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## Small School Takes Big Steps to Advance School Security



This small school has taken big steps when it comes to advancing school security. Leonard ISD has recently implemented cutting-edge network video technology to help create a more secure learning environment for its students and staff.

Located amidst gently rolling hills in a remote area of Texas, with its red-brick town square and old-time post office, Leonard, Texas is in many ways a portrait of the past. A refreshing reflection of a simpler time and place, this small, friendly community is home to Leonard Independent School District (ISD), which educates approximately 900 students. But this small school has taken big steps when it comes to advancing school security. Leonard ISD has recently implemented cutting-edge network (IP) video technology to help create a more secure learning environment for its students and staff. This small town school now boasts some of the most proactive, prepared security programs in schools across the U.S. and serves as a model for others.

### **Security and IT: The Perfect Combination**

Jerome Edwards has the unique and enviable position of serving as both Chief of Police and Director of IT at Leonard ISD. Embodying the concept of IT and physical security con-

vergence, Mr. Edwards not only understands the traditional security issues the school faces, but also the vast improvements in performance an IP system offers over analog.

"Fortunately, our school is not a frequent subject of media coverage or a hotbed of criminal activity. We have our share of petty theft and student fights, but for the most part, we don't have to worry about the grave security issues other urban schools around the country face. Still, you never know when an emergency will occur. We are not immune to weather emergencies, fires, and other problems and want to offer the safest environment we can," commented Edwards.

Previously relying on a few outdated black and white cameras connected to an old VCR, the school lacked easy access to live or recorded video to help investigate or resolve incidences. The video was essentially useless given the difficulty of accessing it and the challenge of archiving it using VCR tapes.

Edwards recognized the need for video that would be useful, not only for investigating incidences, but for preventing them. He recalled, “We selected IP video because we had the network infrastructure in place to support it and we knew it would be vastly more accessible and easier to use and maintain than analog video. IP is the technology of the future and an investment in these cameras will serve our needs well as we grow the system.”

The school’s Superintendent had received information from Wren and had heard about their successful installations in other schools around Texas. When evaluating video solutions, Edwards was happy to speak with Wren and was impressed with their demonstrated success.

Based on his knowledge of security and IT, Edwards was able to select and install Wren’s IP camera equipment and Wren Video Management System (VMS) Software himself. The solution integrated seamlessly with Leonard’s existing network and within a few weeks, Leonard ISD went from operating a 1980s-powered analog video security system to employing a full IP video solution that only a small percentage of schools nationally have.

### Keeping an Eye on Things

Since public, high-traffic areas are the site of most incidences—from student fights, to locker theft, to unauthorized visitors—cameras were installed at all four campuses to cover hallways, cafeterias, and main entrances. The video surveillance system’s first value is as a deterrent. In the high school, a multi-pane view from Wren VMS Software displays live views from cameras on a monitor in the main office, serving as a constant reminder to students that they are being watched.

The principals at all four schools have Wren VMS Software installed on their computers and can view video across the district – not just at their own school. This set-up makes it easy to respond in case of an incident and for principals to share best practices and ideas when it comes to school security. Likewise, office staff has access to video so they can monitor public areas throughout the day when classes are in

session. Using Wren VMS Software’s SelectView Window, they can simply leave a small window featuring live video up at the bottom of their screen, making for convenient monitoring while working in other applications. This allows them to identify problems such as students skipping class, unauthorized visitors in the building, or any type of suspicious activities.

Edwards found it easy to record, save and retrieve video via a PC using Wren VMS Software. “The software enables us to monitor security on campus in a live and proactive way. Because it’s now extremely easy to access video of an incident, say after a fight, theft, or vandalism incident, the video offers the Superintendent and principals an irrefutable tool to verify events beyond the accounts of the participants or bystanders. This context is extremely valuable for resolving situations and taking the appropriate action with the appropriate parties.”

When the next round of funding becomes available, Leonard ISD plans to install outdoor cameras to monitor the playground at the elementary school, another site of potential accidents and intruders. They also plan to use Wren’s VMS mapping feature to pinpoint camera locations on blueprints of the four different buildings, better enabling principals from other campuses to retrieve the video they need even if they are unfamiliar with the specific camera locations within those buildings.

Taking a healthy approach to using network video, Edwards said, “We know enough not to rely on cameras exclusively—they are just part of an overall security program, which includes an array of tools and activities. We still post teachers and staff in the halls between classes to monitor students, make use of access control, and communicate over the PA system. By shifting to network video, we now have a more powerful, accessible tool in our arsenal and we’re maximizing it on a daily basis.”

When asked if he thinks Leonard ISD is now on the cutting-edge, Edwards responds, “There are definitely more steps we can take when it comes to securing our campuses. But network video has given us a great way to be proactive about security and is one big step toward creating safer schools.”

