

Body Cameras in Schools Spark Privacy, Policy Discussions

BY: [Tanya Roscorla](#) | July 22, 2015

While police body cameras have made headlines lately, at least one school district is drafting policies for administrator body cameras.

Leaders at Burlington Community School District in Iowa want each principal and assistant principal equipped with body cameras so they can record what happens in student disciplinary situations. For example, video caught on a surveillance camera last school year showed that a middle school principal did not kick a student, though he was accused of doing so.

"We hope to have a tool in place that will allow us to accurately address any issues or concerns that arise in our district," said Jeremy Tabor, director of human resources at the district. "And it's really a tool to ensure that our students, staff and visitors are being treated properly."

The Privacy Tightrope

Like with any new technology, school districts must figure out how to protect students' privacy while also keeping them safe. Over the last number of years, both federal and state legislatures have [taken up bills](#) that deal with student data privacy.

Privacy advocates and parents have been particularly concerned about [who has access](#) to student data, how long it's kept and whether it's secure. On top of that, they want to make sure the data in students' records is accurate and that third parties will not take advantage of it. Whether the data comes from biometric identification technology, online learning platforms or body cameras, the handling of that potentially sensitive information is important.

"This is really indicative of the larger policy discussion going on about student data, privacy in general and balancing the benefits of privacy, which we all value, versus the monitoring, the data that you get from this new technology," said Sonja Trainor, director of the National School Board Association Council of School Attorneys.

And lawmakers come down on both sides of these issues. For example, [Texas passed a law](#) in June that would require school districts to install video cameras in special education classrooms if parents request it. On the other hand, Congress is considering [a privacy bill](#) that would prohibit schools from receiving federal funding if they recorded video in classrooms without meeting certain conditions, including a public hearing beforehand and unanimous written consent from parents and teachers.

For school districts that are considering body cameras for administrators, it's important to be aware of laws at the state and federal level that may apply, exceptions to those laws, and the privacy rights of students and parents. The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act governs student records, but isn't clear on whether videos are student records, and the law has many exceptions, Trainor said.

School districts including Burlington have had video cameras in hallways, outside buildings and on school buses for years. What's different about the body cameras is that they can capture audio and video in one-on-one interactions. And that's a big difference, because surveillance cameras wouldn't pick up the same footage as the body cameras in a conversation between a student and a principal.

Possible Policies

Since the idea was brought up in a June board meeting, district leaders in Burlington have been considering what policies would govern the use of these devices. Some of the things they've talked about include limiting the use of the cameras to student disciplinary situations and giving people the option to say "no" to being recorded.

If a recorded conversation starts to turn away from disciplinary issues to other personal matters, the district is considering giving principals the discretion to turn off the camera and write down the reason they did so. The principal would be responsible for uploading the video, and if needed, would be able to rewatch the video and take notes that would go into the student record. The video itself would not go into the record.

District leaders are also thinking about who looks at the videos and how to make sure that any student

records generated by watching those videos is accurate. Potential ideas include having a second set of eyes review videos when they're used to form a part of a student's written record.

Aside from the technology department, only people approved by the director of human resources or the superintendent would be able to see the videos. Those people would need to have an educational reason for seeing the video, and the district would document who had access to it, how long they had access and what the purpose was.

Other policy considerations revolve around what happens to the video after it's taken. District administrators are thinking about storing videos for seven days, though it could be extended to 10 to 14 days. The idea is to make sure the video is kept long enough for someone to come forward with a complaint, but not to keep them indefinitely, Tabor said. Because officials don't want to place too heavy a burden on the technology department, they would give the IT staff members up to 30 days to actually delete the videos.

At the end of the day, the school district can't predict every possible situation that comes up. But specific guidelines developed over the summer and fall terms will help principals know what's expected when they start wearing the cameras in the spring.

"We don't want to rush this," Tabor said. "We want to make sure we're taking the proper amount of time to vet this and make sure we have a good, effective policy in place."

This article was printed from: <http://www.govtech.com/education/Body-Cameras-in-Schools-Spark-Privacy-Policy-Discussions.html>