Article #3

Fairfax board authorizes high school surveillance cameras

The Washington Post - By [Emma Brown](http://www.washingtonpost.com/people/emma-brown) December 16, 2011

The Fairfax County School Board decided Thursday to permit indoor video surveillance cameras for the first time, capping a [months-long debate](http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/virginia-schools-insider/post/fairfax-school-board-will-vote-on-cameras-in-schools-in-december/2011/11/14/gIQAt3pwLN_blog.html) over whether such monitoring technology is appropriate and effective for public schools.

High school principals who can demonstrate community support for surveillance cameras can install them in cafeterias, hallways and other gathering places. The devices won’t be mandated countywide, and they will not be permitted in locker rooms, restrooms or classrooms.

Eight of the board’s 12 members voted for the measure, saying the cameras would give high school administrators a way to improve safety by deterring bullying, theft and other wrongdoing.

“We have food fights, bullying, theft and criminal street gangs operating in our schools, said board member James L. Raney (At Large), who voted in favor of cameras. “I want to do everything I can do to improve the safety and security of students because I don’t want to see anyone get hurt.”

There are no scientific studies on the effectiveness of school cameras as an anti-crime tool. Nevertheless, surveillance cameras are widespread in suburban school systems nationwide, including in Montgomery, Prince George’s, Prince William and Loudoun counties.

Fairfax has long resisted cameras out of concern for student privacy.

“We’re the government,” said Stuart D. Gibson (Hunter Mill), who voted against the measure with several others. “I don’t think that it’s right for us, as the government, to watch what kids are doing with cameras.”

“This proposal takes us down the wrong path,” Evans said Thursday. “Rather than creating an atmosphere of respect and trust, it tells our students: ‘We’re watching you. We expect bad behavior of you, and we’ll be darn sure we’ll catch it on tape.’ ”

Fairfax officials estimate that putting cameras in all high schools would cost $880,000, plus about $100,000 annually for maintenance. The money would come from non-instructional funds, school officials said.

The plan was first [presented in September](http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/fairfax-principals-want-indoor-school-cameras/2011/09/15/gIQApLPkaK_story.html)by principals who said cameras would have helped officials catch the students responsible for a rash of food fights last year. It has drawn criticism from some parents who say the school system is pushing the proposal along without giving careful thought to the cameras’ long-term cost and impact on school climate.

Emma Brown writes about D.C. education and about people with a stake in schools, including teachers, parents and kids.