



Building a Comprehensive School Security System in Texas

The Sherman Independent School District (ISD), 60 miles north of Dallas, Texas, was experiencing a surge of new development. Keeping up with the growing population presented a number of challenges for school officials, not the least of which was providing security for more than 6,000 students and nearly 500 teachers.

The school district already had components of a security system in place, from video cameras to an emergency preparedness plan that included close interaction with local law enforcement and continual monitoring of national security directives. But the surveillance and detection systems installed at the various schools were proving less than adequate. Consequently, administrators set out to upgrade the existing systems, beginning with installation at newly constructed schools then expanding to include all facilities.

Planning for the critical system became a community effort, with local leaders, parents, teachers, and law enforcement officials involved in examining which system provided the best security – with the highest return on taxpayers’ dollars. As the planning committee developed its selection criteria, two key requirements emerged: the security system had to be user-friendly and accessible district-wide, and given budget constraints, the district needed a solution that was economical and flexible.

Explains Chuck Edwards, Construction Project Manager for Sherman ISD, “We already had separate video

camera systems at our schools, but they were cumbersome. Principals and administrators had a difficult time reviewing and sharing stored video. As a result, the surveillance equipment was not used to its full potential.”

ISD found the solution it sought through UNICOM Government. The company’s dedicated team of physical security specialists partnered with school officials to design a new system that seamlessly combined video surveillance, interior intrusion detection using passive infrared motion sensors, and a comprehensive alarm system that monitored facilities for burglaries, fires, and other emergencies. “UNICOM Government worked closely with us, studying floor plans, locating hot spots, and plotting the best location for cameras,” said Edwards. “What’s more, because government regulations required that we use local vendors, UNICOM Government helped us find the best people available for the installation.”

Additionally, because UNICOM Government is a U.S. Communities supplier, Sherman ISD could procure the newly designed system with ease, speed, and at considerable savings. The U.S. Communities Gov-

ernment Purchasing Alliance allows state and local government agencies and nonprofit organizations to reduce the cost of goods by pooling the purchasing power of public agencies nationwide. Goods are available from a select group of suppliers, with all prices pre-competed.

Full integration enables expanded use

The design of the new ISD system integrated all security components on one platform, enabling district administrators to monitor and record activities at each school and manage the entire process from within a single application. What’s more, the user-friendly design greatly enlarged the system’s use. Notes Edwards, “Our staff doesn’t have to read through a thick manual just to secure and capture a video snapshot or see what’s going on in hallways.” Storage for the video was addressed by three-terabyte servers at each facility, with a back-up at the school’s operations center.

Although the integrated system was primarily designed to protect students and teachers, it also has proven useful in a range of other security and surveillance areas, from

reducing theft and vandalism to capturing incidences for use as evidence in disciplinary hearings or legal proceedings. “There’s so much excitement about the new system, because our staff sees it as a more comprehensive tool than we had before,” says Edwards.

The system’s open architecture makes it easy to accommodate future growth, whether adding new facilities and surveillance cameras or increasing recording and storage capabilities. “Our goal is to expand its use not only for the school district but for our fire and police departments as well, giving them wireless access so that they can pull up cameras at particular locations,” says Edwards. “Not only does the system meet our needs today, but it has the flexibility to evolve with changes down the road.”

**For more information contact
UNICOM Government at
800.999.4874, visit UNICOMGov.com,
or e-mail us at
PhysicalSecurity@UNICOMGov.com**



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2553 Dulles View Drive, Suite 100, Herndon, VA 20171-5228 · 800.999.4874 · UNICOMGov.com

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