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Va schools do ID scans to weed out sex offenders

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Three Virginia Beach schools are using a new security system that scans parents' and visitors' identification cards and checks them against national lists of registered sex offenders. But some parents and civil-liberties advocates say the scans and checks go too far.

School officials say the city school division paid \$5,100 to install the Raptor Technologies system at Princess Anne High School, Larkspur Middle School and Birdneck Elementary School. The monitoring program will cost an additional \$432 a year at each school.

If the trial period is successful, district officials will consider expanding the registry checks to all city schools.

"This is a step toward ensuring the safety of our students and employees," Larkspur Middle School principal Daniel Keever told The Virginian-Pilot.

Texas-based Raptor Technologies says it has installed its systems in more than 7,000 schools across 42 states, including schools in Richmond, Fairfax and Prince William County.

When an ID is scanned through the Raptor system, the name and address are checked against a compilation of state sex offender databases. If the visitor is flagged as a sex offender, an instant alert is sent to select school officials, who would then be instructed to contact authorities.

Opponents, including Jim Harper of the libertarian Cato Institute, say the instant sex-offender registry checks are a disproportionate response to an exaggerated threat.

"It's worth asking how often someone has actually accessed a school to commit a crime against a child," Harper said. "I'm guessing the answer is, not very often. And so, over a period of several years, you might spend tens of thousands of dollars and prevent zero instances."

A similar security system was tested at three Chesapeake schools in 2008. The program was so popular that the division used \$268,400 in federal stimulus funds to expand the ID scans districtwide at the start of the school year, division spokesman Tom Cupitt said.

To date, Chesapeake's system hasn't flagged any sex offenders attempting to enter a school, Cupitt said.

"But that might be because the system has deterred people who are on those registries from attempting to enter a school," he said.

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