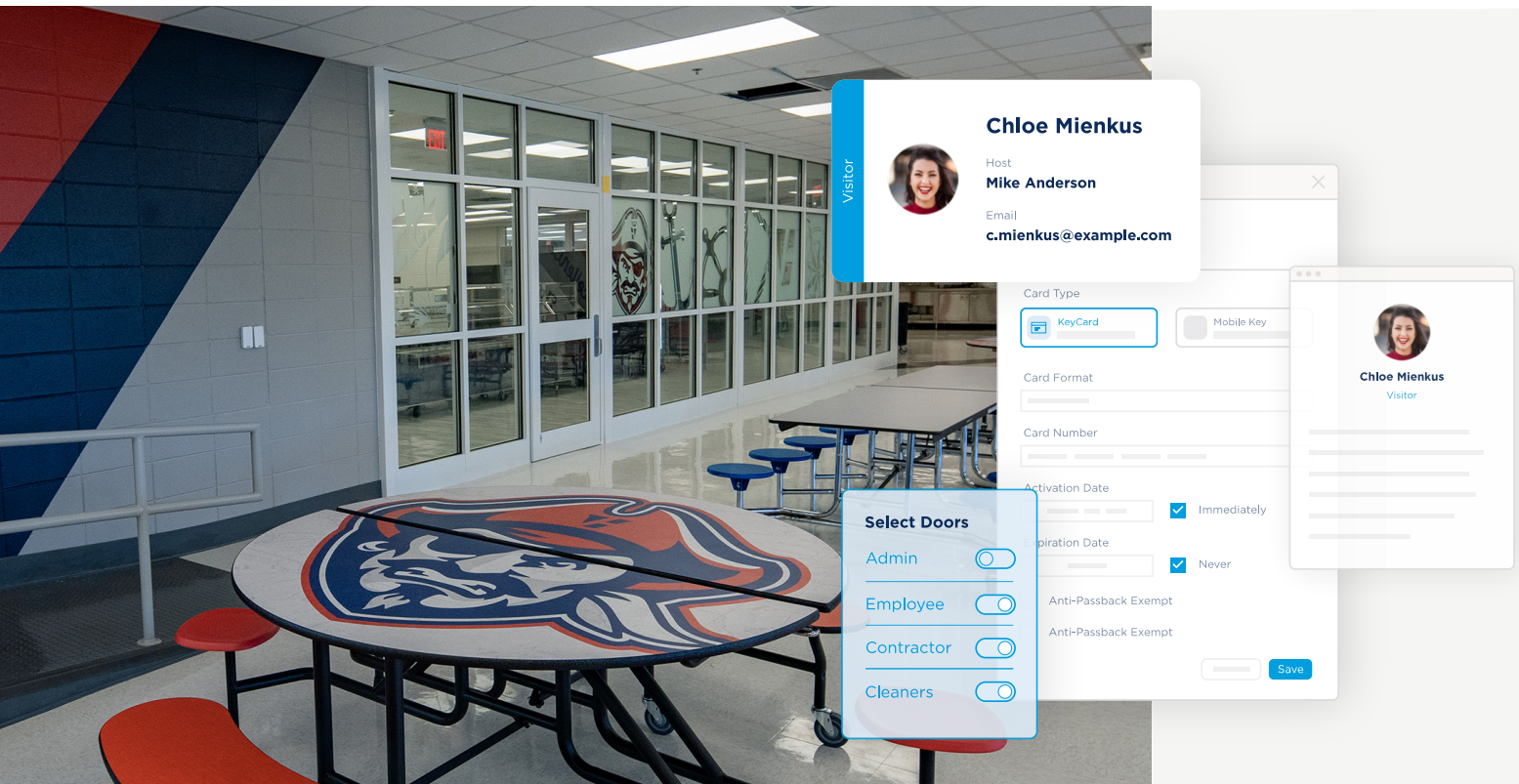
CHALLENGES: TECHNOLOGY AND SUPPORT

Price — who has worked in K-12 security for almost 30 years — and his eight-person IT team realized their access control system was a vulnerability.

Vestavia operated using an on-premises Lenel S2 system that Price described as “aged and difficult to maintain.” The system had many inefficiencies, including a manual provisioning process and an inability to integrate with Vestavia’s chosen video management system, Milestone Systems. The former meant some user credentials remained active in the system, even if the staff member associated with the credentials no longer worked in the school district. With a new access control solution, Vestavia would be able to clean up and better organize their database.

Getting product support was also a challenge. Price recalled that in order to learn about system changes, he would have to contact a third-party reseller who, in turn, would contact Lenel S2. Direct correspondence with the provider was virtually impossible.

“We had to go through a third-party reseller to get any information and access to the knowledge from the engineering team to know what changes we needed to make,” Price said. “We felt that we were very boxed in with the technology and the support.”



“The implementation has been great, and installation was easy,” Price said. “We’ve had follow-up calls on a weekly basis. The icing on the cake was having the ability to connect with the Genea team to ask questions.”

- Keith Price, *Director of Technology*

A SEAMLESS IMPLEMENTATION

To get the process started, Price contacted the district’s trusted integrator, CDW. He explained Vestavia needed a solution that would both modernize the school district’s access control and provide ongoing, customer-centric support.

“We suggested Genea because it’s a great product, cloud-based and easy to use,” said Josh Sherer, Principal Field Solution Architect at CDW. “It had a different model than many other systems, but it uses industry standard, off-the-shelf Mercury hardware. We thought it would be a solid option.”

The implementation began with a kick-off call, after which, Vestavia’s user information was imported into the Genea database. Genea then programmed and shipped the non-proprietary Mercury controllers. Vestavia worked with CDW to lead the design and implementation of the system. Within a week, they had installed, tested and successfully completed the implementation of 11 doors.

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SOLUTION - AUTOMATED DOOR SCHEDULING AND DOOR GROUPS

Door scheduling was another critical feature according to Price. The feature allows Vestavia's IT team to select specific times when doors will automatically lock and unlock. For example, the front entrance of a building may unlock at 7:00 a.m. and lock when the school day officially begins at 8:00 a.m. System administrators have the option to set additional lock times as well.

"Once we looked at and evaluated the product, we understood that it was user-friendly, very intuitive, and worked well when integrated with other systems," Price said.

Further, Price and his team used the door groups feature to create subsections of doors and locations.

"We're split between a central office area and part of a school," Price said. "[The school] has a gym that is used after school and by the community, so we wanted to segment off that access and availability at different times of the day."

By creating separate rules for each set of doors, Vestavia can implement detailed access permissions and door schedules. Door groups also help with monitoring who accesses specific areas and when.

"The software helps us make sure people have what they need and don't have what they don't need," Price said. "Being given that granular control for each of our access points is key to us."

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INTEGRATED VIDEO SECURITY FOR A SAFER CAMPUS: MILESTONE SYSTEMS

In addition to the cloud-based dashboard, Vestavia wanted to connect their Milestone security cameras with Access Control. The integration allows Price and his team to monitor the hallways, building exteriors and offices from a single pane of glass (as opposed to toggling between the access control dashboard and video management platform). He emphasized the importance of having video footage matched to door-access events.

"Having the compatibility between the two systems is a new functionality for us," he said. "Being able to see when a door was opened and then [go straight to the recording] is essential."

Cloud migration also meant Vestavia could easily expand their network of security cameras. Before the Milestone-Access Control integration, cameras had been placed in key locations like gyms and cafeterias. However, the integration allowed the IT team to gain complete visibility into hallways and other non-instructional spaces.

THE FUTURE

As Vestavia continues its plan to roll out Genea at other schools in the district, Price said they intend to avoid installing new door readers, instead opting to keep their current hardware.

“We weren’t in a position to add all new equipment, but we’re doing a staged refresh/growth,” he said.

This solution, known as a “software takeover,” will allow the school district to save time and expenses associated with ripping and replacing card readers. With a software takeover, only a new controller is required — new wiring and hardware are not.

Going mobile may also be in Vestavia’s future. Currently, end users scan into designated entrances with proximity cards, but Price thinks this will likely change.

“I see us exploring and potentially evolving into mobile card access as well. Most people on our campuses are carrying their phone anyway. They’d prefer not to have a card, so if they can use their phone or some other method to gain entry, and we can have that same security and access available to them.

With responsibilities ranging from networking to instructional technology, Price and his team have a full schedule every day. Genea has helped free up some of their time to manage their workload more effectively while still cultivating a safe environment for students.

“It’s very exciting to have this system that is easily operational; we can get support quickly from the manufacturer when we need it; it’s easy to understand and we can delegate roles,” Price said. “We can have the control we need, but it’s not what takes all of our time.”



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Still unsure if Genea is right for you? Get in touch with one of our helpful representatives. Backed by live 24/7/365 support, we ensure you get the help you need, when you need it. Plus, our vast online resource library includes webinars, guides, help articles and more.

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