



How Punahou School Protects Student Data On-Premises and in Google Drive With Varonis

“ Varonis is a force multiplier. We can spend our time looking at high-value alerts and not manually wading through millions of files to try and determine whether they’re appropriately shared or not.

About this case study:

Founded in 1841, Punahou School is the largest independent K-12 school in the United States.



Highlights

Challenges

- Cleaning up decades of stale data to save on storage costs
- Detecting and defending against ransomware
- Protecting PII and PHI data

Solution

Varonis Data Security Platform:

- **DatAdvantage** gives complete visibility and control over critical data
- **Data Classification Engine** discovers and locks down sensitive data automatically
- **Automation Engine** automatically repairs and maintains file system permissions
- **DatAlert** monitors and alerts on abnormal behavior in critical systems
- **DatAdvantage Cloud** protects **Google Drive and other SaaS applications**

Results

- Protect millions of files in the cloud
- Prevent ransomware attacks before they start
- Perform the equivalent workload of more than one full-time employee

Challenges

Protecting student data on-premises and in the cloud

Throughout its long history, Punahou School has taken the responsibility for managing and protecting student information seriously.



“We have a lot of personal information, particularly about students, their families, and donors,” says Beau Monday, Chief Information Security Officer.
“We need to protect that sensitive information.”

The school was founded more than 180 years ago and in the past few decades had accumulated a lot of on-premises data. Beau wanted to classify sensitive information in that data and strengthen protection.

Beau also wanted to clean up orphaned and legacy file permissions and figure out which stale files were safe to delete to reduce data storage costs.



“The school is 180 years old, and we have millions of files,” says Beau. “Purging them would not only conserve disk space but also reduce the risk of files being leaked.”

Another looming worry for the school was ransomware and insider threats. The year Beau purchased Varonis, ransomware attacks were on the rise, affecting more than a thousand schools in the United States.



“There was a big concern about ransomware even though it hadn’t been a problem specifically for us,” says Beau.

“We have a lot of personal information, particularly about students, their families, and donors. We need to protect that information.”

Solution

Varonis' Data Security Platform for Windows, Active Directory, and Google Drive

To start, Punahou School implemented two **DatAdvantage** subscriptions:

- DatAdvantage for Windows
- DatAdvantage for Directory Services

With these modules, Punahou School gained more visibility and control over its sensitive student and donor data.



“Getting that level of insight is critical in a cybersecurity role,” says Beau. “If you don’t know how people are using data, it’s really hard to control.”

Once Beau and his team had visibility into the school’s information, they used **Data Classification Engine** to find and automatically classify sensitive information, including PCI and PII data.



“Varonis has a lot of reports and remediation right out of the box,” says Beau. “Once Varonis classifies all that information, they can tell you who has access to sensitive files and whether that access is appropriate or not.”

Next, the school used **Automation Engine** to find and fix excessive access to files that weren’t needed or used.

The Punahou School can have millions of events in its environment on any given day. Beau and his team use **DatAlert** to distinguish between benign events and events that require closer scrutiny.



“If someone shares a new file that Varonis has flagged as sensitive, we get an alert and react to it quickly,” says Beau. “It limits our risk and allows us to react a lot faster to potential risks.”

When Punahou School decided to expand into the cloud, it turned to Varonis again and implemented **DatAdvantage Cloud** for Google Drive.

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“We were making a big push to move our data to Google Drive for resilience purposes, and we wanted the same level of visibility that we have in our on-prem file shares out in Google Drive,” says Beau. “When Varonis introduced their cloud option, we were very excited.”

Beau found that setting up DatAdvantage Cloud for Google Drive was remarkably quick.

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“The initial setup was honestly a single half-hour kickoff call with about 20 minutes’ worth of setup, and then it was done,” says Beau.

Beau has also been impressed with Varonis’ commitment to innovation. Every time he logs into the platform, he finds something new.


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“It’s obvious Varonis is innovating at a rapid pace. They’re being very, very aggressive and making improvements to the platform that I can see on a week-to-week basis,” says Beau. “It’s pretty amazing.”

With the level of service and support that Varonis provides, Beau views Varonis as more than a vendor.

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“Some vendors I won’t hear from until it’s time to renew our service,” says Beau. “That’s definitely not the case with Varonis. It’s much more of a partnership.”



“If someone shares a new file that Varonis has flagged as sensitive, we get an alert and react to it quickly. It limits our risk and allows us to react a lot faster to potential risks.”

Results

Rapid risk reduction and huge cost savings

Varonis has been instrumental in finding and correcting inappropriate access to sensitive information.

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“We were able to identify files that were shared inappropriately or left open on Google Drive and put a stop to it,” says Beau. “Those are the things that kept me up at night — somebody leveraging inappropriately shared files.”

Varonis has also helped Punahou School thwart several ransomware incidents.


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“Varonis alerted us to suspicious activity and we responded very quickly, minimizing the damage of those events,” says Beau.

The school is able to provide all these protections even with a lean IT team.

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“We’d have to dedicate a full-time staff member to doing what Varonis is doing today,” says Beau. “With the millions of files that we have in Google Drive, I don’t know how any single person could make sure all those permissions are appropriate.”



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Protect student data with confidence, no matter where it lives.

Stay on top of data protection and compliance with Varonis.

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