Keeping Students and Staff Safe from Technology Abuse

By Robert Ruder

Recently, while changing into their bathing suits for physical education class, female students at a Lancaster, Pennsylvania, high school saw a camera phone being held in a ceiling vent. They reported the incident, and further investigation by the school administration revealed that a male student had crawled into the building's ductwork from a nearby room. Additional sleuthing by school officials determined that no photographs were taken or images transmitted.

The male student avoided criminal charges but faced school district disciplinary proceedings for entering an unauthorized area of the school with a camera phone in hand.

In addition to invading a student's privacy in a locker room or bathroom, students can use camera phones to cheat on tests. Students can photograph a test and send it to fellow students so they know what to study. With the number of students who own cellular phones increasing at a dazzling rate, designing a school dis-

After becoming official, the district's varied populations should be informed of the policy. To ensure a thorough understanding, I offer school officials the following suggestions:

- Present the policy to parents and community members at informational gatherings at each of the district's schools.
- Share the policy in district and school newsletters and on the district's Website.
- Include the policy in staff and student handbooks,
- Conduct orientation seminars for all district staff members and provide individual training for new employees.
- Introduce the policy at orientation assemblies for students and back-to-school nights for parents.

Going One Step Further

To add another layer of security, the director of buildings and grounds and building maintenance personnel should survey all buildings within the school district to ensure that all noninstructional areas are secured and accessible by key only. In addition, spaces adjacent to bathrooms and locker rooms should be locked and inaccessible to unauthorized personnel. Storage areas, faculty lounges, and conference rooms should be limited to use by authorized school personnel. Catwalks and ventilation ducts that are over or adjacent to these areas should also be inspected to eliminate unauthorized access.

As new construction or remodeling initiatives are being contemplated, the accessibility of ventilation ducts by unauthorized personnel should be considered. Forward-thinking contractors working in concert with school personnel can devise methods to limit unauthorized access to air-conditioning and heating ducts.

Advancing Technology in the Schools

As school personnel, we must be cognizant of the need to protect the privacy and safety of others within the school environment. This level of protection extends from those who risk physical harm by choosing to venture into the dangerous labyrinth of a school's ductwork to those who choose to photograph coworkers and post the images online to those who use school district technology for private use or gain.

As the use and dependency on technology increase, the practice of updating technology use policies every few years is no longer a viable model. School districts may find it necessary to revise policies related to technology yearly—or even more frequently. Conducting due diligence in this regard will help a district remain current with trends and practices while safeguarding the safety of its students and staff.

trict–wide multilevel firewall to address electronic intrusions is a prudent course of action.

Creating a District Policy

A first step in developing a district policy is to become familiar with other districts' policies. Policies vary across the country: some school districts ban cell phone use; others limit their use to before and after school, at lunch, and between classes; and others prohibit students from using the camera function. Find out what other districts are doing, how their policies are working, and how the community feels.

Using in-house personnel and guidelines provided by the district's legal counsel, the policy should be crafted to consider the district's needs. The policy should address policy violations and the consequences. As with all policies, the adoption of guidelines for technology use in the school district's buildings, on grounds, and in vehicles (including school buses) by all district employees and students should follow established protocol before they become policy.

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