

Armed guards and video surveillance: A quest to further secure our schools

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In the light of the recent shootings at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Conn., governments across the United States are in hot debate over how to implement stricter security standards within our nation's schools. This proactive approach to school security has led to the proposition of using armed security personnel such as police or trained guards to prevent the occurrence of any future tragedies. Another option brought to the table involves the implementation of extensive **video surveillance networks** in schools. Both approaches to increasing public safety standards have led governments to draw additional funds to help thwart these types of incidents.

Agencies across the nation, including the state of Virginia, are calling for budget discussions in efforts to restore funds that were previously cut for officer presence at schools. While personnel costs remain an expensive investment for governments to maintain, many feel the benefits will outweigh the extra costs in the long run.

Due to cost concerns, many states and localities are also considering arming teachers and other school staff to supplement having to hire additional law enforcement officers. This recommendation has generated a lot of questions among policymakers regarding liability, types of weapons, training, and standards that would differentiate between school staff and police officers. Schools are also considering hiring additional school resource officers (SROs), which are certified law enforcement officers assigned to a school district. The House Appropriations Committee has also announced a proposal for the inclusion of additional money to increase SRO presence within schools.

The spike in personnel needs also parallels the call for additional technology resources; some schools are considering increased surveillance measures such as linking video systems to police departments. While schools already utilize video surveillance systems for preventing criminal activity such as vandalism and theft, this is a first step to linking real-time feeds to law enforcement centers. The city of **Atlanta, Ga.**, proposed integrating Atlanta Public Schools into the police department's growing surveillance network. The goal is to have live video feeds transmitted into the city's video integration center that is actively monitored by officers, and increase response efforts to any school-related catastrophe. By using this method, departments may have to increase their expenditures on employees to monitor the video feeds.

Analyst's Take

These various steps to enhancing school security will surely offer vendors an opportunity to build business in the public safety market. Armed-personnel presence may push governments to purchase additional technology such as mobile/portable radios, and **officer-worn cameras** to improve operations. On the other hand, vast surveillance networks in schools could lead to the formation of private-public partnerships and additional systems integration with public safety departments. Cities and counties may even begin generating funds for the build out of real-time crime centers.

As part of continuous efforts to partner law enforcement and school districts, many schools will be eligible for additional grant funding for public safety infrastructure. Vendors should be on the lookout for grant programs that may be created or expanded, including the SRO program, to assist localities in paying for additional resources.

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