

School Safety & Security

Important steps you should take to improve your school's security & safety measures for students & staff

White Paper Summary

This white paper contains a list of important issues that school administrators should consider when seeking to implement new school safety and security improvements. From planning actions to expert recommendations, this paper covers every significant security need facing today's K-12 schools.

If you have any questions after reading this white paper, please contact us.

The safety and security of schools is on the minds of most educators today, as it is vital that plans, processes and systems be in place to protect people and property. With recent school shootings, it certainly seems that having an armed resource officer on every campus is important. If that can't be done, then having a well-developed response plan with the right technology in place is even more important.

There has been talk recently about arming teachers or utilizing metal detectors, though it seems that most law enforcement experts are against arming teachers. As for metal detectors, many security experts say they are unlikely to stop a gunman. In fact, a National Center for Education Statistics survey showed only 2% of schools using metal detectors on a daily basis as of 2014. So, where do you start?

Questions for Education Leadership

- What do we owe our community in terms of safety and security?
- How do we implement good, common sense security in times of limited budgets?
- Is there a belief that "it can't happen here" or "it can't be prevented"?

- If we ignore recommendations and common solutions being implemented elsewhere, how does that affect our community image and liability?

School safety and security is not a simple task. It requires an immense amount of planning, documentation, training, and investment. Security risk assessments, emergency preparedness, crisis planning, working with local law enforcement, and training are among the details. The long list of possible recommendations and a myriad of technology choices can be difficult to understand and prioritize. However, it needs to be accomplished!



From the book, *School Security, How to Build and Strengthen a School Safety Program* by Paul Timm, the keys to school security are:

- Commitment from the Top
- Performance Accountability
- Good Relationships with Emergency Responders

Immediate Actions

For starters, here are some recommendations for local schools administrators to immediately implement from *Six Steps for Improving School Security* by Patrick V. Fiel, Sr.

- 1. Make security a top priority.** All schools must have their current risk assessment plans reviewed and updated by an experienced education security expert. Then administrators must strictly enforce any and all new safety and security policies and procedures.
- 2. Implement a closed-campus policy.** All schools, especially elementary schools, must be closed to outsiders until they are cleared to enter through a single entrance controlled by a video intercom. All other doors should remain locked throughout the day. Once a visitor is approved to enter, he or she must check in at the office and present government-issued identification to be screened by a visitor management system that checks databases for registered sex offenders.
- 3. Finance school security improvements.** Properly securing a campus is not inexpensive and may require making difficult decisions to reallocate internal budgets. Both public and private grants may be available to help offset costs. The websites for federal and state departments of education are a good place to start looking for grants and how to obtain them.
- 4. Build strong relationships with local law enforcement.** If a district does not already have a regularly assigned officer for each campus, administrators should ask the police chief, sheriff or state police to make

special assignments during school hours. Law enforcement response to an emergency needs to be in a range of one to three minutes to be effective.

- 5. Encourage parents to get involved.** Parents can be a tremendous force in lobbying legislators for additional funding for school security. Parents also need to make sure that any firearms in the home are securely stored and properly accounted.
- 6. Get students and teachers involved in their own safety.** Students and teachers are often hesitant to report what they see and hear on campus for fear of retribution. One option is to create a hotline and website that students and teachers can contact anonymously to report suspicious activities.

Security Expert Recommendations

There are dozens of articles and papers on the subject of school security technology. The following is a compilation of some of the most common recommendations.

Building Actions:

1. Develop campus lockdown procedures and drills. Practice those drills during different times of the day.
2. Consider stronger windows and doors at entrances. Consider perimeter fencing to deter trespassing and to limit access.
3. Limit campus entries, only one entrance and lock entrances when school is in session.
4. Use a vestibule/double entry system with intercom/video call box at main entrance. If possible, make sure when a visitor enters the school, their only option is to go into the school office for visual verification.
5. Implement strong electronic visitor registration with national sex offender and barred list database checks.
6. Accountability and reunification. Have the capability to track people that are in the building and/or at a muster point.
7. Implement door access control systems. When someone loses a traditional key, the only way to deactivate the lost key is to rekey the entire building. Card access systems can be implemented as an alternative means to controlled access, allowing you to grant and restrict access to specific areas. You can produce reports on who has accessed each door and when.
8. Video surveillance systems give greater visibility, and can be integrated with door access control and crisis lockdown systems.
9. Install a crisis lockdown system with communication, notification and panic buttons. Communications include labeled





telephones, PA, intercom, two-way radios and cell phones.

10. Implement an anonymous tip hotline for the district to be used by teachers, parents or students.

Personnel Actions:

1. Undergo a risk assessment and develop a comprehensive emergency response/crisis plan that is updated yearly.
2. Create an emergency response team using teachers, law enforcement, emergency service

personnel, mental health professionals, school counselors, facilities personnel, office personnel, student leaders and parent representation.

3. Work with local first responders and develop close relationships.
4. Involve students and staff, train on situational awareness, and educate parents.
5. Staff monitoring of arrival and dismissal times.
6. ALL students, faculty/staff AND visitors should be required to WEAR an ID badge. Visual identification is a major component of an overall security program. This means that even students must wear their ID while on campus.
7. Designated school personnel arriving at the outside meeting area (muster point) should be responsible for taking a headcount that includes all staff, students, and visitors.

Technology for School Safety

Of course, technology plays an important role in school safety and security. A wide variety of security technology is available from many different vendors, which also presents many questions. What technology is the most effective and widely deployed? Which systems need to be integrated so they work together? How do I get the most for our investment? Do I have to work with so many different vendors?

From the book, *School Security, How to Build and Strengthen a School Safety Program*, by Paul Timm:
"If people are the number one asset in schools, the first hour of planning and the first dollar of spending should be spent on addressing two areas: communications and access control. Nothing protects people better than effective communications and access control. Without excellent communications, Murphy's Law is bound to find you in a situation where you need help, but cannot contact someone or in circumstances where an emergency announcement was made, but you could not receive it. Where access control is concerned, too many schools operate with ineffective visitor management procedures and, at any given time, have no way of accounting for those that are in the facility or have left the facility. The point of this discussion can be summed up with a challenge: Invest in improving communications and access control!"

Visual Security with ID Badging

An effective visual security program means that ALL people in the school be identified and wear an ID. In the case of middle and high schools, that also means students. Although only 9% of schools require students to wear their badge (National Center for Educational Statistics), there is a growing trend where schools are requiring students to wear their IDs. These schools combine the requirement with incentives or privilege losses to gain compliance.

For visitors, adhesive stickers don't work very well. They are not very visible, tend to fall off, or be placed under a coat. It is recommended that the sticker be placed on a tag and worn on a visible, color-coded lanyard. A variety of red lanyards printed with VISITOR are available from many vendors today.

Local Service & Support

It is advantageous to have local service and support for the various safety and security solutions that your school may purchase and incorporate. The complexity of the solutions needed are often too much for a school or district's IT department to handle on its own. Identification Systems Group (ISG) dealers across the US and Canada offer local on-site resource for school security solutions. Their knowledgeable field sales and technical staffs provide the in-person consultation that your school or district needs. They offer a variety of identification, access control, communication, and related systems. Integration of these systems to a central identity/security database is a very important benefit, and is necessary for proper security management.

These types of systems include:

- **ID Card Systems** for producing student, faculty, staff and visitor cards. The system should connect to your central people database and create an identity/security database for integrating with other systems like door access control, visitor registration, and personnel tracking.
- **Visitor Registration Systems** to produce visitor tags. These systems can verify the visitor against a sex offender database as well as an internal barred list (terminated employees, expelled students), and maintains the list of who is in the building at any time. This system connects to the identity/security database so a log of visitors is maintained and the "who to see" list is automatically maintained.



- **Door Access Control Systems** can be wired or wireless. The system is integrated with the identity/security database so that privileges are assigned the moment the ID card is issued and revoked when removed from the central people database.
- **Video Surveillance Systems** can be integrated with access control and crisis lockdown alert systems. Systems can also include DVRs for recording suspicious behavior or unauthorized access attempts on campus.
- **Electronic Tracking Systems** can be used in case of an evacuation, and lets you to know who is in your building, or tracks people at an event or at a muster point. Again, the key is being integrated with your identity/security database so all groups of people are included. We offer a simple system to record faculty and staff times so they can be included in the data.
- **Notification and Crisis Lockdown Alert Status Systems** provide the color code recommended by FEMA in electronic form. It notifies school officials, calls law enforcement, triggers emails, texts and cameras, and electronically locks down the school. Officials and authorities see a real time floor plan status, live video, and chat messaging from any electronic device.



Resources

- [Six Steps for Improving School Security](#) by Patrick V. Fiel, Sr, SecurityInfoWatch, January 21, 2013
- [8 Ways to Improve School Entrance Security](#) by Randy Atlas, Ph.D., FAIA, CPP, Campus Safety Magazine, March 23, 2017
- [More Guns are the Last Thing We Need in Our Schools](#) by Patrick V. Fiel, Sr, Campus Life Security, February 28, 2018
- [School Security, How to Build and Strengthen a School Safety Program](#) by Paul Timm, PSP, published by Elsevier
- [School Safety Preparation Tips for Back-to-School](#) by Chuck Hibbert, National School Safety and Security Services, July 27, 2016
- [Maintaining a Secure Environment, School Security Begins at the Front Door](#) by Patrick V. Fiel, Sr, School Planning & Management, December 1, 2014
- [Survey of Public Schools with Various Safety and Security Measures](#), 1999-2014, National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)
- [Introduction to the Incident Command System for Schools](#), FEMA, October 31, 2013
- [Should Teachers Carry Guns? Are Metal Detectors Helpful? What Experts Say](#), The New York Times, February 24, 2018
- [North Carolina Facility a Model for School Safety](#), School Construction News, January 2, 2014

About the Author

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About the ISG

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