

# Door Security + Safety

DHI'S PUBLICATION FOR DOOR SECURITY + SAFETY PROFESSIONALS

MAY 2021



## School Security & Safety

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## Changing the Security Landscape in Cherokee County

*Modernizing safety infrastructure transforms campuses into secure learning centers.*

BY KRISTEN JENNY

A3 Communications, a division of The Cook & Boardman Group, has provided integrated access control, surveillance and structured cabling to Cherokee County

School District (CCSD) in South Carolina since 2016. The upgrade is part of a statewide investment in modernizing the safety infrastructure of its rural schools.



A3 Communications has roots in South Carolina. The business was launched in 1990, in the aftermath of Hurricane Hugo, and established headquarters in Columbia, South Carolina. A3 Communications has grown to specialize in comprehensive security, network and communications solutions for the education market nationwide.

### LAWSUIT FUNDS LIFE SAFETY

In November 2014, the South Carolina Supreme Court ruled on a lawsuit originally filed by 39 South Carolina school districts demanding funding equity for the state's most rural counties. A \$55 million fund for the original plaintiffs was opened to 48 South Carolina school districts, including Cherokee County.

The state awarded CCSD \$466,000 to fund projects to enhance life safety through school infrastructure. The majority of these funds were allocated to install an access control system and updates to the district's surveillance camera network. The legacy systems being replaced were the standard lock and key system and an analog closed-circuit camera system running over coaxial cable.

### CHOOSING TOGETHER

The CCSD serves approximately 7,800 students and employs 550 teachers in 19 schools countywide. A3 Communications was tasked with helping CCSD identify and implement the new security measures; Axis Communications and Panasonic surveillance cameras with a Videolnsight Video Management Software (VMS) platform were selected.

"The new cameras allow us to transmit HD video at 1280 x 720 pixels, and power is provided to cameras using PoE (Power over Ethernet) from our network switches," says Ramon Vanlue, a lead audio/visual technician for CCSD. By March 2021, more than 1,700 cameras were operating in the district.

Opposite page: The entrance to Gaffney High School's Wellness Center features a controlled door and an IP surveillance camera.

Right: The LenelS2 access control panels work with the school system's existing ID cards.



Right: One of 1,700 cameras installed throughout the school district to monitor hallways, doors and common spaces.

Below: The LenelS2 access control door system secures 78 doors in nine different Cherokee County School District locations.



The school district chose a LenelS2 access control system for controlled doors. "The door panels have been more of a trickle-down project than the cameras; funding forced us to do a couple of projects at a time," explains Mary Katherine Heintzel, Safety and Incident Coordinator for CCSD. "The first building outfitted with access control was the Institute of Innovation, which was newly constructed and opened to staff and students in 2018. Once that facility was complete, we moved on to the other buildings."

As of the 2021 spring semester, CCSD had 78 card readers throughout nine

locations. "Currently, we have seven schools lacking access control, but it will be installed in each of them over the next school year," Heintzel says.

### NEW TECH OUTCOMES

The camera and door upgrades had an immediate impact on the school district's security, staffing and ability to stay focused on providing quality education to Cherokee County children.

"The picture quality between the new camera system and our old system is night and day," Vanlue notes. "The staff and school resource officers are now able to see things on the VMS feed

that they couldn't before. Additionally, the new system opens the door to scalability within our organization."

Vanlue adds the access control system helped replace and limit physical door keys used by employees. "We already had a printer card system in place with the ability to add access control via the LenelS2 system," he says. "Many people lose keys regularly, and as some of our schools have multiple keys, searching for the right one can become an issue."

Vanlue says staff and administrators who now use their ID card to gain access to the building enjoy having a different safety element during times



Above: CCSD audio/visual technician Ramon Vanlue monitors the Gaffney High School IP surveillance cameras using Videolnsight's Video Management Software (VMS).

Right: Viewing 16 areas of Gaffney High School at once over Videolnsight's Video Management Software (VMS).



when it is more important to have layers of security within schools. "We also like knowing when doors are open and who accessed the door as well as being able to properly onboard and offboard staff. The safety of kids and staff are the top priority of the Cherokee County School District."

"The access control system has significantly increased the physical security in our buildings," Heintzel says. "It has given us a streamlined approach to facility entry, which the staff has been appreciative of. The system's ability to show who used the card readers and what time they entered buildings is

valuable information for any incident that occurs."

### LAYERED SOLUTIONS

The security upgrades undertaken by the Cherokee County School District are indicative of national trends in how communities are addressing the physical security of schools.

The migration to integrated controlled doors and a high-definition IP video surveillance network places CCSD on a level with the most technologically sophisticated and secure school districts in the nation. The new system

for CCSD represents the high-water mark for the layered security approach in modern educational institutions.

A3 Communications continues to work with CCSD to maintain and upgrade its security solutions. +



**KRISTEN JENNY** is Account Manager at A3 Communications, a division of The Cook & Boardman Group. Email: [kjenny@a3communications.com](mailto:kjenny@a3communications.com).