

# School security cameras add facial recognition software

[John Wisely](#), [Detroit Free Press](#) Published 6:01 a.m. ET Aug. 12, 2019 | Updated 10:53 a.m. ET Aug. 12, 2019

*New technology is a big part of beefed up defenses for schools in era of mass shootings*

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In response to mass shooting threats, carpenter Connor Spencer works on the install of security upgrades like new security doors and a vestibule to make it harder for intruders to enter at Hunter Elementary School in Brownstown Twp., Mich., Wednesday, Aug 7, 2019. (Photo: Kathleen Galligan, Detroit Free Press)

In Gibraltar Public Schools, new digital security cameras installed this year allow administrators and, if needed, local police, to monitor school entrances, hallways and other areas.

The system includes facial recognition software that digitizes each person's face and can quickly scan through thousands of images to find that person in a hurry.

"You can zero in on a face and then it can find that face throughout the building," said Superintendent Amy Conway.

Detroiters have objected loudly to [police forays into facial recognition](#) technology, but many school districts now embrace it as one more defense against mass shooters and other threats. Gibraltar's system is part of more than \$1 million in security upgrades the district is completing with [bond money](#) approved by voters in 2017.

In fact, security concerns have prompted a renovation boom in schools.

Parents and other voters have given their blessing, agreeing to spend millions on more secure entrances, camera systems, alarms, even special triage kits to be placed throughout school buildings in case of a mass casualty incident. Voters have approved both bonds and sinking funds — short-term tax levies to pay for specific projects. Other schools are finding room in their budgets for security guards or school resource officers to add another layer of protection.

The state also is kicking in, approving more than \$24 million in grants for schools to make security upgrades in 2019 alone.



During a full-scale mock disaster training exercise for an active assailant at L'Anse Creuse High School, Officer DePape helps escort people acting as wounded out on Thursday, Aug. 8, 2019. (Photo: Kimberly P. Mitchell, Detroit Free Press)

"As we continue to see more and more incidents on the front page, that is definitely something that administrators, school boards and communities are thinking more consciously about as they look to invest in infrastructure," said Peter Spadafore of the Michigan Association of Superintendents and Administrators.

## Best practices

The changes in Gibraltar and other districts are in line with recommendations from the Michigan School Safety Task Force, a group of educators, police and others that met last year to identify best practices.

In late 2018, then-Gov. Rick Snyder signed a law creating the [Office of School Safety](#) within the State Police and the [Michigan School Safety Commission](#), a group of people to oversee it.

### **School Safety: 2019 School Safety Grants**

Among the [task force recommendations](#) are for schools to:

- Complete a security assessment by October.

- Install secure entry doors with a vestibule that can be locked.
- Install impact-rated vehicle barriers at all entrances and at all areas of mass gathering.
- Install solid core interior doors that can be secured from inside the classrooms.
- Develop consistent definitions for terms like lockdown, secure mode and shelter in place.

The recommendations show how much the education world has changed in recent years, said Nicholas Dent, a task force member who now serves on the School Safety Commission.

"When I started teaching, we were living in a pre-Columbine world," said Dent, who has taught Spanish at Marshall High School for 25 years. "We weren't thinking that way. There were not the hardening measures there are now in terms of all doors being locked and people being buzzed in and security cameras. Things were a lot looser in terms of security."

Some civil libertarians question the accuracy of facial recognition technology and worry about its use in schools. Eric Williams, a senior staff attorney with the Detroit Justice Center, said the technology has been shown to be less accurate with darker skinned people and youths.

"The accuracy of facial recognition technology is really suspect when you're dealing with younger people because there are so many changes from year to year," Williams said. "It seems to me it's unnecessary."

But Dent said he hasn't heard any concerns.

"I think that it's one of those few things in education that everybody can agree upon, the need for school security," he said. "There's never any pushback when it comes to taking steps or spending money to harden the facility and make students safer."

## Voters approve

Ron Roberts, superintendent of Chippewa Valley Schools in Macomb County, said parents and others in his district were very interested in security when they approved a \$98 million bond last year. Roberts said about a third of that money will be used for security upgrades, including more secure entrances at the schools and new security cameras with newer technology including tracking capabilities.

"As you can see from what's in the news these days, the topic really resonates with people, and rightfully so," Roberts said. "People were really very concerned. They thought that it was important. Parents thought it was important that we address the issue now as best we can."



Captain David Kennedy and Lt. Jason Arbo, of Macomb County Sheriff's office, look over the floor plan for L'Anse Creuse High School participating in a full-scale, active assailant training exercise at the Macomb County Emergency Management and Communications center in Mt. Clemens, Mich. on Thursday, Aug. 8, 2019. It was announced in October that the county's Office of Emergency Management and Communications had received a \$316,860 federal School Violence Prevention Program grant. (Photo: Kimberly P. Mitchell, Detroit Free Press)

Dakota High School is in the process of reconfiguring its entrances, work that should be completed before students return this fall. Chippewa Valley High School will get new entrances as well, he said, but those won't be completed until sometime next month because of supply delays.

The district already had security cameras but is replacing them, he said.

"I think our last cameras were installed probably seven or eight years ago," he said. "These cameras, you know, the technology has greatly improved. We've expanded our coverage. So we thought that was important."

Security is just one thing to be paid for with the bond. The district also is resurfacing parking lots, replacing school buses, upgrading classrooms and equipment and other projects. But security was top of mind for people in the community, said district spokeswoman Diane Blain.

"We did a series of town halls in the community," she said. "It was clear to us that keeping our school safe and enhancing what we were currently doing was important. That is really important to parents today."

## Metal detectors

The Detroit Public Schools Community District is installing access control systems at 62 schools with School Safety Grant money from the Michigan State Police, spokeswoman Chrystal Wilson said.

When it's completed this winter, it will bring the total number of schools with access control to 91 of 104 schools.

The system requires staffers to swipe a badge to enter schools.

The district also has cameras in 87 schools that are monitored through a control center at the district's Police Headquarters. The district has issued color-coded identification badges for all employees, vendors, contractors and volunteers, who are expected to wear them on campus.

The district also has security personnel and metal detectors at all buildings. The district has 71 full-time security officers.

"We believe full-time employment will improve retention, attendance, and lead to stronger relationships with students and families," Wilson said.

Schools also are beefing up training of staffers. Districts use a variety of programs that teach staffers and in some cases, students, to run, hide from an armed attacker, and, if necessary, to fight.

This week, more than 200 police officers, firefighters and emergency medical technicians took part in a training session in Macomb County that took place at three different high schools.

"Active assailant incidents are dynamic, quick-paced events that require a certain amount of specialized and coordinated planning by emergency management and the public safety entities," Brandon Lewis, Macomb County's director of Emergency Management and Communications told the Free Press.

Last November, voters in the Lake Orion Public Schools approved a \$160 million bond to remodel and upgrade classrooms, playgrounds, athletic fields and to improve energy conservation.

It also plans security upgrades, many of which are still being designed. The schools are getting secure entrances, updated PA systems, new hardware on classroom doors and new door lockdown systems, district spokesman Mark Snyder said.

Traffic improvements aimed at improving safety also are in the works.

In Avondale schools, voters approved a \$30.7 million bond issue in 2017 to upgrade a number of things, including security.

Among the changes in the pipeline for those school are more and better security cameras in every building, spokeswoman Annette McAvoy said. Deerfield Elementary School is being remodeled to move the office to the front of the building from the center, where it was built originally.

## Visitor ID scans

The new configuration will allow office staffers to see all visitors in the new secure vestibules before admitting them to the school itself.

Similar vestibules are being installed in many districts.

When visitors arrive at a school, they first enter the vestibule, which remains locked from the inside. There, they are screened by office staff.

Avondale also is taking an additional step by installing equipment to run Raptor, a visitor management software system in the vestibules.

Visitors will swipe their state-issued IDs into the system, which logs the time and date of their visit. It can even check their names against a database of registered sex offenders and records the district keeps on parents in custody disputes.

Also new this fall, Avondale schools will use a school security service at the high school, Avondale Middle School and Avondale Academy.

"Funding for this extra layer of security will come from the district's operating budget," McAvoy said.

Gibraltar schools also have hired a school resource officer and a crisis coordinator, Conway said. A grant will buy new radios for all the buildings.



**Gibraltar Public Schools Superintendent Amy Conway has access to live security camera video throughout the district at her office in Woodhaven, Mich., Wednesday, Aug 7, 2019. (Photo: Kathleen Galligan, Detroit Free Press)**

"We have all new radios that operate on their own frequency," Conway said. "So I will have one in my office and I can hear everything going on out in the district through the walkie talkies. So if there's something going on in the building, it'll go on my frequency and then I can jump in and do whatever I need to do."

The district also received a grant for triage kits that hang on walls in strategic spots around the schools. They include tourniquets, bandages and other emergency medical gear that may be needed in an emergency.

"I think 20 years ago, the threat contingency wasn't there," Conway said. "The office secretary had the Band-Aid, but now it's a little different."

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