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## Beefing up school security

### Charter academies' computers keep watch for predators

Jennifer Mrozowski / The Detroit News

**DETROIT** -- Gone are the days where parents and visitors could walk around some charter schools after obtaining a generic visitor's badge.

People visiting Flagship Academy are greeted by a computerized security system that scans their identification cards or driver's licenses so the information can be cross-checked against state sexual offender databases from across the nation.

Flagship and Reach Academy in Roseville are two of the latest charter schools enhancing security measures to include routine background checks for visitors, to guard against predators.

At all 57 of the National Heritage Academies' charter schools across the country, school entryways incorporate a computerized security system to scan the identification of all visitors, contractors, parents and faculty passing through the doors.

"I like that because you never know who is around your child," said Detroit parent Jacqueline Chandler, whose son Jarrett Kerns, 11, is a sixth-grader at Flagship Academy in Detroit. "It's important when you leave your child at school to know that the teachers, administrators and principals are doing their best to keep the children safe."

#### Visitors are routed

Flagship Academy's entryway includes two sets of doors that route visitors through the main office and security kiosk system by LobbyGuard Solutions LLC, which includes a monitor that has a camera and visitor badge printer attached.

If a background check on a visitor turns up anything of concern, the system immediately alerts designated school personnel, said academy Principal Krystal Bell. The system also provides school officials with access to parental custody information so officials know who is designated to pick up students.

Though student safety has improved in schools nationwide, violence, theft, drugs and

weapons continue to pose problems, according to the 2007 Indicators of School Crime and Safety report from the National Center for Education Statistics.

### **Crime rate drops**

The rate of students ages 12-18 who were victims of a crime at school declined between 1992 and 2005, the report showed.

Yet during the 2005-06 school year, 86 percent of public schools reported that at least one violent crime, theft or other crime occurred at their school, the report said.

The data also showed that in 2005, the most recent year studied, about 6 percent of students ages 12-18 reported they were afraid of attack or harm at school, and 5 percent reported that they were afraid of attack or harm away from school, which could impede their learning.

With school safety topping the list of concerns for many parents, the interest in school security is growing.

About 600 schools nationwide use LobbyGuard, and the business for the K-12 sector grows each year, said Kevin Allen, president of LobbyGuard Solutions LLC.

The cost is around \$6,500 for a school, including hardware, software, supplies and the first year of support, Allen said. The number of security kiosks sold has more than doubled each year for the past four years, he said.

### **One false alarm**

Bell said the system, installed last school year, once alerted school officials to a potential predator, but it was a false alarm -- the person had the same name as someone listed on a sex offender registry.

Paula Dowker, principal at Reach Academy in Roseville, which opened this school year, said she believes the security system helps attract parents.

"Schools are a target for predators," she said. "This is an effective deterrent of keeping those people off school grounds. ...

"This was a selling point to a lot of parents because security in some schools is not what it should be."

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