

Police, Schools Team Up for Emergency Response



Wireless Access to Video on PDAs and Laptops Helps First Responders Assess and Plan for Any Eventuality

The days of not having a plan and not being prepared to respond to emergency situations in schools are behind us, says David Bobo, director of safety and security at Riverview Gardens School District in suburban St. Louis, Missouri.

Riverview Gardens is about as prepared as a school district can get with March Networks™ DVR systems and wireless communications technology being used to reduce vandalism, keep the peace, and help first responders in emergencies.

Police and fire department personnel with PDAs, laptops and wireless network cards have access to live video from dozens of cameras in and around Riverview Gardens High School, allowing them to assess a situation and enter the school's seven stand-alone buildings with full knowledge of what lies on the other side of the door and around each corner.

"The cameras and the video recording systems assist us with investigations and have reduced vandalism," says the security director, who has 15 years of experience as a police officer and detective.

The DVRs, cameras, PDAs, and laptops were funded through the U.S. Department of Justice's COPS Office, an agency established in 1994 to advance community policing across the United States.

Chief Robert Pruett of the Bellefontaine Neighbors Police Department brought the funding opportunity to the school district's attention and a joint application was submitted.

Chief Pruett, in whose jurisdiction the 2,200-student high school is located, is no stranger to cutting-edge technology. The Bellefontaine Neighbors Police Department was an early adopter of digital video recording, and has March Networks DVRs at its police headquarters and mobile DVRs in its cruisers.

The cameras and DVRs were installed at the school during spring break in 2005. There was no formal announcement, but word got out.

“The students knew when they came back from the break that the cameras were up there and they were on their best behavior.”

Vandalism

Incidents of vandalism dropped off dramatically.

A few years ago, troublemakers targeted the school’s lockers. Last year it was the windows. “It can get expensive,” says the security director.

“Since the system has been installed, the high school has seen a 49% decrease in incidents of vandalism,” notes assistant superintendent of education Dr. Natalie Thomas.

In one rare incident, the DVR system captured evidence of an individual in the act of throwing a brick through the windshield of a staff member’s car that had been left parked on school property overnight.

“It was rewarding to be able to go back to the archives and view the individual from different cameras as he walked across the campus. We could see him launch the object through the windshield and we were able to identify him.”

When students get into fights, the DVR system is instrumental in establishing the identity of the aggressor. The school resource officer, a member of the Bellefontaine Neighbors Police Department, can use his PDA to access live video as soon as he’s alerted to an incident.

“The first thing he’ll do is break up the fight and assist anyone with injuries, but after that, he’ll go to the video to see who did

what. That assists him with the completion of his police report.”

Liability

The DVR systems also help to mitigate legal liability.

“If you’re going to get sued, you should at least have some control over the amount of the check you have to write. It might be one amount if you have nothing at all in place, but if you can show steps and measures you’ve taken to prepare for a situation, you can minimize your liability.”

The security director, who is based in the school district’s administrative building approximately two miles from the high school, is able to access live or archived video from the March Networks DVR system over Riverview Gardens’ wide area network.

“And with my PDA and laptop, I can pull up video from our schools anywhere in the United States,” he says.

The school district had no video surveillance at all prior to the installation of the March Networks DVR systems. However, he is familiar with VCR-based systems and appreciates not having to worry about changing tapes and storing them.

“Digital technology saves all of those headaches,” he says.

Riverview Gardens looked at several different DVRs on the market, but selected March Networks technology as a result of recommendations from other satisfied customers in the St. Louis area.

The reliability of the March Networks DVR systems and the reputation of March Networks’ Certified Solution Provider, Alarm 24, made the decision easy.

Next on Riverview Gardens’ agenda is a plan to roll out DVR systems to its middle schools, which are already networked and ready to go.

The school administration praises the foresight of local law enforcement agencies for spearheading the joint application for COPS funding.

“We’re just thrilled to be able to partner with the police and fire departments in our community to provide a safe and secure learning environment for our students,” says assistant superintendent Thomas. ✨

Riverview Gardens School District

The Riverview Gardens School District (www.rgsd.org) operates 10 elementary schools, two middle schools, one high school and one early childhood education center, serving approximately 8,000 students in the St. Louis County communities of Riverview, Moline Acres, Ferguson, Dellwood and Bellefontaine Neighbors.



Alarm 24 Inc.

Alarm 24 Inc. (www.alarm24inc.com) is a security systems integrator providing DVR, access control, burglar, fire alarm and environmental monitoring systems to a wide range of commercial, industrial and institutional clients in St. Louis, Missouri, and surrounding areas. To contact a sales representative, please call 636-970-1777 or email sales@alarm24inc.com