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How the Saanich School District Expands Its Security Capabilities With Varonis

> " I haven't seen any other solution that can put layers of protection and support into a school district like Varonis.

About this case study:

Saanich School District 63 is located in British Columbia, Canada.

Highlights

Challenges

- Managing a security program with a lean IT team

- Protecting a large volume of student and HR data

- Complying with FOIPPA

Solution

Varonis Data Security Platform:

- **DatAdvantage** gives complete visibility and control over critical data

- **Data Classification Engine** discovers and locks down sensitive data automatically

- **Policy Pack** adds a library of rules to find and detect FOIPPA data

- **DatAlert** monitors and alerts on abnormal behavior in critical systems

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Results

- Protect student data in Windows and Microsoft 365 without adding IT staff

- Serve as a model for other school districts

- A plan to further optimize their security posture moving forward

Challenges
Protecting student information with a lean IT team

A school district in British Columbia, Canada, is putting its student data first. Saanich School District 63 encompasses 18 schools and is responsible for protecting the privacy of thousands of students and more than 1,000 staff members.

Safeguarding that much data is a huge undertaking under any circumstances. But the Saanich School District, like most, is lean-staffed, and that creates extra challenges for its small IT team.

In delivering education to students, the Saanich School District manages many types of sensitive personal information from students and staff.

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"We have the personal information of tens of thousands of students and a thousand-plus employees," says Cody Henschel, Director of Information Technology. **"We have academic records, payment information, and medical information, such as psychological assessments. A large volume of information flows through our doors and many different teams need access to it."**

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Cody and Scott Arnold, Systems Administrator at the Saanich School District, always put security at the forefront. But their small team was stretched thin trying to prevent data loss, ensure data privacy, and prevent ransomware attacks.

> "Security is incredibly difficult in school districts because we have the same responsibilities as other large organizations but with much smaller teams," says Cody. "And it's almost impossible to build a large security team within a school district because salary demands are so high."

The Saanich School District must comply with the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FOIPPA) — so being able to quickly and accurately classify that data was a high priority.

Cody and Scott needed help. Either they had to find a way to hire a much larger IT team or they needed software to dramatically extend their capabilities.

Enter Varonis.

"Security is like climbing up a steep hill — and we had a lot to achieve. We started looking for solutions to make sure we felt supported."

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Solution

Varonis' Data Security Platform protects cloud and on-prem student data

The Saanich School District built its security foundation around four **DatAdvantage** subscriptions:

- DatAdvantage for Windows

- DatAdvantage for Directory Services

- DatAdvantage for SharePoint Online

- DatAdvantage for OneDrive

These DatAdvantage modules give the Saanich School District complete visibility and control over sensitive student data regardless of whether it resides in the cloud or on-premises.

The Saanich School District also uses Varonis' **Data Classification Engine** to implement custom rules to find and classify sensitive data, such as student numbers, personal education numbers, and individual education plans, automatically.

> **"It was easy to set up specific rules to look for different types of information,"**
> **says Cody. "Data Classification Engine went beyond simple pattern matching to**
> **look for information in the context of documents. That is a neat feature."**

With sensitive information identified and classified, Cody and Scott could apply relevant Canadian and provincial privacy rules (including FOIPPA) at a granular level right out of the box with Varonis' **Policy Pack**.

With these pieces in place, Cody and Scott implemented **DatAlert** to monitor critical systems and alert on abnormal behavior. Today, Scott spends just a few minutes every day reviewing and closing out critical alerts to catch any threats early.

Cody also uses Varonis to assess the precise impact of any security incident.

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> **"If a person's email account is compromised, we can understand what took place when the unauthorized person had access and verify whether or not they accessed personal information,"** says Cody.

Whenever DatAlert detects anomalous activity, Cody and Scott use it as an opportunity to educate users.

> **"If we see that someone is copying sensitive data, for example, we'll not only send out a technical fix but also use the situation to start a conversation and educate users,"** says Cody.

Cody and Scott also rest easy knowing their lean IT team has the support of Varonis at any time should they need it.

> **"Even when you're doing all the right things, there's still a chance someone will breach your systems,"** says Cody. **"But if a breach happens, I have access to teams of people at Varonis who are trained in how to deal with it."**

"Varonis gives us an overall lens into our data. It's the place we go to see how systems interact with each other and who is accessing them."

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Results

Protecting student data in Windows and Microsoft 365

With Varonis, the Saanich School District is protecting student and staff data without scaling its IT team.

The District gained visibility and control they'd never had without Varonis. Now they minimize their blast radius by identifying and locking down over exposed sensitive data, stale sensitive data, and idle stale enabled users.

Scott likes having the ability to monitor all activity in a single place, making it easier and faster to investigate threats.

> **"The biggest thing with Varonis is the time savings — instead of having to dig into multiple systems to see what happened, Varonis paints a bigger picture and shows what might be going on. That would take a very long time if I was to try to dig into all of that information myself manually. But it's all right there in Varonis in a couple clicks," says Scott.**

Today, the Saanich School District's IT team continues to operationalize Varonis by optimizing alerts for risks to sensitive data in Teams, OneDrive, and SharePoint Online.

Cody believes so strongly in Varonis, he's already presented the Saanich School District's experience with Varonis as a model for other Canadian school districts.

> **"For a reasonable investment, you can bake Varonis into your systems and transform your existing team into security experts," says Cody. "Everybody across our school district, from the board to our senior executive team, is excited about what we're doing."**

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"If a breach should happen, not only will we have answers to what happened, we'll also have access to teams of people that are trained to deal with these types of breaches."

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Protect student data with confidence, no matter the size of your IT team.

Stay on top of data protection and compliance with Varonis.

Request a demo