

Electronic surveillance (especially security cameras) is the most commonly misused security tool by school districts. Schools often install surveillance cameras believing they will prevent crimes. In reality, electronic surveillance systems have not been shown to reduce crime or prevent criminal acts.

Though they don't prevent crime, surveillance cameras can be useful for investigating incidents after they occur. A surveillance system that has been properly installed, maintained and used can document events in district facilities and help identify individuals involved.

For surveillance cameras to be most effective, they must be part of a comprehensive security program that includes access control, visitor programs, student and staff policies and procedures, and communication equipment.

Philosophical Concerns

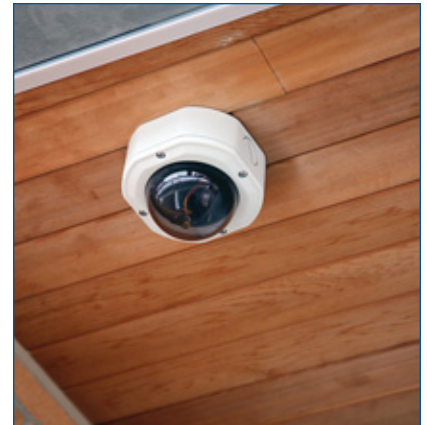
Some organizations and individuals have strong philosophical objections to the installation of surveillance cameras in any public place. They claim the mere presence of cameras can suggest the school is dangerous, reinforcing fear and undermining the desired climate of the school. While these concerns are important to address within your district, no scientific evidence supports these claims.

Coverage

If your district has determined that surveillance cameras would be a positive addition to your security program, be prepared to spend some time determining your true needs and what system design will best meet those needs. Consider focusing surveillance coverage in the following areas:

- Commons or other large gathering areas
- Library or media center
- Cafeteria

- Administrative offices
- Building entrances
- Outside locker rooms
- Outside restrooms
- Parking lots
- Major hallways
- Hidden or problem areas



Keep in mind that cameras are not a substitute for true access control (locked doors or an access control system). If you install cameras at building entrances, position them so they record the faces of those entering. While establishing overall camera coverage of parking lots is typical, you may need more advanced equipment if you expect to be able to identify individuals or license plates.

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Equipment

A wide variety of surveillance equipment is available from manufacturers and suppliers. Here are some general guidelines to consider when choosing equipment:

- **Fixed vs. Pan/Tilt/Zoom Cameras**—Fixed cameras cost less, are easier to maintain and reliably document the areas you position them to cover. Pan/Tilt/Zoom cameras (which can be moved around remotely) cost more and require more maintenance. Because they move, they may be pointed away from the area where an incident occurs.
- **Analog vs. Digital**—Digital cameras are the current state of the art in surveillance cameras. The newer technology comes with a higher price and larger storage requirements. Analog cameras represent older technology, usually at a much lower price. They require less storage than digital models. Hybrid (combination) systems are also available. These systems take advantage of the higher resolution of digital cameras where more detail is needed and use analog cameras where less detail is required.
- **VCRs vs. DVRs vs. NVRs**—Recording and storing camera images is essential to investigating incidents. In the past, cameras usually recorded at a slow speed to a VHS tape in a VCR, resulting in choppy videos showing just a few frames per second. Currently, the preferred method is to record to digital format, regardless of whether the camera is analog or digital. This can be done using a digital video recorder (DVR) or network video recorder (NVR).

A DVR is a stand-alone device that can have a variety of storage capacities and does not necessarily affect district computer network traffic or capacity. However, if surveillance systems are upgraded or requirements change, the existing DVR may not be able to handle the demand. NVRs are installed on a district's computer network and use the storage capacity of the network servers to record surveillance images. Due to the required bandwidth of most surveillance systems, this may affect network capabilities and cause computer problems if the network is not large enough.

Avoid Fake Cameras

Fake or nonoperational cameras may increase your liability exposure if they mislead people to believe that areas are being supervised when, in fact, they aren't. If your school does not have surveillance cameras, do not post signs indicating that cameras are present.

For Additional Information

U.S. Department of Justice: www.ncjrs.gov

- Spotlight – School Safety

National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities: www.edfacilities.org

National School Safety and Security Services: www.schoolsecurity.org