



SCANNING THE SCHOOLYARD



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Relationships between students and campus law enforcement have been key to establishing an environment of safety and security at Delaware Valley School District, which encompasses 200 square miles in northeastern Pennsylvania.

"Kids have come to the police officers...and told them about potential threats that we've been able to curtail before they've happened," says Christopher Lordi, director of administrative services for the district.

About eight years ago, the rural district decided to employ its own sworn police force and hired five officers, including a chief of police. It has since added a sixth.

"Having a police force not only gives us a presence of an armed person to counteract any issues that we may have, but it also allows us to create relationships with students," Lordi says.

The officers are a presence on the three campuses that make up the district. They may be found teaching and conducting Internet safety classes and anti-drug programs.

"Not only are they our first line of defense, but they're also relationship builders, and they create positive environments where kids will feel comfortable to come and tell them things," Lordi says.

Still, the officers and faculty can't be everywhere at once when incidents do occur, which is why the district installed a camera and video management system (VMS) about 10 years ago.

"It doesn't matter how many administrators you have, how many teachers you have, how many officers you have," Lordi notes. "They can't be everywhere at once, so the cameras allow us to be in those places when somebody can't."

As the original cameras and VMS were becoming outdated, Delaware Valley's board was supportive of purchasing a new system. The district worked with integrator Guyette Communications of Plymouth, Pennsylvania, and chose the Vicon Valerus VMS system, as well as approximately 400 cameras, also from Vicon. Installation began in March 2017 and ended just before the new school year began in August.

The cameras, the majority of which are the 3 megapixel IQeye Alliance dome model, were installed inside and outside of the district's eight buildings. The Vicon Cruiser domes with 30x optical zoom were purchased for the parking lots to better read license plate numbers. Campus police have access to a license plate database, so no license plate recognition software is needed, but Vicon does integrate with such software should customers need that feature.

In addition to feeding into a central video server at a district-wide monitoring station, each building has its own local recording capability and stores video for a set number of days.

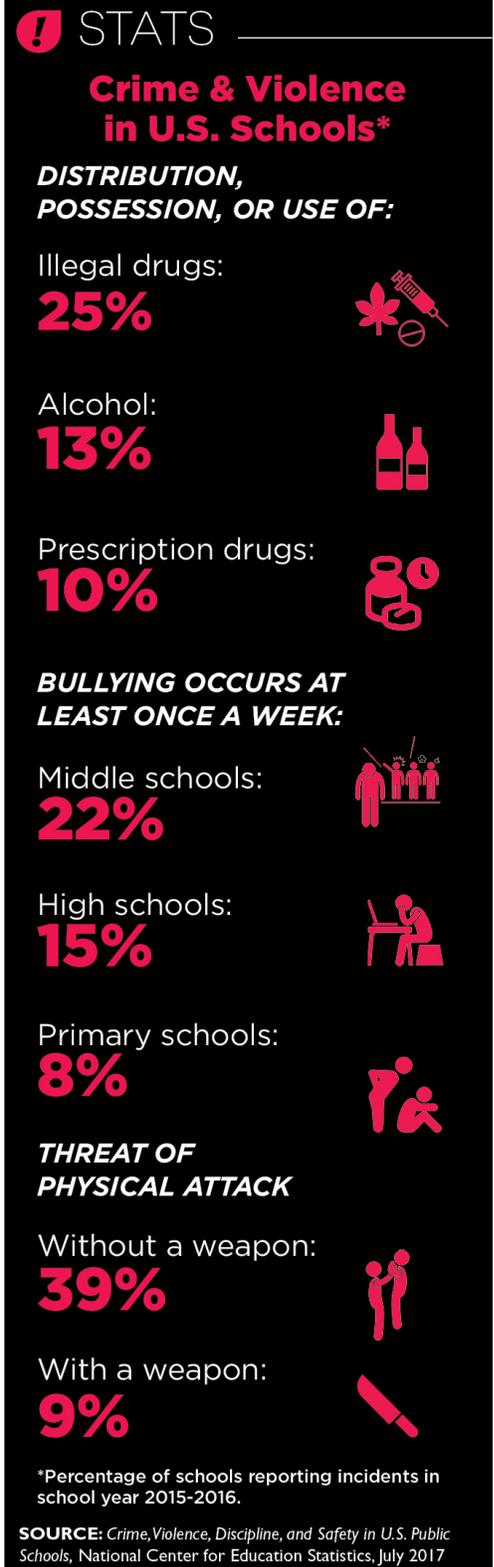
Delaware Valley is expanding a career and technical education wing, which includes 25,000 square feet of classrooms and workspace. The school plans to install more cameras there.

The district police force is responsible for managing the VMS, and each officer has a hardwired PC monitoring station to view video feeds. Campus police also have access to footage via iPhones purchased by the district and use them to see what's going on at their campuses.

"When we need to view something quickly our officers can go right on their iPhones and view it right from there, which is handy if you don't have the ability to get back to your computer," Lordi says.

Giving all officers access to the entire district's camera feeds was also crucial. "We did that for backup purposes," he says. "If anything were to happen on one of the campuses, all of the officers—after they secure their buildings—can go on and be the eyes and ears for our officers on those other campuses."

Soon after the cameras were installed, the new system led to the capture of a thief. In the spring of 2017, when a laptop went missing, the video was reviewed in the general time frame that the incident occurred. It revealed an employee going into an administrative office with a garbage bag, then coming back out.



"We could zoom in, and you could see that the bag was significantly larger when the employee came out," Lordi notes, adding that the old camera system would not have been clear enough to identify the culprit. The footage was turned over to local police, who apprehended the employee. That person has since resigned.

The detail captured by the cameras also helped solve an incident in the parking lot. Lordi notes that the main campus is in a high-traffic area, which can attract unwanted activity.

"We were able to pull the license plate from one person that had an incident on campus...and track the person down," Lordi explains. "It just provides another layer of security, so we know who's on the campus and what time they leave the campus."

While the district currently hands footage over to law enforcement after the fact, it's working on a memorandum of understanding with local police and hopes to establish a network that allows police to view video from the campuses live. "We're currently working on a strategy to get them involved beforehand," Lordi says.

With the combination of its police force and the camera system, Delaware Valley has seen a significant reduction in incidents on campus.

"When our officers first started we had something like 200 to 250 incidents that our administrators were dealing with; I think last year we had 36," he says.

The Valerus VMS and cameras give campus police and administrators peace of mind about their ability to solve incidents, and ultimately keep students safe.

"It allows us to feel secure knowing that it's going to be on camera if someone doesn't view or witness it live," Lordi says. "We can always view it on the cameras later."

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