

## Eyes in School

### The pros and cons of outfitting school resources officers with body cameras

The world we live in has forced school leaders to make critical decisions that impact our children's lives. In some cases, it has come down to a fine line between safety and security and a student's right to privacy.

Tragedies in our schools such as active shooters, alleged sexual assault, bus accidents, and other incidents, have caused changes in our schools. For instance, many schools now have some sort of video security system used to monitor school hallways and grounds.

A new level of monitoring may be coming to schools with an increasing number of law enforcement agencies requiring their officers to wear body cameras. While this is not a pressing issue facing Wisconsin schools (yet), on the national level, it is growing rapidly.

#### Reducing Incidents

School districts in Iowa, Texas, Tennessee, and elsewhere are beginning to invest in "technological risk management" tools, such as body cameras for school resource officers. Proponents argue that school resource officers with body cameras have been able to reduce claims of excessive force.

"Some school resource officers are sworn law enforcement and can carry weapons, so having a camera isn't necessarily a bad idea," said Paul Timm, president of RETA Security. "Some school districts have already designated people to be able to carry weapons. I would almost

insist that the person who's carrying have some kind of a camera. I think it just makes sense to me."

If the video is reviewed on a regular basis and appropriate follow-up occurs, advocates say body cameras can reduce the number of unreported incidents.



In addition, there has been increased support from the federal government to make schools safer. One of President Obama's initiatives has been to provide districts with funding to hire more school resource officers and purchase security equipment, which can include body cameras.

#### Legal Uncertainties

There are many questions and legal uncertainties that arise when we consider the use of body cameras in our schools. Will students' personal conversations be recorded? How long are the videos stored? Could the videos be turned over in response to a legal request? Who owns the videos?

Some have expressed concern that the use of body cameras in schools would infringe upon the privacy of students and staff.

Others question whether body

cameras would impede upon a school resource officer's ability to build relationships and trust with students. We often look to school resource officers to be a support system to help keep kids safe, not to get students into trouble.

Likewise, some schools are looking into having principals and assistant principals wear body cameras. This fall, the Burlington Community School District in Iowa will become one of the first districts in the nation to have its principals and assistant principals wear body cameras. However, the effects of having administration wear body cameras can be intimidating for students and may make it less likely they will talk to staff about bullying, abuse or other problems.

#### Growing Conversation

These are just a few of the major pros and cons that districts around the country are faced with when dealing with the possibility of implementing body cameras into their schools. This is a conversation that will continue as the technology becomes more commonplace among law enforcement.

The ultimate decision to implement body cameras into your district lies in the hands of each individual school district's administration and legal counsel. ■

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