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SCHOOL NEWS

Nassau County launches new school alert system

Valley Stream superintendents interested in learning about security smartphone app

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By Mike Smollins

Nassau County recently rolled out a new alert system for school officials designed to improve communication between the district and the police department in the event of an emergency, and all four Valley Stream school districts have expressed interest in learning more about the program and adding to crisis plans already in place.

The two-pronged approach gives the Nassau County Police Department access to school security cameras and establishes direct communication between officers and school officials via smartphone app.

In the event of a threat to participating schools, law enforcement officials would be alerted by the app and be able to view the school’s security cameras remotely via smartphones and tablets — even in their patrol cars. Valley Stream school officials said they are interested in the concept, but haven’t implemented it.

“This new comprehensive school security program provides a direct link to a NCPD communications bureau supervisor that will automatically access camera, card systems, mapping and door locks,” said Brian Nevin, senior policy advisor to the county executive. “This direct link is opened once a school administrator clicks the alarm button on a mobile device. The communications bureau supervisor will be able to provide responding officers with real-time intelligence as they will be accessing school cameras, door locks and more.”

The system was tested in school districts in Merrick and Bellmore over the summer and is ready for use by any of the county’s 56 districts and private schools. Valley Stream’s schools would need to work with the NCPD on floor plans, classroom images, live camera access and other security steps in order to implement the system. The app cost Nassau County \$1.5 million, but is free for schools. The system’s proponents suggested it would also save the schools money by eliminating the need for security guards to work overtime.

“It’s a nice system, once it’s all implemented it will increase school security during the school day and after school,” said District 24 Superintendent Ed Fale. “Protecting our students and maintaining safe schools is first and foremost in our mind. Anything we can do to provide safety for our students we’re interested in.”

Fale added he’d like to utilize the app, but would have to meet with the Board of Education before any decision is made. He echoed the sentiment of other Valley Stream superintendents, who are interested in the technology, and are eager to learn more about it.

“Concept-wise, I’m supportive of any technology that is obviously going to ensure or support more safety procedures and assist us in handling an emergency,” said Nicholas Stirling, Superintendent of District 30. “I’m looking forward to hearing more about the actual technology and what’s entailed.”

After the 2012 shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Conn., which claimed 20 young students and six teachers, school districts in Valley Stream prepared for potential crises.

For District 30, that included adding numbers on classroom windows so that law enforcement officers can approach the outside, security doors that have partially-obstructed windows, the removal of glass from doors and the addition of keypad locks.

Nationwide panic associated with school shootings resurged on Sept. 8, when a 14-year-old freshman at Alpine High School in Texas shot and killed herself after shooting and wounding another female student.

“We have a great relationship with the [Problem Oriented Policing] Officers,” said Central High School District Superintendent Bill Heidenreich. “The fact that they are visible in our school goes a long way in building trust and confidence and relations between schools, kids and police officers.” He said with NCPD’s reinstatement of the POP program in January, officers routinely check in to make their presence known.

Each school district in Valley Stream already has procedures in place and goes over safety drills to ensure the methods are engrained in their students and staff should an emergency ever occur.

District 13 Superintendent Constance Evelyn said the schools update emergency plans each year, and “regularly engage in practice drills and professional development to enhance preparedness for incidents related to the safety and security of our district.”

Barbara Rubin-Perry contributed to this story.

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