

Learning to Protect Privacy and Stay Compliant: K-12 Schools

K-12 school districts are tasked with collecting and managing countless student documents, including immunization records, enrollment applications, incident reports, and, more recently, COVID-19 contact tracing records. The daily influx of paper and digital files often presents an overwhelming challenge to school systems. Add on ensuring compliance with FERPA and HIPAA guidelines as well as local district regulations and managing student information is undoubtedly made harder. Even with compliance with FERPA's mandate for reasonable controls, countless data breaches happen each year. [IDTheftCenter.Org](https://www.idtheftcenter.org) estimated based on their data; there were over 2,000,000 leaked documents in 2019. While regulatory compliance can be complicated and doesn't always guarantee data safety, there are important steps to follow to guide your compliance efforts and help secure student data.

Stay Informed

Changes to compliance mandates are frequent at the local and state level and require affected organizations to stay informed. These changes are often small, involving only specific areas such as health or disciplinary records or put in place additional protections as to who documents can be shared with. More considerable compliance changes, although rarer, can sometimes require profound organizational changes to the way documents are handled. A perfect example of these overarching changes involves the current COVID-19 pandemic. Federal guidelines governed the disclosure of COVID-19 related information and required schools to stay up-to-date on how this data should be handled. By scheduling time to visit essential websites such as [Student Privacy at the U.S. Department of Education](https://www.ed.gov/student-privacy), you'll stay on top of changing policies and find technical assistance to help safeguard your student information.

Clarity and Controls

Once well informed about the compliance laws that affect you, the next step in the process is clarifying who has access to each type of record and under what circumstances. Some information may be safe to permit to people with individual interests such as parents, financial aid providers, or school officials. In contrast, other information may require sign-offs from students, parents, or guardians. Setting up clear organizational guidelines on who can access certain records and the correct processes to obtain them will almost certainly make the [compliance](#) process easier.

Protect the Information

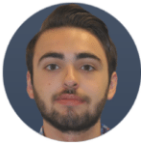
While traditional file cabinets are how many schools protect student information, this method leaves a lot to be desired. Records can be accessed by anyone who can find the key, and [disasters](#) like fires or floods can completely ruin long-standing archives. Such disasters can not only destroy the documents of current students but can also damage files well into their mandated retention periods, creating more headaches in the event those files are needed. While student information systems help protect certain student data, you need to protect all student records. Those include securely managing assessments, evaluations, and health records that exist outside of your Student Information System. The traditional file cabinet approach can also make it extremely difficult to segment records so that each

key holder can access only permitted files. While leaving one key in the hands of a behind-the-desk gatekeeper is the approach many schools take, it places a lot of responsibility on one person who is, in fact, human.

A Digital Transformation Solution for K-12 Schools

[Square 9 Softworks](#) offers schools and school districts a solution for better documentation management that resides outside their Student Information System. [Education Essentials](#) securely stores cumulative, health, and supplemental records in an encrypted, siloed environment and gives you the organizational tools to control who can access each record type and under what conditions, all while providing an efficient and more productive way to store and retrieve data including student records directly from your student information system. Education Essentials helps index files, making them easily searchable and gives you direct access to records within and outside your student information system for streamlined, controlled access.

For more information on Education Essentials and how it can improve your school district's document management, contact us at info@square-9.com or visit: <https://www.square-9.com/education>



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