

NY lawmakers vote to pause facial recognition in schools

July 23 2020, by Carolyn Thompson



In this July 10, 2018 file photo, a camera with facial recognition capabilities hangs from a wall during installation at Lockport High School in Lockport, N.Y. The New York Legislature has passed a two-year moratorium on the use of facial recognition in schools. The ban approved Wednesday, July 22, 2020, follows an upstate district's adoption of the technology as part of its security plans, and a lawsuit by civil rights advocates challenging the decision. (AP Photo/Carolyn Thompson, File)

The New York Legislature has passed a two-year moratorium on the use of facial recognition in schools.

The ban approved by the House and Senate on Wednesday follows an upstate district's adoption of the technology as part of its security plans and a lawsuit from civil rights advocates challenging that move.

The legislation would prohibit the use of biometric identifying technology in schools until at least July 1, 2022, and direct the state's education commissioner to issue a report examining its potential impact on student and staff privacy and recommending guidelines.

The Lockport Central School District activated its system in January after meeting conditions set by state education officials, including that no students be entered into the database of potential threats. Schools have been closed since mid-March because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Administrators have said the system is capable of alerting staff to guns as well as sex offenders, suspended staff members and other people flagged by [law enforcement](#) or prohibited by court order from being in schools.

If signed into law by Gov. Andrew Cuomo, the moratorium would effectively pause the Lockport district's system until the education commissioner's study is conducted or the moratorium is ended, according to the New York Civil Liberties Union, which sued in June to have the system deactivated.

The lawsuit, filed on behalf of two district parents, is pending.

"We've said for years that facial recognition and other biometric

surveillance technologies have no place in schools, and this is a monumental leap forward to protect students from this kind of invasive surveillance," Stefanie Coyle, deputy director of the NYCLU's Education Policy Center, said in a written statement. "Schools should be an environment where children can learn and grow, and the presence of a flawed and racially-biased system constantly monitoring students makes that impossible."

In a statement praising the temporary ban, the New York City-based Surveillance Technology Oversight Project said the technology is more error-prone for students of color, "compounding the human bias they face every day."

Lockport administrators did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Although used in places like airports and stadiums, facial recognition is so far rare in public schools. The western New York district is believed to be the first in the state to incorporate the technology in the aftermath of deadly mass school shootings.

Superintendent Michelle Bradley has said the system does not collect or store any personally identifiable or other information until a match is made and confirmed by [school](#) staff, who would receive an alert from the system.

The \$1.4 million Canadian-made Aegis system was funded through a state technology bond.

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