A Guide to Biometrics in Schools

Biometrics are an increasingly popular way to identify students as they move through the lunch line and in other areas around campus. With just a touch of their fingertip, students can be identified quickly and accurately.

Many districts want to know more about this new topic, and how to introduce it to their campuses. SL-Tech has taken a very thoughtful approach to the development of our biometric solution. We understand that the use of biometrics is a very sensitive subject for administrators, parents, and students.

This guide will provide school district administrators with the information they need to know about biometrics and the steps they can take to implement it successfully.

Biometric Identification Programs in Schools

SL-Tech's biometric technology stores alphanumeric templates derived from fingerprints. Our system does NOT store fingerprints or images of the fingerprint. Storing templates reduces data storage requirements, speeds matching, and eliminates security issues that surround saving fingerprints.

The system works this way:

1. The child places his/her finger on the biometric sensor.
2. The sensor measures the differences between the ridges and valleys of the fingerprint.
3. Mathematical algorithms create a template based on this measurement.
4. The device generates an alphanumeric value from this template.
5. This alphanumeric value is compared with the set of stored values in the database. If a match is found, the value uniquely identifies the child within the school population.

Place finger on sensor — Template generated and ID matched — ID transmitted to POS Client
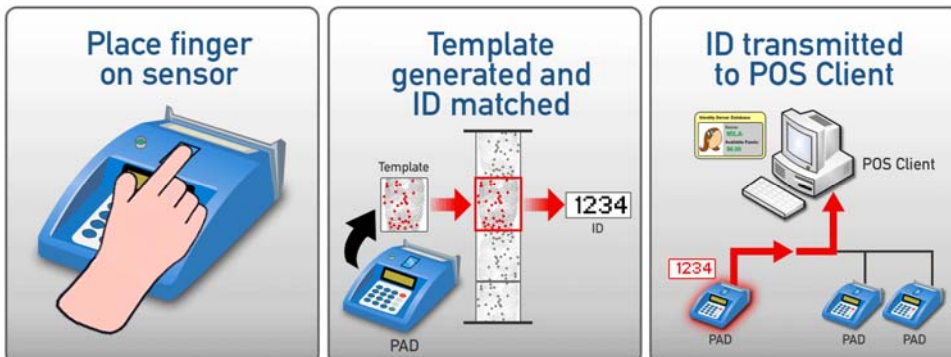
What are biometrics?

Everyone has physical and behavioral characteristics that are unique to them and change little over time. Biometrics are the methods and tools used to identify these unique characteristics.

Features that can be recognized by biometrics include face, fingerprint, hand, iris, DNA, keystroke, signature and voice.

For schools, finger scans are most commonly used in biometric identification. The finger scan works with the Point of Sale software to identify and record students just like a keypad or barcode scanner.

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How can biometrics be used in schools?

Biometrics can help quickly identify students in a variety of school settings, including the cafeteria, the main office, the classroom, and the library.

Cafeteria

Allows students to access their meal accounts. Identifies students as free, reduced, or paid.

Attendance & Registration

Provides an electronic means of enrolling students at individual school sites and recording attendance.

Library

Manages student library accounts, including check-outs.

Advantages

- Quick, accurate identification of students speeds up lines and saves staff time
- More secure – reduced opportunity for identity theft
- Cannot be forgotten or stolen, unlike ID cards or PIN numbers
- Reduced costs – no need to replace lost or damaged ID cards
- Reduced administrative burden of managing multiple identities

Practical Steps To Introduce Biometrics

1. Before implementing biometrics, your school should consult with district administration and your state agency to determine the most suitable and appropriate system for your needs.

2. Develop a clearly defined "Biometrics Use" policy. This policy should include statements about the use of biometric data and the ability to "opt out" of the program.

3. Contact all parents to address any possible concerns up front. Explain the technology to be used, what is involved, the data to be held and stored, why it is required, how it will be kept secure, and how long it will be retained.

4. Reassure parents and students that the district will not pass the data on to any third parties and that all biometric data will be destroyed when the student leaves the school.

5. Allow parents to "opt out" of using biometric technologies to identify their children.

6. For parents who choose to "opt out", select other means by which their students will be identified (e.g., ID cards, PINs).

Is It Secure?

Schools should recognize that security of personal data is of paramount importance and, for obvious reasons, a particular concern of parents.

Our system does not store fingerprints or images of the fingerprint. There is no way to generate a fingerprint from the encrypted template. Hence, the templates cannot be used for any other purpose than student identification at the school. The database is not shared and is not accessible unless otherwise configured.

Is It Legal?

In most states, yes. However, it is always advisable to review your state's data privacy laws before introducing biometrics in schools. Many states may require that parent consent be obtained before any biometric data is collected. Even if parental consent is not required by law, school districts are strongly encouraged to gain parent approval prior to enrolling any children in a biometrics program.

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