



Key points:

- **Push to put cameras in classrooms led by parents of nonverbal children**
- **Movement has not yet borne fruit at state level**
- **Effort would unduly add to allure of more restrictive settings, TASH says**

≤ Disability group seeks to head off movement to put cameras in classrooms

One might think [TASH](#) would be the first to back state-level efforts to require schools to install video cameras in special ed classrooms.

After all, TASH is at the forefront of the effort to end the use of restraint and seclusion, actions for which there sometimes is little or no documentation. Nonetheless, the group has come to see the video cameras movement as misguided and potentially counterproductive.

The movement consists of efforts by parents, so far unsuccessful, to pass state legislation requiring such devices.

"These bills, while intended to increase student safety by identifying perpetrators of abuse and rooted in the best interest of children, are based on misconceptions about how sustainable school safety is achieved," TASH said in a [position statement](#) Jan. 20. "The proposed legislation also has the potential for new and more entrenched types of discrimination and abuse to emerge."

In particular, TASH said, requiring video cameras in special ed classrooms would tilt the scales of IEP decision-making toward more restrictive environments.

"If cameras are installed in segregated classrooms, [such classrooms] may then be promoted as the 'best-monitored' and 'safest' settings for students," it said.

Proponents of video monitoring say cameras already are a fact of life in hallways, cafeterias, and other parts of the school building -- so why not classrooms?

Cameras are particularly needed in classrooms for children who are low- or nonverbal, according to Katie Kelly, supervising attorney for special ed at [Community Legal Services of Mid-Florida](#).

"If you've got a client who can't testify, you've got nothing, and so the abuse continues," she said. "And so that's why people are looking for some documentation, or at least some oversight, of what is going on in the classroom."

TASH has taken a firm stance against classroom cameras, however, and so it remains to be seen how far the movement will get.

Trying to get a bill

Ohio parent Tara Heidinger sparked the video camera movement in 2012 when she created a Facebook page called [Cameras in Special Needs Classrooms](#).

"Why am I doing this?" says the page, which has garnered 19,000 likes. "It's for the safety of the children who can't go home and tell their parents how their day was."

Her goal is to persuade schools that cameras would be good for them, not just parents.

If a student has a meltdown, she said, "we can look back into the video [and figure out how] to prevent another one."

Heidinger also is trying to address the concerns raised by TASH, such as the limited range of some cameras.

"That's the great thing about mirrors," Heidinger said. "Get the mirrors in the corner, you'll get every angle."

So far, however, no bill has been introduced in the Ohio legislature, and in Texas, a [bill](#) approved by the state Senate during the last legislative session died in the House.

Adding to the mythology

Perhaps due to its limited success at the state level, the video cameras issue has not gotten the attention of many national groups; the [National Disability Rights Network](#), the [National Association of State Directors of Special Education](#), and the [Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates](#) each said they had no position on the matter.

Likewise, an official at the [American Association of School Administrators](#) said the issue had not come up in conversations with district superintendents, and a spokeswoman for the [National School Boards Association](#) had no immediate comment.

TASH doesn't want to let the movement go unchallenged, however, according to Executive Director Barb Trader.

"On the face of it, it seems like one of those, 'Sure, why not?' kind of ideas," she said. "But when you analyze it, there's all kinds of reasons why it's a bad idea."

In fact, the cameras could backfire, according to the TASH position statement.

"Footage of isolated, uncontextualized 'incidents' of student behaviors could be used not as evidence of teacher abuse but [to] justify referral to the juvenile justice system," it said.

But for Trader, the main concern remains the stature that cameras would give segregated settings -- a stature, she says, they don't deserve.

"We know that parents are deeply concerned about safety and may think erroneously ... that if [their children] are in a segregated classroom, they're safer than if they're in a general education environment," she said. "We know that's not true, and we're worried that if we put video cameras in those classrooms, that it would add to that mythology."

See also:

- [Race, disability issues overlap in Mississippi restraint project](#) (Dec. 4)

- [OCR chief noncommittal on prospects for guidance on restraint, seclusion](#) (Oct. 27)
- [OCR not hesitant to invoke 2012 treatise on restraint, seclusion](#) (Aug. 11)

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