



Making the Case for Security Cameras in Schools and Colleges

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Making the Case for Security Cameras in Schools and Colleges

Cameras in classrooms can deter violence, theft, and bullying—and help police respond to unfolding incidents. At the same time, their presence raises questions about privacy, the nature of learning spaces, and intellectual freedom. eCampus News looks at what it takes to secure classrooms while preserving an institution's primary mission of education.

In 2015, a TV news investigation in Dallas captured disturbing footage of a teacher locking an eight-year-old child with autism in a padded closet, a disciplinary practice apparently employed by several North Texas schools. The outrage that followed paved the way for a new Texas law requiring schools to record all teacher interaction with special-needs students in class at the request of a parent.

The use of video surveillance in K-12 schools and higher education is nothing new, of course. More than 90 percent of educational institutions in the U.S. already use security cameras, according to a 2016 survey by *Campus Safety Magazine*, with 79 percent planning to install additional camera systems over the next three years. Typically, though, these cameras have been used to monitor public areas, such as parking lots, athletic stadiums, hallways, stairwells, and common areas. The idea of video surveillance in classrooms—epitomized by Texas law SB 507—has gained traction only in recent years.

"A video recording could be the one thing that saves a teacher's job when there are false accusations of misbehavior, and could protect a student from a teacher who is abusing them verbally, emotionally, or even physically."

It's the kind of safeguard that is long overdue in schools, according to Mark Powell, a board member at the San Diego County Office of Education, who believes that "cameras will protect the safety of both students and teachers." In an opinion piece written for the *San Diego Union-Tribune* in November 2015, he noted, "A video recording could be the one thing that saves a teacher's job when there are false accusations of misbehavior, and could protect a student from a teacher who is abusing them verbally, emotionally, or even physically."

These are important goals, but institutions should be aware that the installation of security cameras in classrooms may raise privacy and pedagogical concerns, as well as challenges around implementation and cost. Before installing surveillance cameras in classes, security experts encourage institutions to approach the issue methodically, deliberately, and inclusively.

IDENTIFY THE PROBLEM

"Understand the security concern you're trying to address and determine how or if a camera can solve it," suggests Sue Riseling, executive director of the International Association of Campus Law Enforcement Administrators (IACLEA) and former police chief at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. "That's where you start." In Riseling's view, it's an approach that works, whether an institution is dealing with break-ins at a parking lot or a rash of thefts in classrooms.

Not surprisingly, the security concerns confronting educators in K-12 classrooms tend to differ from those in higher education. Unlike college students who are paying steep fees to attend, some high school students are unwilling participants who feel they have little to lose by acting up. "Given the age and development of students in K-12, there is more potential for confrontation between a teacher and a student than in higher education," said Riseling.

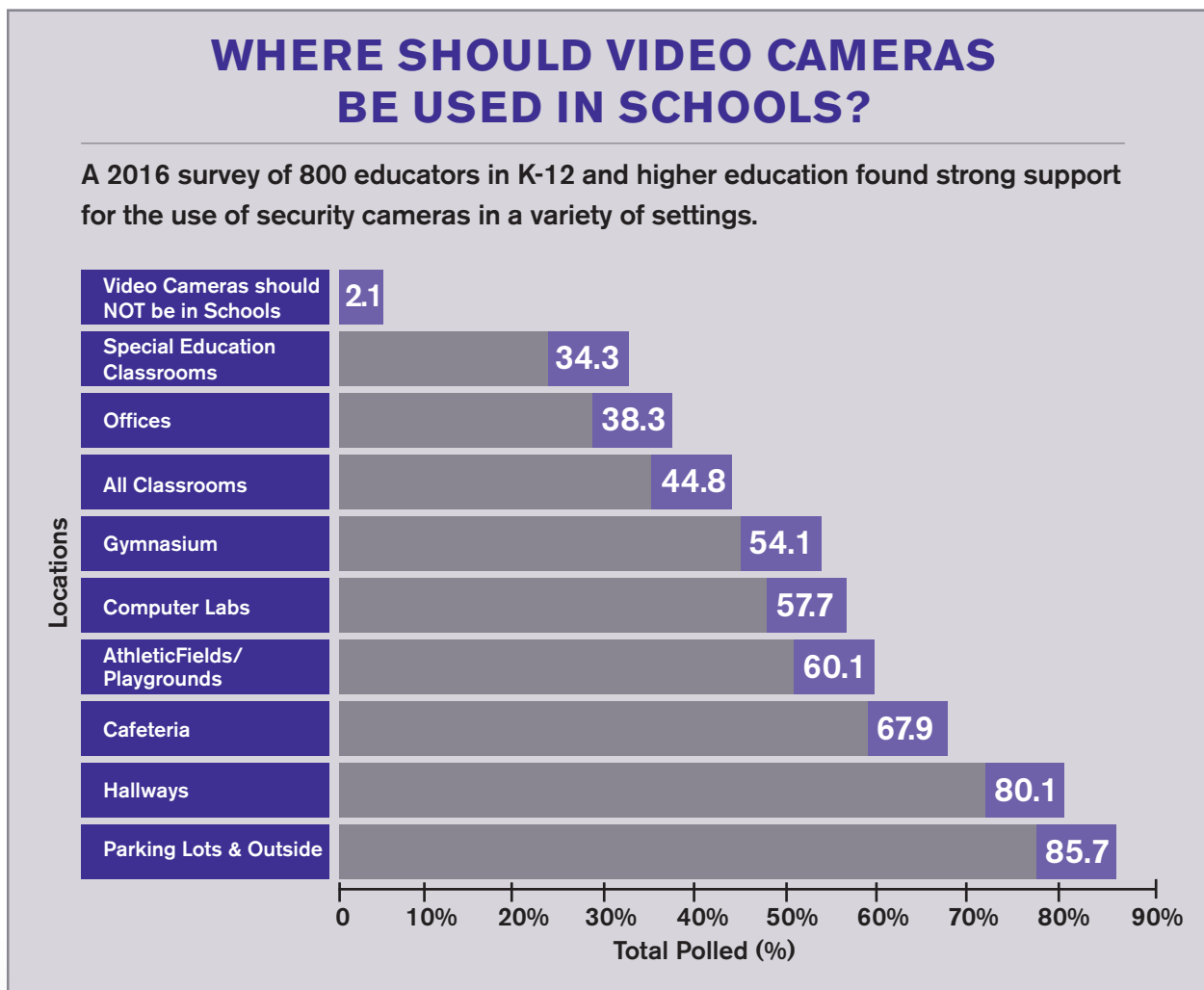
The possibility of dangerous showdowns in high school classrooms is not lost on Berkly Trumbo, a senior director of G4S, a security company that provides a wide range of protective services to the education sector. "Inside the classroom the ultimate threat is violence, either against other students or against the teacher," said Trumbo, who advocates for what he calls "layered solutions," including duress buttons and live video monitoring by security officers to provide early warning of potential problems. "Seconds save lives," he added.



No school ever wants to be in the position of having to react to a violent incident—administrators would much rather prevent it instead. And indications are that security cameras do act as potent deterrents. "When folks know that they're being monitored, it shapes their behavior—period," said Trumbo.

This has certainly been the experience at Fraser Public Schools in Michigan, which has deployed security cameras in public areas around its schools. "We established early on that the cameras were a tool to deter harmful activity and protect students," said Superintendent David Richards. "Criminal and disciplinary incidents declined almost immediately. Once students realized that the cameras were active, they were a strong deterrent."

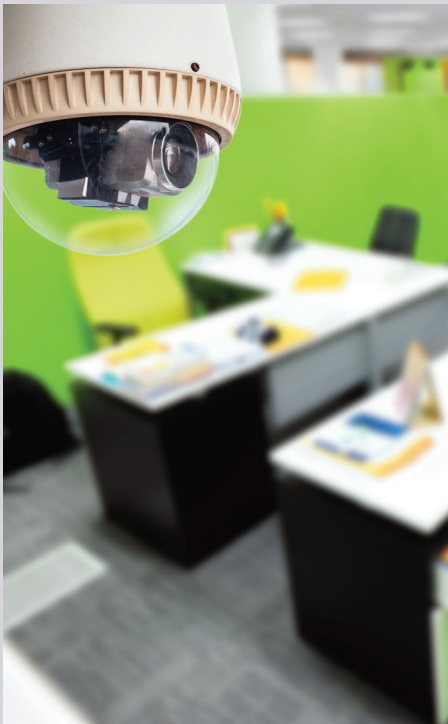
Despite the success of the cameras at Fraser, the district nevertheless opted not to install cameras in classrooms themselves. "This decision was not taken lightly," said Richards, "but student and staff privacy is a big interest."



In terms of privacy, the classroom occupies a gray area. Unlike stairwells and hallways, classrooms are not obvious public areas—after all, most teachers close the door and expect to see the same students each time. But unlike locker rooms or bathrooms, they are not obviously private either: Courts have generally ruled that teachers and students do not have a legal expectation of privacy within classrooms. Adding to the complexity, camera footage from a classroom can be used for a wide range of purposes, from criminal investigations to disciplinary actions to teacher evaluations.

Sensitivity to the use of security cameras in class is particularly acute in higher education, with its emphasis on intellectual freedom. "Campuses really have to remember the reason for their existence, which is an academic mission to educate students and to grow and transfer knowledge," said Riseling. "It isn't necessarily a government mission or a law-enforcement mission, right? That's worthy of a very vigorous discussion."

It's a concern to which Trumbo is sensitive. He believes that each institution must find its own balance based on its educational philosophy on one hand and the level and nature of the threats on the other. "The biggest challenge is trying to preserve that feeling of an open campus," he said. "The very spirit of a university is as a place of learning, a place of growth, a place of finding oneself."



5 KEYS TO A SUCCESSFUL CAMERA IMPLEMENTATION

1. **Identify and understand the security issues that need to be addressed.**
2. **Solicit input and buy-in from teachers, employees, students, and parents.**
3. **Involve key constituent groups, legal counsel, and facilities/IT in the development of detailed strategies and policies.**
4. **Review institutional infrastructure needs, including bandwidth, cabling, and storage options.**
5. **Conduct a phased rollout, starting with areas where security concerns are highest.**

ESTABLISHING POLICIES AND GUIDELINES

To achieve that balance, say security experts, it is imperative that schools and institutions develop detailed strategies and policies governing the use of video surveillance. Responsibility for shaping these policies, furthermore, should involve a broad swath of campus constituents, not just campus police or security officers.

"You want the key players at the table: legal counsel, someone from Student Affairs, someone from Faculty Governance, and someone from Human Resources who can think about all the employee ramifications," said Riseling. "You also want to include the folks responsible for the nuts and bolts who are going to install and repair the system."

An institution's legal team is needed to help navigate the rocky shoals of FERPA and open-records laws, such as the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), which govern access to information at public entities, including schools and universities. If a public school wants to use a video recording as part of a disciplinary action—a student caught cheating or bullying another student, for example—that footage probably qualifies as a student education record under the provisions of FERPA. This means a student and his parents may be entitled to see the recording, but confidentiality clauses severely limit its viewing by others.

In cases involving criminal activity, on the other hand, open-records laws may kick in, allowing media organizations to demand footage from public schools and colleges. Legal counsel needs to be on hand to shape policy around these laws; even then, a lawyer may need to be involved on a case-by-case basis. According to Riseling, legal clashes involving the competing aims of FERPA and FOIA are all too common. "It was always a challenge, and it will continue to be a challenge as more and more cameras come into existence," she said.

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Teachers and other staffers also have a stake in understanding how cameras will be used in class, and they should be represented at the table during the development of surveillance policies. While security cameras may make teachers safer in class, those same cameras can also be used to evaluate them or monitor staff performance.

"You have to make sure folks understand the purpose of the cameras and that you are using them for security reasons—not necessarily to monitor employee behavior," said Riseling, who once encountered resistance from an employees union at an East Coast university regarding the installation of security cameras in work spaces. "You don't want people thinking the cameras are for nefarious uses. It's actually quite a serious matter."

Some teacher concerns center on the belief that someone might be watching them all the time. In reality, monitoring live feeds from dozens of different cameras is an expensive proposition with limited

COST SAVINGS: HOW TO GAIN CAMERA COVERAGE IN A WIRELESS UPGRADE

The use of security cameras in schools and colleges has exploded in recent years, thanks in part to lower costs. "Video surveillance has become much more cost-effective," said Sue Riseling, executive director of IACLEA and former police chief at UW-Madison. "We've seen a real broadening of its use since it became less expensive."

Even so, the prospect of putting a camera in every classroom on campus remains daunting. "I'm not even sure how many classrooms there are in some of these major research universities, but I would say thousands," added Riseling.

New products coming onto the market, however, may make those costs more manageable, particularly if institutions combine the initiative with upgrades to their wireless infrastructures—a seemingly endless project on campuses everywhere. Extreme Networks, for example, recently released a wireless access point that is bundled with a wide-angle security camera. Known as the AP3916, it provides Wi-Fi connectivity and video surveillance through a single Ethernet uplink. The bundled device provides institutions with the opportunity to extend their video surveillance capabilities as they expand their wireless performance and footprint.

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benefits. "Having somebody sit and look at one screen with maybe 16 different cameras on it is really not effective," said Riseling. "Most of the time nothing's happening—I don't know how those folks stay awake. It's the ultimate bad reality TV."

Fortunately, major advances in the capabilities of video-management systems (VMS)—the software that handles and stores video feeds—have largely eliminated the need for this kind of approach. Today's VMS use sophisticated algorithms to detect unusual activity on cameras, which in turn triggers an alert. Using this selective approach, a single campus dispatcher can handle as many as 500 cameras. "The ability to narrow down what is being viewed has really been a big breakthrough," said Riseling. "Now these software packages can recognize a normal state for a particular camera feed and then signal when the normal state changes." Alerts can be triggered, for example, by sound or movement levels outside the "normal" range or occurring at the wrong time of day.

Establishing the rules or triggers used in the VMS should be the job of the same cross-campus group that creates the policies and guidelines for video surveillance. By using such an approach, institutions can go a long way toward assuaging concerns about a Big Brother presence on campus, while providing the maximum level of security in a cost-effective manner.



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CAN LECTURE CAPTURE DOUBLE AS SECURITY VIDEO?

Cameras have played a role in college classrooms for years as part of institutions' lecture-capture systems. While these systems vary widely in quality and scope, many schools—particularly those involved in distance learning—employ sophisticated setups that involve multiple camera angles, including coverage of the podium and the audience. While the use of these cameras is educational in nature, some safety advocates see the potential for dual use. "It makes a lot of sense to layer security measures onto existing infrastructure systems like these," said Bob Nilsson, director of vertical solutions at Extreme Networks. "Schools installing new systems should consider the potential for cameras to help fulfill their institutions' educational missions and security responsibilities at the same time."



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RESOURCES AND FURTHER READING

"The Legal Implications of Surveillance Cameras,"

a 2012 article in *District Administrator* magazine.

"Survey Finds Broad Acceptance for Video Recording in Schools,"

a 2016 survey of 800 educators by Extreme Networks.

"Study Finds More than 9 in 10 Campuses Have Security Cameras,"

a 2016 survey in *Campus Safety* magazine.

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