

Atlanta Public Schools

Fast Facts

Facility*

Atlanta Public Schools

- Active enrollment of approximately 52,000 students
- Over 100 facility sites
- Six geographical and three "at large" districts

Industry

Public School System

Challenges

- Atlanta ranks as the fourth fastest growing U.S. city
- Diverse older properties and new construction
- Limited resources and budget
- Strict compliance standards in a challenging environment

Solutions

FireScan, AccountManager, DocDrive and Embedded Codes & Standards

Results

- Compiled a detailed database of devices across the entire operation
- Reduced departmental costs by 20%
- Streamlined operations
- Improved compliance documentation
- Improved relationships with authorities having jurisdiction

**Figures cited valid at time of time of publication.*



Company Profile

Atlanta Public Schools is one of the largest school districts in the state of Georgia, serving approximately 52,000 students across 87 schools. The District is organized into nine K-12 clusters with 58 neighborhood schools, six partner schools, 18 charter schools, two citywide single-gender academies and three alternative programs. The system also employs 5,924 teachers, along with numerous administrative, support, and maintenance staff.

Safety of students and staff is the top priority for APS who continues to invest not only in the quality of education, but also in the safety of its staff and students. For example, the district recently added body-worn cameras to the uniforms of more than 80 school resource officers. Other recent initiatives include increasing technical data integration abilities to proactively improve safety and security around schools and strengthening emergency preparedness beyond operational readiness.

Challenge

According to estimates based on the USFA National Fire Incident Reporting System and NFPA's Annual Fire Experience Survey, there were 4,859 fires at educational occupancies reported to local fire departments in the U.S. between 2013 and 2017. These accounted for one civilian death, 56 injuries, and more than \$57 million in property loss. Preschool through grade 12 facilities were responsible for the largest share, at 68% of the incidents, or 3,318 fires.

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Atlanta Public Schools

David Resmondo, Senior Security Specialist and 24-year veteran of APS, started out working with the school district's security team and contractors. In 1999, he was asked to take on the inspection and maintenance for fire alarm and signaling systems. "One day, they brought a stack of paper reports [for inspections] that had failed to my desk and asked me to look into them," said Resmondo. "I was very happy working with the security cameras and burglar alarms, but at that time, Atlanta was growing quickly, and everyone was working hard to keep pace. That's how I was introduced to the life safety industry."

"It was mostly conventional systems at that point in time," he explains. "Addressable was just coming into play and we didn't really have a dedicated life safety team at that stage. Some repairs would be assigned to us because of our low voltage experience and expertise, and in other cases, they would be assigned to electricians."

Without a centralized team and visibility across operations, APS was naturally experiencing challenges managing their life safety systems. "For the first five years, we were dealing with handwritten NFPA paper reports until around 2004-2005, when I spoke with my security contractor about BuildingReports. We did a trial run [with FireScan] and it worked great."

Solution

David Resmondo arranged for a trial program with his security contractor to see how FireScan could improve and streamline compliance reporting and repair work for the school district's extensive fire alarm and signaling systems. "It worked great," said Resmondo. "All the reports were automated and available online, so I could see what was going on without having to dig through handwritten reports, which are not easy to read."

Leveraging the new electronic reporting from the security contractor, Resmondo and his team achieved greater compliance than was possible with paper reporting. "Basically, BuildingReports helped us to become compliant. The system labels everything in an easy-to-read format. I can look at a report and see, 'OK, this is bad, this is bad, and this is bad,' as opposed to trying to decipher someone's notes in the margin on a piece of paper."

That's when the team was faced with another familiar public-sector challenge. "Our first experience with BuildingReports was great," said Resmondo. "We continued the relationship for another 11 to 12 years when another problem came into play. It became a budget issue."

A property tax freeze in Fulton County resulted in a \$12 million budget shortfall for APS in 2017, forcing the system to find ways to cut expenses. "I was given a mandate that, 'You have to cut your budget by 20%,'" he explained. The safety of the students and faculty being the top priority of Atlanta Public Schools and his team, he was forced to find a way to make things work.

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"I can't tell schools they can't replace security cameras. I have to inspect and repair or replace the issues we find with fire alarm systems. I have to provide access control when needed," he said. That's when Resmondo decided he and his team would have to take on the responsibility of fire alarm inspections themselves to save the outsourcing expense.

"I contacted BuildingReports and told them, 'I need to be able to have this software; I need all the tools,'" he explained. "I showed them my certifications. It was nothing against our service provider, but I was left with a business decision. I had to save money for the company."

Results

Doing More with Less

"The first year we did it — 2018 — that was a learning curve," said Resmondo. Since they took on the inspection responsibility themselves, the team did not have a historical database and had to start from scratch. The first step was to barcode and use FireScan®

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to scan and record the data (such as device type, manufacturer, model number, location, etc.) for each device across more than 100 sites. However, the initial effort provided accurate, detailed information on the fire alarm assets of the entire school district.

“But roll around to 2019, and it was a cakewalk. I do most of my inspections from January through February,” he said. This was a tall task, given that his inspection team consisted of him and two other employees. “I had my database in place, and I only had two new schools, so I was able to just roll through it.”

Resmondo and his team met the objective to cut costs by 20%, in part by taking on responsibility for the district’s fire alarm inspections. With the aid of BuildingReports, his team was able to achieve an efficient annual process and better forecast and plan critical maintenance tasks, and automatically track warranty information and recalls.

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Achieving a Preventative Maintenance Model

“Ultimately, I’m in maintenance, and when you’re in maintenance, you don’t want to be playing catch-up,” said Resmondo. “I’m able to do preventative maintenance on fire systems now because of BuildingReports. I am now on a battery replacement cycle every four years, and now I can see what’s coming up a year ahead.”

On average, the team preemptively replaces approximately 350 batteries a year. Without the visibility provided by BuildingReports, they could be reactively replacing batteries unnecessarily. Resmondo explained, “If I had to replace [all batteries for] the entire district at once, that could cost around \$40,000. [With BuildingReports] I can also look at the age of smoke detectors in any given building and know what’s coming.”

A Higher Level of Compliance

Atlanta Public Schools leverages an add-on feature from BuildingReports called Embedded Codes & Standards, which displays references to the NFPA code explaining the reason for a device’s failure. According to Resmondo, the benefits are two-fold.

“One, I need my guys to know why something failed. With BuildingReports, they can plug in the code and see, this is why we’re failing and this is what we have to do to repair it,” he explained. “And then, I like the fire marshal to see it. I like the fire marshal to see we’re aware of the code, we know what we’re doing. Here’s your report, and we’re going to get it fixed up.”

In fact, the team usually make repairs the same day and leverage the on-demand reporting to demonstrate the deficiency has already been resolved. Prior to BuildingReports, relationships with the AHJ were strained by the team’s limited documentation. “Now the fire marshals know the code; they go to classes. It’s good to have a good relationship with them, because now they also know what we’re doing [to meet the compliance standards],” Resmondo explained.

Streamlined Operations

“We’re in a better spot today with fire and life safety because of BuildingReports. We know it’s great inspection software, but let’s put that to the side,” Resmondo said. “We’re in a better spot because of maintenance. I can pinpoint what’s wrong. We’re in a better spot because I can project which systems need to be changed, and if I need to get a quick device count because I have something I need to get changed immediately. I don’t have to go to the school and pull a program or walk the building.”

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When you consider the variety of facility layouts and diverse make-up of those facilities, including North Atlanta High School, a converted 11-story building that once housed IBM offices, the time savings is substantial. "I can go to BuildingReports and say, 'OK, I have 15 modules, five smokes, 14 pull stations' I have all the information I need in one central place," he continued. "So as far as streamlining everything, making the operation efficient, [BuildingReports] did it."

"Where we are now, I know beyond a shadow of a doubt at this point that my fire systems function, and that's peace of mind."

– **David Resmondo**, Senior Security Specialist, Atlanta Public Schools

Peace of Mind

Education occupancies can be particularly challenging. "The main thing I fail is pull stations. Kids will pull the pull stations to the point they're so twisted they're about to fall off," said Resmondo. The functional diversity of a school campus is another challenge, including chemistry labs, assembly buildings like basketball arenas, large kitchens with equipment designed to feed thousands daily.

"Where we were with paper reports was not knowing if the fire systems were functional or not. Where we are now, I know beyond a shadow of a doubt at this point that my fire systems function, and that's peace of mind." And, with David Resmondo and the low voltage team at APS at the helm, students, parents and faculty can also sleep better at night.



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For more information

about BuildingReports' web-based fire and life safety inspection-reporting solutions, call **770-495-1993**, email sales@buildingreports.com or visit www.buildingreports.com.

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About BuildingReports

Building safety and compliance are critical to service companies, building owners, and fire and safety officials who are charged with safeguarding occupants. BuildingReports' mobile and online inspection reporting tools enable inspectors to quickly gather data on fire and life safety devices to ensure that these devices are working properly and meet code requirements, and to identify actions needed to meet compliance through easily verifiable inspection reports. With millions of inspection reports for hundreds of thousands of buildings, hundreds of million devices represented, and more than 13 billion square feet of floor space covered to date, BuildingReports has earned its reputation as the most trusted name in compliance reporting. Learn more at www.buildingreports.com.