Article #4

 By Alyssa Morones for Education Week

**Surveillance Cameras Gain Ground**

**in Schools**

They’ve been watching the world from malls, gas stations, and other public places for decades, but now, surveillance cameras are becoming a standard, even expected, fixture in school hallways. And technological advances and violent incidents such as the recent Newtown, Conn., school shootings seem to be hastening their installation across the country, according to experts.

Some critics argue that pervasive fear might be clouding reasoned judgment, as schools rush to amp up their safety and surveillance measures. Newtown’s Sandy Hook Elementary School, [**where 26 students and staff members were killed in December**](http://www.edweek.org/ew/collections/newtown-school-shootings/index.html), had a video surveillance camera and buzzer entrance system, which allowed approval of all visitors seeking to enter the school. Those measures, though, were little protection against a determined killer with powerful guns.

Sending children to an environment in which they are under a constant state of surveillance does not come without some cautions, critics of the practice say.

“Constant surveillance, from the time children enter school to the time they leave, teaches the wrong thing about the relationship between the citizen and the government in a democratic society,” said Jay C. Stanley, a senior policy analyst for the American Civil Liberties Union in Washington.

**Growing Demand**

Stanley Security Solutions, a global company that provides security hardware to schools, hospitals, and governments, has seen an increase in demand for its products, including cameras, in recent months, with the most significant increase coming from near Connecticut and the New England region, where the Sandy Hook shootings, as well as [**a devastating bombing in April at the Boston Marathon**](http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/schooled_in_sports/2013/04/one_child_killed_others_injured_in_boston_marathon_explosions.html), took place. In Boston, the nation saw how authorities’ strategic use of surveillance cameras helped to identify the suspects.

Mr. Imbusch, principal at Walpole High School said that in the 1,165-student high school, the existing security cameras have proven useful in determining what might have happened in certain disciplinary or criminal situations. “They’ve primarily been used to solve any questions we might have,” said Mr. Imbusch. “And they may have some kind of quality I can’t assess—when people see a camera they may be less inclined to do something, so they’re preventive.”

**Cheaper, More Advanced**

Technological advances, such as enhanced remote capabilities, have also helped to lower the costs of buying and installing the equipment, making them more affordable for schools.

“They can now buy 10 cameras where they could afford two before, so they’re becoming more mainstream,” said Mr. Stockwell.

Likewise, cameras’ growing capacity to provide sharper images have enhanced their usefulness, while digital capture and storage capabilities make the footage easier to access, view, and share. School hallways aren’t simply being watched—some cameras are now capable of capturing and detecting motion and changes in temperature. Surveillance footage can be easily shared with police, further upping the cameras' appeal.

But some, including Mr. Stanley of the ACLU, question the possible effects of having stored videos of children—videos that could be saved for years to come. The footage from those newer cameras is stored centrally on a school’s information-technology platform. Because the platform may be owned by the county or state, in the case of public schools, police departments also have access to the platform.

Technological advancements have played a role in cameras’ use for security surveillance as well as [**education-related purposes**](http://www.ted.com/talks/bill_gates_teachers_need_real_feedback.html), such as teacher professional development or evaluation. Cameras with 360-degree visual capability, for instance, allow users to take in an entire classroom to get a more comprehensive view of both the teacher giving the lesson and students’ engagement with it.

While progress in the way cameras operate and their abilities to monitor the halls where children spend a large portion of their days seems to create a sense of increasing safety for some communities, there are limits to the security they can actually provide in a crisis, some experts note.

“No one’s argued that video cameras would have done something at Sandy Hook,” said Mr. Stanley. “Cameras could have only done something after the fact, but in that case, the person wasn’t concerned about what happened after the fact. The pros and cons have to be thought out very carefully before changing the learning environment.”

Jason P. Nance, an assistant professor of law at the University of Florida, in Gainesville, said, “It seems to be accepted throughout the public, both socially and politically, that cameras are an acceptable way to monitor students. What people don’t realize sometimes is cameras are actually more intrusive than people think. Because their uses are not overt, like pat-downs or metal detectors, they don’t send out a prison-like vibe.”

**Hidden Costs?**

There are two social costs associated with school surveillance cameras, according to Mr. Nance. The first results from submitting students to a constant state of surveillance. “Many would argue that this is a substantial invasion of students’ privacy rights, especially because states have mandatory attendance requirements, so students are essentially required to be subjected to constant government monitoring,” said Mr. Nance.

Second, constant surveillance in schools may lead children to accept constant government surveillance in public places.

While questions about the effects of policies incorporating surveillance cameras might arise, their continued presence in schools has legal footing.

Mr. Stephens, of the National School Safety Center, explained that the basic expectation of schools is that they provide “reasonable care” in establishing safety policies. It is up to local school boards to decide what their security practices will be in meeting that standard.

“These standards can be different depending on the kinds of risks and threats schools face,” added Mr. Stephens. “It’s a function of place, threat, and circumstance.”

A potential legal tripwire for use of surveillance cameras comes from the Fourth Amendment’s protections against unreasonable searches and seizures. But Mr. Nance said courts typically consider cameras minimally intrusive.

He explained that cameras may be placed in schools so long as they aren’t placed in areas where students and staff would have a reasonable expectation of privacy, such as locker rooms or bathrooms.

In one case where cameras were found to be illegal, the devices were embedded in school-issued laptops that were used out of school.

Despite such concerns, Mr. Stephens said security cameras may now be in schools to stay. “My take is, we’ve certainly lost some of our innocence,” he said. “And we’ve lost privacy to cameras.”