

What FOI considerations surround the use of video surveillance in schools?

Video surveillance is video, physical, or mechanical, electronic or digital surveillance system or device that enables continuous or periodic video recording, observing, or monitoring of individuals in school buildings and on school premises (per IPC Video Surveillance Guidelines). Within the school board/authority, the surveillance system includes hand-held, portable digital devices used by principals and vice-principals to record school incidents for investigative purposes. Additional components of the surveillance system include portable video cameras that are used to record incidents on designated school buses from time to time as required. Consultation with stakeholders should be any part of the decision-making process to use video surveillance after less intrusive methods have been considered.

Any information obtained through video surveillance systems may only be used for the purposes set out by MFIPPA and must relate to the protection of students, staff, and the public, including the discipline or consequences that arise from that, or it must assist in the detection and deterrence of criminal activity and vandalism. Information should not be retained or used for purposes other than those described above.

Who should be able to view recorded images?

Images collected should only be viewed by the principal or vice-principal of the school, site manager, or the Superintendent of Education and/or in co-operation with members of the police as required. Recorded images shall be released to the police on request to aid in law enforcement in accordance with MFIPPA. The principal or site manager must authorize access to all video records other than those requested by the police. Without authorization by the principal or site manager, video records will only be released to or viewed by the police after school staff has been provided with a valid warrant. All recorded images are the property of the school board/authority and are used, disclosed, retained, secured, and disposed of in accordance with MFIPPA.

Principal's Best Practice: Students, staff and the public should be notified, using clearly written signs, prominently displayed at the perimeter of the video surveillance area, of video surveillance equipment locations, so that each person has reasonable and adequate warning that surveillance is, or may be, in operation. Incorporate this in school handbooks, newsletters and/or the school's website.