

Focus : Education

Security in the classroom

Company cites benefits of surveillance cameras in schools

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Though a rarity even 15 years ago, security cameras in schools are becoming more prevalent these days.

In fact, according to the National Center for Education Statistics, the percentage of students who observed the use of security cameras in their schools increased from 39 percent to 58 percent between 2001 and 2005.

That's good news for companies in the security business.

Since 2003, Valhalla-based Select Telecom has continued to expand its services by installing video surveillance cameras in area schools.

Since doing its first installation in the Eastchester Union Free School District, Select Telecom has installed cameras in four other school districts and is in talks with several districts in both Westchester and Rockland counties, said the company's Chief Operating Officer Paul Durante.

The cameras are not meant to evoke a "big-brother" type of atmosphere in schools, Durante said, but rather should be viewed as a preventative measure. "It's a deterrent. If someone is thinking about stealing something (such as a piece of computer equipment), they'll think twice if they know they won't get away with it."

Also, the cameras can be used to aid an administrative investigation into an altercation. For example, if a fight occurs an administrator can review the video to who provoked it, said Mike Durante, president and CEO of Select Telecom. "Now they have all that recorded," he said.

Select Telecom's foray into security cameras began in 2003 when the company was installing a telephone system in the Eastchester schools. At the time, they had primarily been involved with installed voice over Internet protocol (VOIP) telephone systems and voice and data network solutions. An Eastchester official then asked if the company installed security cameras.

After discussing the possibility with the representative from Nortel Networks that Select Telecom works with, the Durantes learned there were IP video surveillance cameras on the market that worked with the brand of data switches Select Telecom already sold for its phone systems.

"Because we were already selling compatible data switches, it was a great way to enhance a sale and add extra value for our customers," Paul Durante said. They eventually answered a request for proposal issued by Eastchester and signed a contract with the

school district to install 70 cameras, he said.

Select Telecom has a one-year warranty on the camera system, and then offers routine maintenance. The company has a total of some 400 cameras installed in five school districts.

The IP cameras are the most current form of technology available, said Mike Durante. With IP, users are able to access the cameras via the Internet or over a private network, he said.

Durante said the company is actively seeking to install the surveillance systems in several more schools.

"We look at the individual needs of each school and determine a customized system to meet those needs," he said.

In addition to school districts, Select Telecom has branched out and installed the camera system in office buildings and parking lots.

"We have quite a few clients requesting them," Mike Durante said.