

The logo for FARGO, featuring the word "FARGO" in a bold, white, sans-serif font on a black background.

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Case Study: Painesville School District

Privacy and Security are Enhanced With New School ID Program

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Students want to fit in. They want to be just like all of their friends. For students at Painesville City Local School District (www.pcls.net), an unusual point of differentiation came to a head in the cafeteria lines. While most students paid with cash or had their parents prepay their lunches, those who qualified for a free lunch had to share that information with the cashier, often in front of their friends. Many chose a less embarrassing alternative. They just didn't eat. Today, thanks to the school district's new photo ID program, students go through the line side by side, both showing information-bearing ID cards, making it transparent to all but the computer which students are eligible for a free lunch.

"We would like to go to a cashless program, but it's difficult," said David Schade, Director of Management Information Systems at Painesville. "Not all parents can afford to send a month's worth of money for lunches."

Painesville City Local School District in the northeastern corner of Ohio has a culturally diverse, lower-income student body. It is in the process of upgrading all of its schools, replacing five small elementary schools with three larger buildings and replacing both the middle school and the high school. The process will be complete in 2010.

While the lunch situation was a good outcome of the school's new ID card program, it wasn't the primary

motivating factor. In the past, the school had relied on a security company to produce its 400 faculty cards. Painesville would supply photos, as well as the necessary information, and then order the cards off the Web site of the security company. "It might be a month before we received the cards," said Schade. "We were not willing to live with that. A new teacher who joins our schools needs to be able to get into the front door immediately. We knew we needed to do something to enhance our security. Everything changed after 9/11. In the past, people could walk up to the building and just sign in. They can't do that any more. Buildings are locked down. Not having access can be a hassle."

Improving faculty card production was just one component, however. ID cards for the 2,800 students were provided free through the school's photography program. "The biggest problem here was that the school had no way of producing a card for students who did not get a school picture," said Nadine Zagar, ID Consultant, Identiphoto Company, Ltd. "They needed the ability to manufacture ID cards in-house."

Schade knew what he needed and saw a printer to match those needs at the Ohio Technology Conference in 2003. "We needed a two-sided card with an individual's photo and name on the front, and a barcode to automate students' access to the cafeteria and the library," he said. "We also wanted a printer that would accommodate both simple ID cards for students and proximity cards for faculty." By integrating these operations, Schade knew the Painesville schools could maintain and access one central database, thus making operations more efficient and more secure.

After listening to Schade's requirements, Zagar recommended a Fargo DTC500 Series Direct-to-Card Printer/Encoder. It prints images directly onto the surface of a blank plastic card by heating a print ribbon beneath a thermal printhead, transferring color from the ribbon to the card. The machine is also capable of encoding ID cards in the same pass.

Zagar knew the DTC500 Series would accommodate the volume and the dual-sided printing that the Painesville City schools needed, with variable data on both the front and the back of the card. In addition, the printer could be upgraded to include a lamination station.

"As the school's technical contact, I also wanted a printer that would work well so I didn't have to support it," said Schade. "I wanted a product that wouldn't break and could handle a load of printing. I didn't want to have service people out here. Regardless of whether or not they are any good, it always is best if service people never have to show up."

Today, the school's printer resides in the Food Services Department, although it prints both faculty and student cards. "We have an electronic cafeteria," said Schade. "Since students need an ID card to go through the cafeteria line, it seemed logical to keep the printer here. In the past, it sometimes took us a month to get a card printed. Now we can have a card in a minute and a half, if we want. Since students need their cards for lunch, those who forget them can have another one made immediately and still have time to eat."

Students and faculty are tough on cards, so Schade made the decision to laminate student cards and go to a heavier card stock for faculty. "Schools should definitely laminate student cards," he said. "They get scratched pretty quickly. The extra cost of a laminator is definitely worth it."

Faculty, too, need a heavy-duty card. "Many of the faculty wear their cards on a lanyard," he said. "The cards can get stuck in desk drawers and crack. With all of my crawling in and around desks to fix computers, I used to break a card every two weeks. I didn't realize our environment was so hostile to ID cards." The Fargo printer he selected enables the school to print proximity cards for faculty using a pressure sensitive card. "Now we have a clamshell card that

is difficult to bend," he said. "I've had the same card for more than two years and am not worried about it any more."

Because the printer and its supplies are kept in a locked room when not in use, sophisticated security measures are not needed. Users simply insert the printer's SmartGuard™ access card to gain access and prevent unauthorized use.

Using ID cards has helped the Painesville schools on many levels. It has encouraged students to apply for the federal lunch programs, which in turn benefit the schools. The Universal Service Fund, which is also known as E-Rate (education rate), provides schools and libraries with discounted telecommunications services based on participation in the community's National Free/Reduced Lunch Program. As a result of the ID card upgrade, Painesville has seen more student participation in the program. Consequently, the school receives more federal money to help pay for telecommunications. Currently, 84 percent of the cost is paid by the government, according to Schade.

By having the program completely in-house, it has added to the school's security. In addition, the process for producing cards has gone from a month to just a minute or two, increasing the efficiencies of the school. When I receive a CD of school photos, I do a mass loading of the pictures onto the badging Software so they are ready to go," Schade said. "This is a program in which everyone wins."