RETHINKING DOCUMENT MANAGEMENT:
THE PAPER VS. DIGITAL DEBATE

The most valuable asset in your district are your kids. The second most valuable asset are your records and personnel files. These are the community's records, documenting the **educational history of its citizens**. *Loss, improper exposure or uncontrolled destruction, would be catastrophic.*

When considering transferring your records to digital format, several objections arise regarding safety, privacy and cost. The following discussion addresses the basic concerns of digital record management versus traditional storage of paper documents and what benefits your district will have after implementing an electronic filing system.

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SAFETY & SECURITY

LOST OR THEFT

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First, it is argued that your records are the safest locked in a file room, when actually the opposite is true. In a 5-year span, the Federal Bureau of Investigation reported over 28,000 burglaries and break-ins in US schools[1]. School **file rooms are rarely locked** and there is typically no tracking system in place, this allows a person to enter and remove a file, whether malicious intent or simple forgetfulness, the file never makes it back to the proper place. Without any tracking solution, the file is lost.

With a digital record management system, that uses secure servers, **records are backed up in multiple locations**. There are digital solutions available that have detailed tracking capabilities, allowing each record to be tracked to the individual document, capturing user information and actions, a safety feature not found in traditional record management practices.

NATURAL DISASTERS

It is hard to plan for what "Mother Nature" has in the future. When considering common natural disasters such as flooding, the thought of *electronic anything* doesn't seem like the safest option, but again the opposite is true. **Paper records are extremely vulnerable to fires, floods, tornadoes, hurricanes, and just about any other type of unexpected disaster.** Though in some areas these events can be rare, when it occurs, districts are left devastated and property destroyed. In 2015, there were 24 major natural disasters reported in the United States that cost millions in damages, and effected hundreds of schools[7].

With electronic filing, documents can be secured on servers located across the United States. Individual computers may be damaged or destroyed, but your records would be unharmed; it would take a cataclysmic national disaster to simultaneously destroy servers located across the country. And in the case of the common power outage, digital records are not lost by the flick of a switch. Some e-filing solutions are **accessible on any internet enabled device** so you are never really without access to your records, try searching through a dark file room with a flashlight.

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DIGITAL MEDIA CHANGES

Changes in digital media are inevitable, like most things, as our needs change so does how we address them. Storage devices like floppy disks and data discs seem like such an ancient thought. However, file storage and file formats are very different. With digital document management, files are stored on permanent hard drives located on physical servers. **Hard drives have existed since 1956[2].** They get bigger and stronger, but the manner in which they store files doesn't change. They are extremely consistent.

Digital files are stored in universal formats, such as txt, jpeg, pdf, csv, html, tiff, or work processing software such as Microsoft Office, Apple and Google. These formats have existed for over 20 years. For instance, files created in Microsoft Word in 1983 can be opened and edited today.

OWNERSHIP

When coming to the issue of ownership, it is understandably easy to question who exactly owns something that is virtual. Let's think of it this way... If you currently have your district's archive records stored at a contracted facility, does that facility manager own your records? In an article, How Stuff Works, it explains in great detail, when dealing with digital document management, **you still own all documents that are uploaded to the cloud[8]** and the ability to remove and retain all documents at any time.
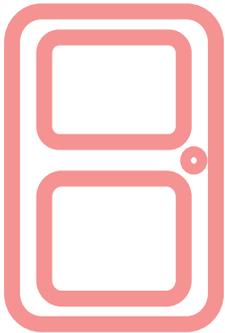
Each district still owns ALL documents that are uploaded to the cloud at all times.

PRIVACY & LEGAL COMPLIANCE

PRIVACY

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, fewer than 65% of public schools have a security camera system and only 28% of those have a daily presence to monitor activity[12].

Privacy risk exist in both paper and digital record management practices. Hackers can invade digital systems and gain access to digital records, however, **schools already face this exposure** with records stored in gymnasiums, attics, desks, closets, etc. You may feel that your paper records are safe but they are extremely vulnerable to basic level security breaches that don't require a hacker's expertise. Anyone, with physical access to the school, can walk into a file room and access a record, **there is typically no protection or protocol** (locked doors, security personnel, video surveillance, etc.) applied to these files.

With today's advancing internet security capabilities, digital records have proven to be more secure than paper files.

Believe it or not, student and staff information is already being stored in digital formats; most schools utilize electronic information systems to manage students and staff. These programs contain identification information in formats such as .doc, .xls, and are often shared and accessed on personal or public devices with no tracking mechanism. Those types of file formats, in traditional sharing methods like email, are far easier to extract sensitive information.

Most digital document management solutions use .pdf or other encrypted file types that make extraction more difficult and in some cases virtually impossible. Some solutions offer **advanced levels of document tracking**, so shared files will be logged and given time specific access.

.pdf and other encryption file types make extraction more difficult

FERPA & HIPAA COMPLIANCE

Paper file storage makes it **virtually impossible to comply with FERPA and HIPAA regulations** due to the laws very strict privacy requirements. For instance, HIPAA clearly states that non-authorized personnel cannot have access to view medical information, cumulative paper files contain these protected documents. If a non-medical administrator accesses these files to view a transcript they violate HIPAA[3].

A key benefit to electronic record management systems is the control that districts have over every record and document at any given time, allowing you to precisely control access and maintain compliance.

9.7% of data breaches in the education industry come from exposed records[13].

RETENTION

Although districts try hard to comply with retention, it is a difficult task to maintain with paper records when each form or document has a different retention period. Even if an administrator could memorize them all, is the time spent reviewing each record each year in order to carefully purge the corrected documents valuable to the district? No, so this results in schools keeping everything in a quixotic attempt to comply with state rules. On one hand admirable, **districts create what is referred to as "the paper problem"** or massive paper storage, exposing the school to unnecessary legal liability for the information contained in archived records.

An electronic records management system can be programed to remember thousands of retention laws and retention settings. Once a school establishes its retention guidelines, **the system can take over and monitor retention** at the document level.
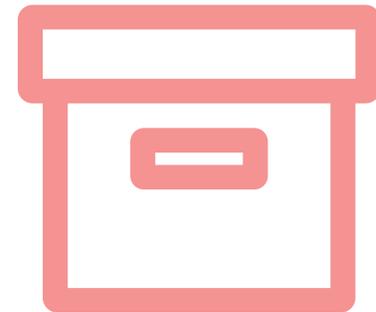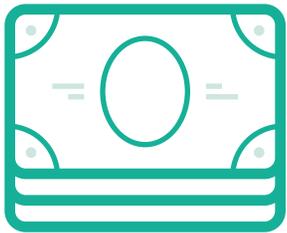
Florida lists a 33-page retention schedule document for districts to apply to each record at each school[10].

COST & ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

COST & STORAGE

We've all learned "there is no such thing as a free lunch." There is a cost to digital storage, but because it is an easily visible amount you may think it is cheaper to keep paper. Study has shown that **paper storage can be 10 times more expensive than digital record management**. How is that true? Have you thought about the hidden details of traditional record management practices like copy supplies (paper, ink, etc.), file cabinets, materials (redwells, folders, clips, etc.), transportation costs, and ware on printers, you could uncover that your district is spending thousands a year on maintaining student and staff records. Did you know it costs over $2.50 in supplies to create one record[4]?

Districts often, and unknowingly, dedicate enormous static resources to the paper filing process. It takes 8 times longer to file and locate paper copies compared to digital storage[4] and the average organization spends about $20 in labor to create and file each paper record, approximately $120 in labor searching for each misfiled document[5]. In addition to the cost allocated to paper files, you are also allocating space, **dedicating up to 20 sq. ft. of space for each file cabinet[7]**. This is time and space that could be repurposed and reallocated for the students.

Districts spend $20 in labor to develop and file a document and $120 in labor searching for a misfiled record[5].

ENVIRONMENT

In a New York Department of Education study, it states that on average a cumulative file contains is 75 pages, if you just think of an individual record it is hard to see the entire picture. Let's take a look at a district that has 5,000 active students, that is 375,000 pages. If each record is copied 2.5 times, the amount of **paper usage grows to 937,500 for just ONE YEAR!** The Sierra Club states that an average, mature tree produces 20,000 pages of paper, it would only take about 47 trees supply your record needs and just over 20 trees per year to maintain[6]. When considering special education students, **the average file is 300 pages**, or one tree for every 27 students, every year.

The environmental impact is enormous.

In a district of 5,000 students, it takes 47 trees to supply your record needs and 20 trees per year to maintain them[6].

THE
YELLOWFOLDER
SOLUTION

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YellowFolder
The Education Documentation Experts

YellowFolder is a cloud-based solution for digital document management and accessible via any internet-enabled device. We develop a file structure based on your current SIS or HRIS, truly a solution that is built around your district's needs. YellowFolder covers every aspect of taking your records from the attic to the cloud:

- Picking up all of your paper documents
- Transferring your files onto the cloud
- Developing a system based on your existing file structure
- Implementing your selected privacy & security settings

WHY YELLOWFOLDER?

YellowFolder is the only digital record management solution that was specifically **designed for K-12 School Districts**. Our system covers your district's needs in Student, Human Resource, Special Education and Administrative record management. We are the intelligent e-file cabinet solution to hundreds of districts across the United States.

WHY YELLOWFOLDER?

Why YellowFolder? Because we understand the value of these records to the community and the responsibility entrusted with school officials to protect and preserve these records. At YellowFolder, we know that **it's really all about the kids!**

Our legal advisors know and stay abreast of retention laws in every state, that's why we at YellowFolder are the Retention Experts. With **25 years of experience** in education document management, we provide a revolutionary replacement to the traditional practices, ridding districts of their paper epidemic.

Records are secure with YellowFolder, we maintain current SSAE 16 and SOC 2 security certifications, with multiple servers, real-time backup capability and require dedicated user name and password compliance to access any record. YellowFolder stores each digital record in triplicate on secure servers throughout the United States, and our system tracks the history of each document, for its entire lifespan.

REFERENCES

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