

→ The Problem... School District Combats Gang Violence, Border Issues

Just 10 miles away from the United States-Mexico border along the Rio Grande, Donna Independent School District sits amidst international violence including drugs, guns and gangs. Administrators sought to decrease the amount of violence spilling over into Donna ISD – a district of 15,000 students spread among 21 campuses.

While many in the community had written the violence off as what “comes along with the territory,” school officials took proactive measures to thwart campus gang violence, said Donna ISD Safe Schools Coordinator Urban Gonzalez. “We knew that despite the fact that our students may sometimes witness or hear about violence around them in our community that we could do something about the violence that was occurring on our campuses.”

“Aside from a couple of analog cameras in a couple of buildings, Donna ISD had no video surveillance system to speak of,” said Gonzalez. Since Donna ISD had been identified as a “persistently dangerous school” by the US Department of Education, they were eligible to apply for federal funds to help combat on-campus violence.

At the time, the US DOE described a “persistently dangerous school” as “a public elementary, middle or secondary school in which a total of five or more violent criminal offenses were committed per 1,000 students during each of the two most recent school years and in which the conditions that contributed to the commission of those offenses are likely to continue into another school year.”



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–Donna ISD Police Chief Donald Crist

The criminal offenses Donna ISD reported most involved assaults related to gang activity, said Gonzalez.

“We had to do something about our gang violence,” he said. “We applied for the grant designated for persistently dangerous schools indicating that we would use the funds to implement a video surveillance system and increase security which we felt would attack our problems head on.”

In 2007 they were awarded the grant and after putting out a competitive bid via a Request For Proposal (RFP), a specially formed Donna ISD committee selected Video Insight (out of the 12 companies that bid on the project) to provide their surveillance solution.

“Out of all of the bids we received, Video Insight offered exactly what we were looking for so they came out on top,” said Gonzalez.

Video Insight’s Solution...

The Solution...

Grant Funded IP Surveillance System Eliminating Dangerous School Rating

The grant provided funds to outfit five Donna ISD secondary campuses consisting of three middle schools, a ninth grade campus and the high school since these campuses were where most of the violence was taking place. Donna ISD chose an IP system with 11 servers and 304 cameras. Administrators and police officers use monitoring stations and the internet web access to view live and recorded data.

Because they had virtually no system in place prior to the IP install, Gonzalez said they were concerned that the technology might be overwhelming for their IT crew in outfitting the buildings and for their administrators in the implementation and use of the system.

“But that really wasn’t the case at all,” said Gonzalez. “Everything went very smoothly. And it is really a very simple system to use. We have learned that the best thing about it is that you can’t break this system!”

The results of having the system in place have been “dramatic,” said Donna ISD Police Chief Donald Crist.

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the recorded video have worked to address this in a pretty amazing way. It’s a good comprehensive tool in our safety plan,” said Crist.

“We have used the cameras and video mainly to identify students in fights and we have solved cases as a result. Now that the students know the cameras are there, the cameras serve as a deterrent to them and they often choose not to participate because they know they will get caught.”

One of the most important results, said Gonzalez, is that since the video surveillance system has been installed and crime is down in Donna ISD, they are no longer considered a “persistently dangerous school.”

“Along with increased security officers, the Video Insight solution has basically provided us with what we needed to do – to get violence at our campuses under control, keep our students safer and lose that dangerous school distinction,” said Gonzalez.



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