Article #1

**Video Cameras in School?**

Source: US Department of Justice

The peace of mind of both students and faculty at a school can often be quickly enhanced by the installation of video cameras as part of a close circuit television (CCTV) system. This change of attitude may result in even further-reaching effects on a campus that would be expected by the use of cameras alone.

A sense of safety and authority will directly influence people’s opinions and impressions, which will ultimately contribute to the overall order maintenance of a facility and how that facility is treated by occupants and outsiders.

To the school’s security personnel who must handle day-to-day security issues, the best thing about cameras is the deterrence factor they introduce to outsiders who do not belong on campus and to students and employees who do.

Information regarding security measures, such as cameras at the local school, will generally spread through a community. This type of reputation can make outsiders reconsider an unwelcome visit to the historically easy mark of the neighborhood--the school. It can be assumed that most kids are not going to step way out of bounds if they believe they will likely be caught, which if often possible through the appropriate application of cameras.

In a school security system, the ideal goal should be to convince kids not to even attempt to do something that is unacceptable. Addressing an incident after it occurs is good, but not as good as if it had never happened. Once a perpetrator is caught, there is a chain of events involving confrontation, denial, parental involvement, consequences, and perhaps even the involvement of law enforcement and the legal system. School administrators will be forced to spend a great deal of time on the matter, and all participants will find the process distasteful.

Another strength of cameras is the strong evidence they can preserve on tape or digital video. Even if law enforcement is not brought in regarding an incident, the recorded video can be invaluable to a school administration. Many schools report that when students are brought into the school office after an incident and shown a video of themselves in an illegal or unacceptable act—even if the tape might not have been of sufficient resolution and detail to use for prosecution purposes in a court of law—the student will usually admit to the incident.

The ultimate usability of a video recording is dependent on many variables. It is possible for a camera system to produce video on which individuals are unidentifiable or their actions are indiscernible. Be certain that a camera system provides the kind of information you need before you pay for it. These requirements should be clearly spelled out in the purchase agreement, along with a specified time period during which the school can adequately test it.

Video recordings are also beneficial for use with parents. Although nearly all parents want to believe their children are innocent of wrongdoing, some parents will deny their child’s guilt despite the credible testimony of others to the contrary.

However, as many school administrators and teachers have discovered, parents quickly accept their child’s role in an incident when shown a videotape of the incident. Most parents want to do the right thing, but hard evidence if often required for some to concede over a matter involving their own child. From a cost standpoint, the use of CCTV in public areas on school grounds can free up manpower. If cameras are covering a large patio area where students congregate during breaks, adult who normally would be assigned to oversee that area can instead be made available to monitor other areas of concern.

Finally, the solid documentation that a video recording provides can be invaluable in situations involving liability claims. Although it is possible that this may occasionally work against a school, most schools welcome this concrete evidence so that testimony regarding an incident does not consist solely of hearsay.