



From old school to future forward:

How Parkland School Division transformed its security system

Parkland School Division - Edmonton, Alberta, Canada

Updating an aging system:

Discover how Parkland School Division lowered costs,
centralized operations and improved staff and student safety.



Just west of Edmonton, Alberta lies Parkland County, a municipal district home to residential acreages, a diverse range of businesses and approximately 30,000 year-round residents.

It's also home to Parkland School Division, which provides the learning environments for many of the county's students. The division includes 24 learning sites serving more than 11,500 students and 2,000 staff members, plus several administrative buildings. Despite the size of the region and school division, the community of teachers, students and parents is tight knit.

Like any school board, security and safety is paramount for Parkland. Unfortunately, an ageing system was not only creating headaches and risks, but additional costs. "The main issue was that we had an outdated security system throughout our division," says Serge LaBrie, Director of Facilities at Parkland School Division. "It was at its expected lifecycle, so we were looking to replace the system and upgrade it. Our goal was to move to the next level of security systems, while setting ourselves up for the next 10 to 20 years of security needs."

Taking on safety and cost challenges

Parkland is part of a consortium of about 40 other school districts across Alberta, working towards similar priorities for their buildings. Among those is modernizing security systems to be ready for the future and to control rising insurance costs. This need became increasingly apparent as the division worked to retrofit existing buildings and build new ones to accommodate the needs of students and staff, especially as the region continues to grow.

Parkland's existing alarm technology required a staff member to travel to the site of the alarm, without any indication of the issue – whether it was a false alarm or a legitimate security issue. Calls were also frequent towards the end of the security system's lifespan – at times, going off every couple of days.

Goal

To modernize the security systems across Parkland School Division's buildings and gain better control over costs, plus improve employee and student safety.

Solution

Using Schneider Electric's EcoStruxure AccessXpert, Alberta's Parkland School Division has centralized control over the security at its buildings, giving the team greater visibility over alarm events.

Results

- Seamless multi-building implementation
- Centralized and remote security management
- Time savings from reduced after-hours security callouts
- Improved employee safety
- Greater control over rising insurance costs

The challenge was beyond an annoyance. It also created a potential safety issue, if staff weren't aware of what they were walking into on a call. "Previously, we had no mechanism to triage some of those calls. It was an old-school type of approach where staff who received calls about an alarm would respond with very little information – and that lack of information didn't always put them in the right position," LaBrie says.

Since each Parkland School Division site had to be managed individually, coordinating employee access across dozens of individual building locations was also cumbersome and time consuming. For example, there was no easy way to remove access to sites for employees who changed locations, left their role with Parkland, or lost their keys or electronic entry fobs.

Improving safety, school by school

Working with its longtime partner [Nordic Mechanical Services Ltd.](#), Parkland settled on Schneider Electric's EcoStruxure AccessXpert as the foundation of its new security system. "AccessXpert is a solution that's designed specifically for a multi-building client like Parkland," says Brian Sippert, General Manager BMS, Security & Lighting at Nordic. Since we needed to install the security system across multiple sites, EcoStruxure AccessXpert was the solution that best fit this roadmap."

EcoStruxure AccessXpert is an open, mobile, cloud-based access control platform that can operate either on-premises or in a hosted environment, with the same user interface either way and minimal server requirements. "AccessXpert's simplified user interface made it easy for our security team to adapt to the new system, equipping them with greater control and flexibility over building operations anywhere, at any time."

With EcoStruxure AccessXpert installed on premise at the head office, the Parkland team now has access and control over each of its locations. This allows them



to manage every single user, door, and building schedule from a centralized, remote location. For example, they can see the full history of a system, plus add, move, or delete users in real time. With those capabilities at their fingertips, accommodating future changes is easier.

Fortunately, the glitches were minimal. "It was a really well-run project," LaBrie says. Despite some shipping delays due to the pandemic, the upgrades were made with minimal disruption and completed in under three months.

The Nordic and Parkland teams also had ongoing support from Schneider Electric's experts. "The Schneider Electric team worked closely with Nordic to make sure all parts and product were delivered on time throughout the project. If our technical team had any questions, they reached out and got the support they needed," Sippert says.

Another reason behind the smooth transition was that the team replaced all hardware throughout the sites to ensure greater flexibility and integration for years to come. "Overall, there was a huge difference in the buildings, because we changed out the hardware completely, so we weren't trying to integrate new solutions with outdated hardware, which would have been a challenge, and limit our ability to connect additional solutions in the future."

One of the advantages offered by EcoStruxure AccessExpert is that customers have flexibility over how

"We wanted to make sure we could minimize impact to teachers, which is the largest staffing group, so we worked on a school-by-school basis once the front-end installation of EcoStruxure AccessXpert was complete. Once a school was tied into the system and functioning, then we could go to the next school. If we ran into a glitch or hiccup at one building, we resolved it before moving to the next school."

— Brian Sippert

the system is deployed, as it supports traditional on-site applications within the network, including mass messaging, elevator control, and more. By upgrading all the hardware now, Parkland School Division has greater recourse for future-proofing their schools and related facilities down the road.

A more secure future

Today, Parkland School Division now has a more trustworthy, adaptable security system that's saving time and money. Parkland's team has reduced the number of after-hours callouts dramatically, saving time and reducing overall security costs.

Day-to-day management of employee users, doors and schedules is now much simpler across the district. Now, only a few staff members at head office need to know how to manage the system, instead of multiple staff members at each location. Authorized staff can also manage any location's system remotely, via a secure connection.

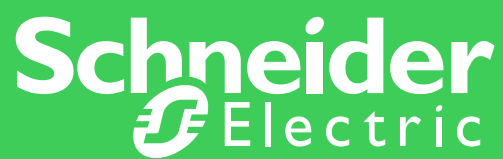
Any required changes, such as removing users, is now done in real-time, reducing the risk of unwanted building access.

Parkland's rising insurance costs – one of the primary drivers behind the security system overhaul – is being more in control. "We've put systems in place that we can control, and we feel that we've got some of the best systems in place to impact insurance rates in a positive way," LaBrie says.

Perhaps most importantly, Parkland gained all these benefits without disrupting life for its students and educators. "We wanted to streamline visitor and building management operations, reduce after-hours impact on our security team and save on security costs, while also positioning Parkland School Division for the future," LaBrie says. "By running smoothly in the background and giving our staff ease-of-access across buildings, this system does just that."



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