Cameras and Surveillance Systems in Schools

“Video Assessment and Security Cameras enhance the staff’s ability to respond to attacks and emergencies quickly and appropriately.”¹ School officials need to be aware of their surroundings and/or have the capability to observe danger and potential threats.²

Benefits
Surveillance systems in schools have proven to be very useful in regards to both emergencies and investigations.³ When an incident occurs, security cameras can provide valuable information. Depending on the location of the incident relative to the camera, the recording could show exactly what happened or it could simply fill in any missing information, both about the perpetrator or what happened leading up to the incident.

School camera systems also act as a visual deterrent for crime.⁴ Cameras placed around the school make potential criminals think twice about their behavior on school grounds.

Important Considerations
There are many different types of cameras and surveillance systems available. Cameras can range in capabilities from black and white to color images, cameras capable of a stationary view or panning, zooming, rotating, picture quality, etc.⁵

The type of camera used depends on a few different factors, such as; is the camera to be used inside or outside? How much area needs to be covered? How close is the next camera? It is important to consider these factors when choosing a camera system. For example: day/night cameras can be useful no matter what time of day it is.⁶ These cameras adjust visibility depending on the current lighting, so they could prove more useful outside than a standard camera.

Placement of the cameras is very important. Internal cameras should cover all hallways, stairwells, and common areas within the building. Exterior cameras should cover all entrances and other key areas outside of the building, such as; parking areas, sports fields, and other areas of congregation.⁷ By establishing cameras at these key points, schools can ensure that they have full coverage of the building and school grounds. It is important to meet with the local Police Department prior to making any decisions about camera placement.

Surveillance System Delay
It is important to know if your surveillance system has a delay in the feed. A delay in the video feed impacts how both the school faculty and the police respond to an incident. An example of this was seen in the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School shooting in Parkland, Florida. Police, who were tracking the shooter's movements using the school’s surveillance system were not aware that the video was on a delay. By the time the police were notified, the shooter had already left the building.⁷ The video feed was on a 26 minute delay, which meant that police were searching the building for a shooter who was no longer there instead of following him when he left the building.⁸ Knowledge about
surveillance system delays changes how police respond and impacts their ability to catch the perpetrator.

Monitored Cameras
Monitored surveillance systems can allow school security and faculty to quickly respond to an incident on campus. If the faculty can observe the incident in progress, they can alert responders to the incident effectively. Early detection of incidents is crucial to limiting the damage done, no matter the type of incident. These monitored systems can also be helpful for police during an emergency. Police and faculty can use the surveillance system to locate perpetrators in the building to bring the incident to an end.

The Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)
It is important to consider FERPA rules when considering how camera systems will be monitored. FERPA guidelines suggest schools should designate a “law enforcement unit.” Law enforcement units are designated personnel who monitor security records and can handle investigative reports. Law enforcement units can disclose these records to police as necessary, in compliance with FERPA. If there is no School Resource Officer, this role can be filled by an administrative staff or faculty member, such as a Vice Principal. It is also recommended that law enforcement unit records and education records be held separately to maintain FERPA compliance.

References

Homeland Security Emergency Management
New Hampshire Department of Safety
110 Smokey Bear Blvd (Physical)
33 Hazen Drive (Mailing)
Concord, NH 03305
Phone: 603-271-2231
e-mail: schoolreadiness@dos.nh.gov
NH.gov/HSEM