

Piedmont Unified School District

Use of Security Cameras at School Facilities

Questions & Answers

The Piedmont Unified School District is committed to: providing a safe environment for students, employees, and visitors; preventing crime and violence on school premises; and protecting school facilities and equipment from vandalism and theft. To this end, the District has developed school safety plans that include the use of surveillance cameras. Answers to questions about the District's use of security cameras follow.

- ***Why did the District Start Using Security Cameras?***
- ***How does the District Notify the School Community about the Use of Security Cameras?***
- ***How does the District Decide Where to Locate Security Cameras?***
- ***Are the Cameras Actively Monitored?***
- ***How does the District use Security Camera Recordings?***
- ***Does the District use Facial Recognition Software?***
- ***Can the Security Cameras be Hacked? Can Video Captured by the District's Security Cameras be Accessed by Unauthorized Users?***
- ***How does the District Evaluate the Effectiveness of the Cameras?***

Why did the District Start Using Security Cameras?

In 2010, the District began using cameras at the main entrances to the elementary schools. These entrances are typically locked from the inside during the school day, and the combination of electronic locks, cameras, intercoms, and monitors enable site staff to remotely control access and secure facilities from intruders. The decision to install these cameras was part of a series of campus security improvements made in close consultation with school security consultants, the Piedmont Police Department, and the District's [Facilities Steering Committee](#). These security improvements also included installation of two-way communications systems at the middle and high schools.

In 2018, in response to escalating vandalism, the District's Board of Education approved the use of security cameras to more generally protect school property. (See Board Policy 3515 and Administrative Regulation AR 3515 [here](#).) Leading up to that decision, there had been multiple incidents of vandals climbing onto roofs of District facilities and causing extensive damage. For example, on March 27, 2018, vandals: climbed onto the roof of the Witter Field House; broke a skylight; pulled off roof tiles and scattered them on the track and field; shattered glass-enclosed bulletin boards and ceramic donor tiles; stuffed broken roof tiles and beer cans in exhaust vents, effectively disabling the field house toilets; broke the windows of a District maintenance truck that was parked nearby; and stole or damaged other school property. The cost to repair damage from that single night of vandalism was more than \$75,000, and this was not an isolated incident. Around the same time, vandals climbed onto the Havens roof, smashed clay roof tiles and caused

more than \$10,000 in damage. Beyond the property damage, these roof-climbing episodes at both Witter Field and Havens raised serious concerns about recklessness and the danger of a climber falling from a rooftop.

Dangerous vandalism at school sites is not new. For example, in 2010, vandals set fire to “waddles” and other items at Wildwood. Waddles, which look like giant straw sausages, were used for erosion control and to prevent mud from sliding down the slope behind the school. This fire was especially dangerous because of its proximity to the school building and nearby homes. Fortunately, there was no damage to the building or homes.

Over the years, repeated incidents of vandalism at Witter Field included graffiti, broken glass strewn on the field, sliced soccer nets, broken poles, and vandals climbing onto the Witter Field house. In one incident, in 2011, vandals burned a 6’ diameter circle in the center of Witter Field, destroying the “P” logo, surrounding turf, and the underlying layers that drain and cushion the field.



Repeated incidents of vandalism at Piedmont High School included: destruction of exterior locks; tampering with the District’s golf cart and wedging the cart into the lower entrance to the 30s building to block the Library entrance; discharging fire extinguishers in the breezeway; and piling garbage cans on the building roofs. Also, there have been break-ins in the 30s building with damage to carpeting, furniture and other property. In 2013 and 2014, The Piedmont Highlander inquired about these incidents and interviewed maintenance personnel about the time and expense to redress these problems.



Although school vandalism was not new, incidents leading up to the Board's May 9, 2018 decision to authorize the use of surveillance cameras suggested a pattern of escalation, with more frequent episodes, more costly repairs, and more dangerous and reckless behavior by the vandals. Over the period starting in the Fall of 2015 and ending in the Spring of 2018, the District incurred more than \$100,000 in vandalism repairs.

Following the Board's approval to install security cameras, installation was not immediate. The District researched the practices of other districts, consulted with legal counsel and the Alameda County Office of Education, investigated a range of technical and technological issues, and gathered information about vendors. The first cameras were installed around the STEAM construction site in early 2019, followed by cameras at the Witter Field complex and Havens in late 2019. Cameras were installed around the completed STEAM building in 2021 and additional cameras were installed at each school site during the summer of 2021.

How does the District Notify the School Community about the Use of Security Cameras?

The initial notice to the community about the *possible* use of security cameras to deter vandalism on District property came in the form of public discussion and debate at Board of Education meetings. This discussion began at a regular Board meeting on March 14, 2018 and was a focus of the Board's special workshop on April 23, 2018. All members of the community were invited to attend this workshop and provide input.

Public discussion of the issue continued at the Board's May 9, 2018 meeting, culminating in the Board's vote to approve the new practice. This decision was reported in the May 9, 2018 issue of the "Board Report" (the District's newsletter at the time), posted on the Piedmont Portal, and included in the Superintendent's year-end letters to families and to staff dated May 31, 2018.

In November 2018, before the installation of any cameras, the District posted the first six signs around the Magnolia Campus and at the Witter Field complex stating:

WARNING
THIS FACILITY EMPLOYS
VIDEO SURVEILLANCE
EQUIPMENT FOR
SECURITY PURPOSES.
THIS EQUIPMENT MAY
BE MONITORED AND
RECORDED AT ANY TIME.

Some of the signs follow:







When the District installed cameras around the STEAM construction site, similar signs were posted at intervals on the outside of the fence that enclosed the site. Similar signs are posted at the elementary school campuses as well. Information about the use of security cameras is included in

the Annual Notice to parents and guardians and in the student handbooks.

How does the District Decide Where to Locate Security Cameras?

The District places cameras in areas where there has been high-cost or high-danger vandalism in an effort to deter future vandalism. The District does not place cameras in areas where students, staff, or community members have a reasonable expectation of privacy.

Are the Cameras Actively Monitored?

The District does not continually monitor the security camera footage. The District accesses the footage when there is an incident of theft or vandalism.

How does the District use Security Camera Recordings?

The security cameras are used foremost to deter vandalism and other crimes. When vandalism does occur, the District reviews the recordings in order to investigate. Recordings may be used in disciplinary proceedings and referred to local law enforcement when required or appropriate. To the extent that recordings (or still images from the recordings) become part of a student record or personnel record, the District is required to ensure that the recordings and images are accessed, preserved, disclosed, and protected in accordance with law, Board policy, administrative regulation, and applicable collective bargaining agreements.

Does the District use Facial Recognition Software?

No.

Can the Security Cameras be Hacked? Can Video Captured by the District's Security Cameras be Accessed by Unauthorized Users?

The District's security cameras were purchased from Verkada, a security company that specializes in video surveillance. Verkada equipment has been targeted by hackers in the past, and Verkada has verified that the District's equipment and systems were not affected. Also, Verkada has provided assurances that system vulnerabilities exposed by the hacks have since been rectified.

How does the District Evaluate the Effectiveness of the Cameras?

Installation of cameras on campus has correlated with a decrease in vandalism of District property. Also, prior to installation of the cameras, it was not unusual for maintenance staff to discover piles of beer bottles and cans and other garbage strewn around the Magnolia Campus, and these problems now occur less frequently. For these reasons, the cameras appear to be effective in preventing crime on school premises and protecting school facilities and equipment from damage, theft and misuse.

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