


Customer Segment Story: PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICTS

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The number of official documents that a school system must maintain is staggering. The list includes critical data relating to budgets, student records, written curriculums, test scores, and a host of other official papers and Vital Records. Every state has different regulations for how long these files need to be stored; and it is the underlying responsibility of the school district to be accountable for the data's security.

Schools often keep hard copies, microfilm, and digital versions of this data but in the event of a disaster certain measures must be taken to ensure a school district's responsibility to the public.

“Whenever you have a fire, you have damage from sprinkler systems, smoke damage, and the fire itself. If records are kept in a fireproof filing cabinet, the records are much safer. It's a really good idea.”

– Frances McDuffie, district payroll administrator, Dillon School District, Dillon SC

Karen Perry, records analyst expert for the schools and colleges of the state of New Jersey, recommends that school administrators work closely with vendors. “We try to promote prevention,” says Perry. “I harp on disaster prevention, rather than disaster recovery. What can you do to set up a system that can protect hardcopy and microfilm? A fireproof filing cabinet is one of the things that will help. Fireproof safes are very nice too. It's something that we've always preached in our manuals, on our Web sites, and in our training. We've always advocated that if people can afford to do so, fireproof filing cabinets are excellent.”

Plainfield School District, in Plainfield, VT purchased a FireKing cabinet last summer. The district also uses the product for student files and records to comply with state regulations which state that certain records need to be stored in a fireproof enclosure. “We're a small school,” says Russell Collins, district superintendent. “We had a small vault, but we did some school construction and the vault was removed so we needed something else.” Collins reviewed different catalogs to find what he was looking for.

His criteria were fireproof qualities and cost-effectiveness for a small school system. According to Collins, the purchasing decisions are determined by the superintendent, business manager, or other administrator.

(National Fire Protection Association) NFPA Standard 232, “Protection of Records” recommends that if keeping vital records on-site, they need to be stored in a secure, fire-protected location in a fire-resistant file or vault that has been tested by Underwriters Laboratories or another nationally known independent testing labs. The top suppliers in the industry offer well-designed, attractive fireproof file

cabinets and fire safes for onsite records protection. You can readily find this equipment at your local office products dealer, in most office products catalogs, or on the Internet.

“We live in a day and age where everything has to be accessible by law. If there is litigation in a public district, the records must be retained 20 years after final settlement. It sounds pedantic, but this is the way public records work,” says Perry.

One practice that would benefit school administrators is to conduct an inventory. If you had a disaster and you had to reopen the next day, what records would you target? Student records and payroll histories are things you will need to keep going. As community leaders, school officials will have to be able to pick up the pieces in the wake of a fire emergency.

“We are required to keep certain records so many years. So it’s for our own security that we have those records. In the superintendent’s office we have personnel records, teacher contracts, board minutes. Some of our cabinets have been around for many years. We purchased one just recently last year, but the district has been using them for a long time,” says Linda Komro, executive secretary to the superintendent, Durand School District, Durand, WI.

According to Western Grove (AK) Elementary Principal, Cindy Hearn, “We have what we call the vault, which is just a reinforced room in the office where we keep a lot of our records. Our bookkeeper has a four drawer fireproof cabinet. We keep all of the personnel records, school budgets, things you wouldn’t want to lose.”

Suzanne Marshall, educational sectors consultant at Nixon Associates in Tallahassee, FL recommends school districts purchase fireproof equipment such as cabinets, safes, and vaults. “If you go into schools you will see them in most principals’ offices,” says Marshal. A former member of the Florida Department of Education Facilities department, Marshall suggests that districts have archives copied by their secretary of state’s office, but also to keep a copy in their own offices for convenience.

Dillon School District, in Dillon SC uses a vault to store student records, but day-to-day records are kept in a fireproof cabinet. It’s a standard practice, according to Frances McDuffie, payroll administrator for the district. “We’ve had instances where we’ve stored records in these cabinets, and lightning strikes have started fires, so it’s really good that we had them. Whenever you have a fire, you have damage from sprinkler systems, smoke damage, and the fire itself. If records are kept in a fireproof filing cabinet, the records are much safer. It’s a really good idea.” According to McDuffie, the only limiting factor to schools purchasing this type of equipment is budgets, because costs are such an issue for many school districts.

Sedalia School District in Sedalia, MO recently purchased fireproof file cabinets from FireKing because their fireproof storage vault was stuffed full. “You couldn’t even get in there,” says Frances Greene, administrative assistant. “Your titles and warranties have to be accessible, so you don’t want to take them offsite, but you don’t want them destroyed either if there was a disaster,” she explains.

Fireproof cabinets, vaults, and safes from FireKing keep important school documents 100% safe in the case of an emergency. As the number of school age children in the U.S. continues to grow, the need for school systems to better manage vital records will increase dramatically over the next few years. The experts all agree – start getting behind this issue now to figure out the best set of solutions for your district.