

Fresno Unified to install high-tech security cameras, floodlights on campuses

By Hannah
Furfaro



The Fresno Unified School District office building in downtown Fresno.

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More than 900 high-definition security cameras will soon go up at Fresno Unified middle and high schools to help law enforcement battle break-ins, vandalism and other mischief during and after school hours.

Schools also will get digital video recorders to store footage and extra floodlights to illuminate dark zones near parking lots and other areas.

The district's school board voted Wednesday to approve the projects. The new security measures will cost more than \$3.5 million, paid for through funds the trustees approved last summer.

At the meeting, Superintendent Michael Hanson had a stiff warning for would-be criminals:

"We just want people to know, don't come to our campuses looking for an easy thing to steal because you're going to get caught."

Fresno schools have been hit by a handful of burglaries in recent months, including an attempt by two 19-year-olds and a juvenile to steal 50 laptop and tablet computers from Ahwahnee Middle in January.

The trio was foiled by police, who caught the suspects shortly after hopping on a tip that a burglary was in progress. Computers and other high-tech equipment have begun replacing copper wire as thieves' choice target, Hanson said.

Fresno campuses already have cameras, but Hanson said video quality on the new models will be a "dramatic improvement."

Police also can get access to real-time recordings, but Hanson said this capability only will be used in the most dire circumstances, like an active shooter on school grounds.

There is no timeline to install the equipment. School administrators promised they will get started as quickly as possible.

Board members were thrilled with the plan, but trustee Luis Chavez said he wished a local company was awarded the camera installation bid totaling \$2.3 million. The project was awarded to the lowest bidder, Anaheim-based AAA Solar Electric Inc.

He questioned whether the district did enough outreach to local vendors, but staff reassured the board that 74 companies, including several in the central San Joaquin Valley, were given the opportunity to bid.

Contact Hannah Furfaro: hfurfaro@fresnobee.com, (559) 441-6412 or [@HannahFurfaro](https://twitter.com/HannahFurfaro) on Twitter.