

Case Study: Data Security in Schools



Industry: K-12 Education

Location: Boise, ID

Size: 58 schools, 39,000+ students

Company Bio

West Ada School District is an above-average, public school district. It is the largest school district in the state of Idaho and in the top 300 largest in the US.

Overview

West Ada School District is responsible for ensuring that their staff members have the information they need to support the children in their care while simultaneously protecting student privacy by providing no more information than each staff member needs to know. After attempts at developing an in-house data security became increasingly complex, they reached out to infoVia to implement infoSecur for a tried and tested solution.

Challenge

Any institution focused on children needs to be fastidious with their data. This is especially true for a School District like West Ada School District. As the largest school district in Idaho, and among the 300 largest districts in the United States, West Ada School District must carefully govern who has access to the district's data, especially student data. West Ada staff consists of various roles to support children including teachers, nurses, academic coaches, psychologists, special needs personnel, clerical staff, and dozens more. Identifying what data can help which staff members better support their students is a task unto itself, let alone ensuring that the data is secured by those same decisions. This access governance needs to be both consistently enforced and also reasonable to maintain.

The Approach

West Ada had a mix of pre-built security rules established through their Active Directory environment and single-user access rules maintained by department heads. These rules needed to be applied across all relational data to ensure compliance with privacy regulations while simultaneously allowing proper access to those with a valid need.



infoSecur provides a means to define and enforce policies across all relational data sets, while maintaining the fluidity of metadata-driven rules, or 'meta-policies' as they are called in this patent-pending solution approach.



"West Ada's talented data team proved a perfect partner for applying automation techniques to accelerate their development process in the WhereScape environment."

ChristopherS, Sr. Data Architect at infoVia

After some preliminary analysis, we came to know that some of the relational data that helps defines policies is pre-existing within the school's data sets. How then can that data be leveraged to help define the meta-policies with minimal or no duplication of effort? We wondered. This drove some of the recent innovation in the infoSecur product we call "reference" policies. Reference policies take two forms. One uses existing data to define roles for users. Since the Active Directory groups already held information as to the school facility a given user worked, infoSecur leveraged that data to map those users to specific facility roles. Secondly, where student enrollment in courses taught by a given teacher was pre-defined, those relationships were reused in the meta-policies to grant teachers access to specific students' data.

Student Data
250K+

Records for **87K+**
Members

2,000 Active
Directory Groups

The Solution

Now that the pertinent relationships between database users, staff, school facilities, and students was mapped in infoSecur, the policies acted in a “fluid” manner, meaning that they changed automatically when the student, teacher, or facility data changed at the source. This approach provided an automated management



method as well as ensuring high

quality of access policies since they were based on facts already well-defined inside the school information systems and/or Active Directory structures.

The Results

infoSecur has allowed West Ada to move their access rules completely into their Data Warehouse as meta-policies, making them consistent by ensuring that no matter where the data is presented their data access rules are enforced. Additionally they change as the natural student/staff relationships change, easing significantly the management and governance duties of the security administration. The result is efficient management, consistent enforcement, ease of data access, and assurance of policy accuracy.

“We were looking for a data warehouse solution that would provide high quality analytics with the ability to quickly adapt. The partnership with Info-via provided us with a team of experts that met our goals. Now we have all our data centralized and are providing information to our district.”

Jeff Dodds- Data Manager

About infoVia

infoVia is a premier group of agile-minded Data Vault experts with the know-how and sense of urgency to help your organization start and grow in Data Vault.

Contact us to help you with guide you on your Data Vault journey.

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