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## [Headlines]

# Child Tracking for the 21st Century and Beyond

Safety, accountability and piece of mind — three very simple benefits of knowing where your students are on the way to school and back home every day. And there are varying levels of what is available to districts to keep close tabs on their riders. One of the industry's newest solutions, xiTix's Real Time Student Exception Reporting or ReTSER, made its first appearance at this year's STN EXPO trade show at the end of July.

"The system works [in] real time, all the time," said Prasad Bane, marketing engineer for xiTix (pronounced zy-ticks). "This means no waiting for the parents, or anyone concerned for that matter, for their child's information. Unlike other systems in the market where you get the information possibly two hours after the event takes place, ReTSER works right at the moment when you actually require it to do so."

The system begins and ends with a radio-frequency identification (RFID) tag that the child either wears on a lanyard around their neck or attaches to their backpacks. This can also double as the student's school ID. As the children board the bus, a reader scans and records each child's presence on the bus. When a student departs, it records the unloading, and if the student gets off at the wrong stop, a text message alerts parents and other concerned parties.

"Schools and the student transportation industry assume a lot of responsibility with respect to the security of children in their care," said Bane, stressing that the system will also reduce incidences of truancy and increase overall safety.

The system can be upgraded to versions that would allow students to pay for their school lunches and to record school bus driver in and out times for accurate time-card reporting. Currently, the company has installed the systems in 10 schools that serve 20,000 students in its native country of India and it is ready to be implemented in the United States.

But, according to Child Check-Mate's Bob Moran, this is only the beginning.

"There is a whole new technology emerging, which is poised to change the playing field not only for child detection but an array of technologies that most people would already consider ahead of its time," said the company's president. "I am referring to Intelligent Optics, which differs from conventional video detection systems."

The system uses a preprocessor chip in a surveillance camera that functions as a human eye, recognizing and differentiating between objects or events and reacting to them in real time. As with all technology, there are varying levels of sophistication. For example, if the camera's sole purpose is to account for the number of children getting on and off a school bus, it would be a standard, simplified application of the technology. But, it could also have the ability to recognize individual children, "like having a back-up set of human eyes with the brains to go behind them," added Moran.

But the solutions can go beyond tracking when a student loads or unloads. According to Zonar's Chief Technology Officer Mike McQuade, it can give school districts detailed data of the actual time span of each the loading and unloading.

"The ZPass system could also be used to drive state reporting for funding formulas, Medicaid reimbursement, and so on," said McQuade, who added that the information could assist local law enforcement find one of the last reported locations of a missing child.

Other solutions are as simple as adding a tag to each child's backpack.

"The main purpose of the Bag Tag was to assure that children got on the correct bus when they boarded either in the morning or after school," said Dennis Marsh, the owner of Ovation Marketing, the company behind the Bag Tag product.

First introduced to schools in Branson, Mo., last year, it is simply a holographic luggage tag that includes a caricature drawing of a school bus on one side and contact information for the student, their address and their bus number on the other. ■