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Cameras, GPS units to be installed in Tacoma school buses

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TACOMA, Wash. -- The Tacoma School District has a \$800,000 plan to gear school buses with high-tech gear aimed to better protect students.

The district is installing two cameras - one near the rear-view mirror and another in the back - on every one of its buses. A global positioning system unit will also be installed to help track the bus' movement.

The district said it has too many buses and too many routes to keep an eye on all of them without any help.

The cameras will capture the kids getting onto the bus, and the GPS unit will track the ride the entire way. Students will also swipe ID cards when they get on and off the bus, so that district officials and parents will know exactly who's on board.

"If there's a bus breakdown, we'll be able to go right to that site," said Sue Race, director of transportation. "If there is an emergency we'll be able to find that bus immediately and also we can tell mom if the bus is late.

The move is a big relief for parents like Christina Leder, who juggles a kindergartner and a preschooler every day.

"He would be there on time, catch the bus on right time, dropped off at the right place and I would just know where he is," she said.

It's a system school districts across the country have adopted. But not all of them have dove into the program Tacoma plans to, according to Apollo Video Technology, the company that installs the cameras aboard the buses.


"This is kind of a bold move," said Rodell Notbohm with the company. "A lot of times a transit or school system will put on a few to begin with, cycle those buses around but the problem is it gives them gaps in coverage."

Those gaps could add up for the Tacoma School District, which has nearly 200 buses.

The cameras will start rolling later this month and the GPS units will follow by the end of the year.

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