



APPENDIX A BEST PRACTICES GUIDELINES





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WARNING AND DISCLAIMER:

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PRELIMINARY DISCUSSIONS

Purpose

This document is intended to help readers think about preventing and responding to events that should be unthinkable, but unfortunately are all too real. It is our hope that those reading this document will never experience firsthand or be directly affected by an act of violence at the school where they work or where their children attend. Indeed, we hope that such an event will never occur at any school, anywhere. Hope, however, is not a strategy; preparation and risk mitigation are.

One can stipulate that schools are, in general, very safe places, that acts of violence at schools are rare, that events such as those at Columbine and Newtown are thankfully uncommon and unlikely. Much like a terrorist attack on an aircraft, an act of extreme violence at a school may be a rare or unlikely occurrence, but it is of high consequence. Each school-based shooting has had a tragic and lasting effect on the school where it occurred, the surrounding community, and the nation as a whole. It is therefore worth thinking more about how we can better protect our schools even if the probability of a violent episode at any particular school is low. The loss of a single child or teacher through an act of violence at school is tragic; more tragic still are the loss of lives that might have been prevented if further precautions or planning had been undertaken to address a known threat or vulnerability. This document is focused on school shooting events and is intended to provide, to those charged with school security responsibilities, a usable synopsis of common security vulnerabilities, best practices for prevention, mitigation, preparedness, and response, as well as links to further resources. While it is impossible to produce a truly exhaustive examination of this ever-evolving subject, we believe that this document thoroughly addresses many of the most essential areas of concern and can be of great value to its readers.

About Our Team

W. Ralph Basham

Mr. Basham has an unparalleled breadth of experience in law enforcement and homeland security. Over the course of his 38-year career in federal law enforcement, he has served as Director of the U.S. Secret Service, Commissioner of U.S. Customs and Border Protection, Director of the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center, and Chief of Staff of the Transportation Security Administration. Mr. Basham has served in these leadership positions as a Senior Executive Presidential appointee in the Clinton, George W. Bush, and Obama Administrations.

Bruce Bowen

Mr. Bruce Bowen is a proven leader in the fields of physical and asset security and protection. During his career with the U.S. Secret Service, Mr. Bowen served as the Deputy Director and as Assistant Special Agent in Charge of the Presidential Protective Division. During his career, Mr. Bowen also led a U.S. Secret Service–U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development initiative in re-designing security for high-rise tenements in Baltimore’s inner city. Mr. Bowen has also led the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center where he was charged with developing and implementing operations to train over 13,000 students annually across 83 organizations. Mr. Bowen is a recipient of the Presidential Meritorious Executive Award, as well as the Presidential Distinguished Rank Award.

John Quattrone

Colonel (retired) John Quattrone served in the United States Air Force as a Security Forces officer. Colonel Quattrone has extensive experience in facility physical security systems, critical infrastructure protection, threat assessment, risk analysis, and mitigation, all within military and civilian educational environments. Colonel Quattrone served as Team Chief, Joint Staff Integrated Vulnerability Assessments at the Defense Threat Reduction Agency, where he conducted over 80 assessments at installations worldwide. Colonel Quattrone is a former three-time commander and was in command during the tragic events of 9/11 where he ensured force protection for a community of 11,000 personnel and four on-base schools. Colonel Quattrone is a recipient of the Defense Superior Service Medal for significantly contributing to the effectiveness of the Department of Defense's antiterrorism posture.

Michael Restovich

Mr. Michael Restovich served in the Senior Executive Service at the Transportation Security Administration, to include a highly regarded role as the U.S. Department of Homeland Security attaché at the U.S. Embassy in London. Here, Mr. Restovich was the senior homeland security official representing the Secretary of Department of Homeland Security, the Transportation Security Administration Administrator, and the U.S. Chief of Mission for the Embassy of London. Mr. Restovich has held key leadership positions in the private sector, serving as a Director of Asset Protection for Exodus Communications and as Head of the Network Integrity Group for MCI WorldCom. Mr. Restovich holds vast experience in securing and defending a variety of invaluable national assets and personnel.

Anthony Lambraia

Mr. Lambraia has 30 years of experience in law enforcement and is considered a leader and innovator in the field of law enforcement training and operations. During his career he has served as Commander of the Active Shooter Response Team at the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Tactics Chief at the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center, and Chief of the Counter Terrorism Operations Training Facility. He has also served as a Correctional Officer, Patrol Deputy, Detective, and SWAT Team leader and trainer. As a Chief at the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center, he was a leader in training development and authored many programs currently in use by over 80 federal agencies nationwide. Mr. Lambraia is now the Owner and CEO of Phoenix RBT Solutions/UTM, which provides products and training to clients around the world. He has been featured on LETN TV and policeone.com several times as a subject matter expert on defensive tactics, firearms, and use of force. Mr. Lambraia has also served as a use of force expert witness in court cases involving law enforcement. Mr. Lambraia has an extensive background in martial arts and has trained professional fighters in mixed martial arts.

Approach

Similar to our nation's approach to terrorism after 9/11, this document focuses on prevention through deterrence, reducing common vulnerabilities, detecting warning signs, and limiting the consequences of an event if it does occur. It admittedly does so with recognition that no amount of reasonable security precautions can absolutely prevent a determined assailant from committing an act of violence at or near a school. Schools are not fortresses nor should they be. But we can and should be better prepared to prevent, respond to, and limit the consequences of the next act of violence at a school.

Much literature already exists on the topic of school security, violence in schools, and active shooter events. An array of government agencies, school districts, non-profits, and other members of the school

and security communities have created a repository of literature and knowledge related to this important field, spurred by the fundamental belief that the places in which our children learn and grow should be and could be safer. Sadly, as recent events – most notably those in Newtown, Connecticut, in December of 2012 – have shown, the challenge to prevent these senseless violent acts remains an urgent priority.

This document synthesizes and attempts to make accessible those resources formulated by trusted and proven sources from government (including from the Department of Homeland Security, Department of Education, and United States Secret Service), non-profits, and educational institutions to identify the types of security vulnerabilities that schools face, and then provide best practices for preventing and mitigating, as well as preparing for and responding to an act of violence, such as that involving an active shooter, in K-12 Schools. Therefore, it is not our desire to contradict many of the authoritative opinions on this important subject, and many schools already examining elements of security planning, risk mitigation, and response discussed in this document likely will find much of the content familiar. Nonetheless, it is our opinion that this document, in line with the goals of the National School Shield Initiative, offers new value to the school security field through its comprehensive, multi-source approach, in part by bringing together often-disparate sources into a single product. Additionally, we believe that on-site school assessments conducted by our expert team of career security professionals in recent weeks makes this document particularly valuable because it is informed by observations of what is going on in schools nationwide *right now*. This document is not intended to be a final customized product or a “one-size-fits-all” approach that will work for every school. It *is* a tool that we hope will spur a thought process on the part of school and community leaders and assist them in beginning to identify their particular vulnerabilities and moving towards developing solutions to close those gaps.

This document does discuss the recent emergence of a national conversation on the potential role of trained, armed individuals in schools as a part of that solution. Like any security measure that a school has the option to employ, whether or not this is a proper choice for a school depends on that particular school’s unique security needs and vulnerabilities, available resources, and any applicable local or state laws. For some schools, an armed law enforcement officer in the form of a School Resource Officer may be part of the answer. In others, highly-trained private security or carefully chosen and trained school staff may be ideal, while in others, an armed individual may not be an acceptable approach but better access controls, surveillance, or response plans would be. The goal of this document is not to prescribe what one solution or mix of solutions is best in a particular case; instead, it is to provide a basis upon which school officials, community leaders, parents, and local law enforcement can work together to begin the discussion about the types of resources available to reduce their vulnerabilities to an act of extreme violence at their school.

Document Organization

The information and guidelines presented below are organized based on synthesis of two prominent approaches to crisis management and security design approaches developed respectively by the U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, which we have synthesized with other resources in the field. The crisis management approach is based on the United States Department of Education’s suggested sequence of managing a crisis. The first layer of that approach is based on the concept of **Prevention and Mitigation**, which addresses what schools and school districts can do to reduce or eliminate risk to life and property. The second layer is based on the concept of **Preparedness**, which focuses on the process of planning for a worst-case scenario. The third layer is based on the concept of **Response**, which is devoted to the steps that parties should take during a crisis.

The fourth, and final layer is based on the concept of **Recovery**, which deals with how to restore the learning and teaching environment after a crisis.¹ Although an in-depth discussion of recovery from an event like that involving an active shooter is beyond the scope of this document, this topic is briefly discussed as an additional consideration in Layer Three to emphasize its importance in the overall emergency management process.

Unique Characteristics of Your School

The use of this document and the security methodologies contained herein should begin by asking the question: “What are my school’s unique physical, environmental, and cultural characteristics?” There may be certain elements of your school’s physical, cultural, and other environmental characteristics that will create individual school security vulnerabilities. On the other hand, these characteristics may be used to strengthen security. For example, a school’s landscaping may not only act as a buffer or perimeter to potential intruders but also may provide hiding or cover for students engaging in illicit activity. Being cognizant of these unique characteristics of your school will allow you to best apply the information and best practices contained herein.

It is also critical to remember that not all threats can be predicted. The absence of a known threat does not always mean that no risk exists. There is no simple solution to the problem of school security and the safety of our children. However, some future attacks may be preventable or mitigated if those responsible for security in schools know what preliminary questions to ask, what pre-incident indicators to look for in order to be able to intervene before an attack occurs, how to prepare to prevent or mitigate an attack, and how to respond when an attack does occur. This document will give you the tools and resources to identify the right questions to ask and begin the process of protecting your school against a violent individual or act.

Who to Involve

Identifying, coordinating with, and training the individuals that contribute to and are impacted by a school’s security is an essential and immediate step that school administrators must take in efforts to minimize the risk of violence to their students and staff. The U.S. Department of Education (“DOE”) recommends several “action steps” in preparing for the event of a crisis related to this concept of cooperation.² Key steps include:

- **Identify and involve stakeholders.** This is essential so as to gather feedback from stakeholders on the parts of crisis planning that pertain to them. This is likely to include, but is not limited to:
 - Families, with whom a school must communicate during/after an active threat situation;
 - Local emergency responders, with whom a school will need to work in a potential active threat situation;
 - City and county emergency management planners;
 - Health and social services provider agencies; and
 - School and other community resources.

- **Define roles and responsibilities.** That is, define what should happen, when, and *at whose direction*. DOE suggests involving as many staff as possible, so as to avoid unnecessarily

¹For more on the approach, see DOE, 2003, Section 1, p. 6-7

²Based on discussion beginning on Section 3, p. 3 of DOE, 2003

overburdening any given individual. DOE defines the following as essential roles, for each of which both primary and backup individuals should be chosen:

- School commander [e.g., Principal, Vice-principal];
- Liaison to emergency responders [e.g., school security officer];
- Caregivers to students [e.g., teachers, counselors];
- Security officers [e.g., School Resource Officer (SRO), private security personnel];
- Medical staff [e.g., school nurse];
- Spokesperson [e.g., communications administrator].

While the vulnerabilities and security requirements of individual schools will vary, what will remain constant is the necessity to involve key personnel and stakeholders on an ongoing basis in order to effectively identify vulnerabilities and implement security plans and procedures.

LAYER ONE – PREVENTION AND MITIGATION

Definitions as used in this section:³

- Prevention is the action schools take to decrease the likelihood that an event or crisis will occur.
- Mitigation is the action schools take to eliminate or reduce the loss of life and property damage related to an event or crisis, particularly those events or crises that cannot be prevented.

Overview

Most often, the first stage in any violent attack on a school occurs not within the confines of the school itself. Rather, the first stage of an attack can happen far from school grounds, and involves an individual or a group of individuals' decision to mount an attack on a school or on people at a school. Extensive studies of active shooter threat incidents at schools have consistently shown that these attacks on schools are very rarely impulsive acts. Rather, the overwhelming majority are premeditated and frequently involve detailed planning, sometimes weeks in advance.⁴

Once an individual decides to mount an attack, they must also physically succeed in overcoming early potential obstacles to that attack. For example, an individual who attempts to mount an attack in the cafeteria of their school must (1) acquire the weapons for that attack, (2) transport those weapons from their original point to the school grounds, (3) bypass any exterior security and move them across the peripheral school grounds, and (4) finally, carry those weapons into the school building and ultimately the cafeteria itself.

As shown above, the first stage of any attack involves both mental (i.e., planning) and physical (i.e., implementing) steps that must be taken prior to the point at which harm is inflicted on people at a school. Because stopping an attacker before they carry their weapons into the school or mitigating their effect if they do is the surest way to keep those at a school safe, the measures that comprise this initial layer of school security serve as an important factor in minimizing risk to a school and its occupants. Part of this strategy relies on establishing and enhancing a culture of awareness and designing procedures for identifying and dealing with potential threats so as to identify those who may be planning an attack before they take action. This includes developing a knowledge of commonly identified 'pre-incident indicators' that historical inquiry of such events suggests may be helpful in identifying and interdicting potential assailants before they engage in violence. Another part is physical, involving the construction, installation, and maintenance of appropriate physical security barriers beginning with the outermost perimeter of school grounds, extending to the exterior of the school building, and continuing through the interior of the school itself. Finally, a third part is comprised of establishing appropriate daily procedures that complement various components of a school's physical infrastructure or, where that physical infrastructure is lacking, compensate for that potential gap in security.

While none of these parts either independently or jointly are guaranteed to prevent a tragedy from occurring, proper action in addressing each of these areas of concern has the potential to significantly

³ Adapted from: DOE, 2010, p. 7

⁴ See Vossekul, et al, p. 22 - 24

increase both the quantity and effectiveness of obstacles that an attacker must bypass before they can realize their violent aims, or can at least significantly limit the impact of those aims.

The subsections outlined in this discussion are intended to encourage and guide school administrators to consider methods that will enhance this prevention- and mitigation-oriented layer of security at their facility. In doing so, they can increase the means by which they deter and prevent violent assailants from taking action; detect and delay those actions if they are taken; and ultimately mitigate and defend against an assailant in a school setting. We will approach this by first, offering an **Overview and Common Vulnerabilities** section that touches on the importance of various aspects of school security and discusses, when applicable, common vulnerabilities that have been identified both in numerous prior studies of school security and also in our own experts' security assessments of schools across geographic regions. Then, it will introduce a set of **Best Practices** designed to be broadly applicable to a diverse set of schools and ultimately tailored by school administrators to fit their individual facility. Finally, it will provide a series of other considerations crafted to assist school administrators in furthering their thinking about specific aspects of their school's security framework.

Prevention and Mitigation: School Climate, Environmental Awareness, and Threat Identification

Some of the most horrific active shooter events in United States history, such as those at Columbine High School in 1999, Virginia Tech University in 2007, and Sandy Hook Elementary in 2012, might carry with them descriptions such as “unfathomable,” “beyond belief,” and “impossible to understand.” The pain and shock that such events caused for the communities that they affected – and the country at large – can rightly be described as such. However, school officials and others who care about the safety of our schools should not conclude that it is impossible to develop knowledge regarding the processes that lead an individual or individuals to embark on such a tragic path. According to a joint report produced by the United States Secret Service and the U.S. Department of Education, “targeted violence is the end result of an understandable, and oftentimes discernable, process of thinking and behavior.”⁵ Furthermore, the FBI report, “The School Shooter: A Threat Assessment Perspective,” states:

In general, people do not switch instantly from nonviolence to violence. Nonviolent people do not “snap” or decide on the spur of the moment to meet a problem by using violence. Instead, the path toward violence is an evolutionary one, with signposts along the way. A threat is one observable behavior; others may be brooding about frustration or disappointment, fantasies of destruction or revenge, in conversations, writings, drawings, and other actions.⁶

Indeed, initial reports of the very recent case of a University of Central Florida student who pulled a fire alarm and then confronted his roommate with a firearm – potentially as the beginning of a larger attack on students in his dorm - was found, after taking his own life, to have left writings indicating he had been planning an attack and to have been stockpiling weapons and homemade bombs in preparation of the attack.⁷

⁵ Fein, et al, p. 30

⁶ O'Toole, p. 7

⁷ Postal

Therefore, the history of active threat situations at schools – and in particular active shooter situations – strongly indicates that such attacks are not spontaneous and without warning, but rather often are preceded by certain behavioral indicators on the part of the attacker that, if identified in time, can have important consequences in preventing the sort of tragedies that have gripped national consciousness in recent times. Being cognizant of these indicators should not be seen as a mindset maintained by only a few designated individuals; rather, efforts should be made to instill in the school as a whole – including students and teachers – a culture of awareness and a willingness to reach out to the appropriate authorities when certain risk factors in an individual or individuals are observed. With the right knowledge and training, school administrators, staff, teachers, and even students, can create an invisible but very real layer of security through awareness of these “signposts” and, subsequently, their reporting to the appropriate individuals.

As such, this section is primarily dedicated to addressing the means that schools can take to prevent or detect emerging threats through four steps:

- 1) Establishing a school climate or culture that minimizes the risk of attack by addressing certain conditions (such as bullying) that have frequently been associated with attackers’ decisions to embark on a path of violence;
- 2) Cultivating a school climate or culture that facilitates positive relationships between adults and students and encourages the sharing or reporting of these pre-incident indicators by any and all who observe them;
- 3) Disseminating knowledge of common “signposts” or pre-incident indicators that enable the members of a school community to identify behaviors on the part of individuals that may be considering or planning an act of violence;
- 4) Identifying and gathering key personnel and developing procedures to consistently and effectively respond to these reports and observations.

We should note that this is in line with the recent recommendations of the Sandy Hook Advisory Commission’s Interim Report of Findings, which suggests “establishing a best practices guide for effective bullying and threat identification, prevention, and response to be made available to all schools.”⁸

In addition to the above components, this section will include discussion of the necessity of schools being cognizant of the larger environment in which they operate. Schools do not operate in a vacuum; the events that occur in their surrounding areas are of consequence in influencing the events that occur at the schools themselves, and may even directly spill over onto school property. Considerations of what is going on in the surrounding environment should factor in to decisions about the magnitude of resources that a school dedicates to security as well as how those resources are used.

Finally, a school must take steps to prevent and mitigate those events that are entirely unpredictable and even unfathomable. Using a phrase from the security field, this area of consideration can be summed up as follows: “Just because there is the absence of a threat does not mean there is no risk.” Many of the steps taken to address this broad component of security are addressed by physical security components and preparedness measures to be elaborated in sections later in the document.

⁸ Sandy Hook Advisory Commission, p. 14

School Climate: Minimizing Risk

In an ideal world, schools would be healthy, productive environments for all of their occupants. Unfortunately, schools suffer from problems of varying severity related to school climate and culture that history indicates may be significant in spurring an individual to engage in violence against others. One of the most frequently identified problems in schools in this regard is bullying. Undoubtedly, most children who experience bullying never engage in, let alone contemplate, violence against their peers or teachers at their school. Nonetheless, an extensive examination of incidents of ‘targeted school violence’⁹ from 1974 – 2000 by the United States Secret Service and the U.S. Department of Education showed that in 71 percent of cases of such attacks, “the attackers felt persecuted, bullied, threatened, attacked, or injured by others prior to the incident.”¹⁰ The report continues:

In several cases, individual attackers had experienced bullying and harassment that was long-standing and severe. In some of these cases the experience of being bullied seemed to have a significant impact on the attacker and appeared to have been a factor in his decision to mount an attack at the school.¹¹

A report by the FBI, “The School Shooter: A Threat Assessment Perspective”, which aims to provide guidance for assessing the magnitude of threat for potential shooters at a school, dedicates a discussion to the potential importance in this process of “school dynamics” – which it defines as “patterns of behavior, thinking, beliefs, customs, traditions, roles and values that exist in a school’s culture”.¹² The report stresses that “assessors need to be aware of how a school’s dynamics are seen by students.”¹³ The FBI report includes the following factors as components of potential “warning signs” as related to school dynamics:¹⁴

- Student’s detachment from school, including other students, teachers, and school activities;
- Tolerance for disrespectful behavior, in that a school does little to prevent or punish disrespectful behavior between individual students or groups of students;
- Inequitable discipline, in that the use of discipline is or is perceived to be inequitably applied;
- Inflexible culture, in that official and unofficial patterns of behavior, values, and relationships among students, teachers, staff, and administrators are static, unyielding, and insensitive to changes in society or student/staff needs;
- Pecking order among students, in that certain groups of students are officially or unofficially given more prestige and respect than others.

Another organization, the Kentucky Center for School Safety (KYCSS) has conducted independent examinations of the culture and climate in 255 schools since 2003. KYCSS lists bullying and harassment as one of the top six common issues found affecting schools’ climate and culture, and writes the following on the subject:

⁹ Defined in the report as “any incident where (i) a current student or recent former student attacked someone at his or her school with lethal means (e.g., a gun or knife); and, (ii) where the student attacker purposefully chose his or her school as the location of the attack.” (See: Vossekul, et al, p. 7)

¹⁰ Vossekul, et al, p. 21

¹¹ Ibid., p. 21

¹² O’Toole, p. 13

¹³ Ibid., p. 13

¹⁴ Adapted from O’Toole, p. 22

Most schools, we have discovered, have well-defined school and district policies to address these behaviors but, nevertheless, they persist and, in some schools, seem to be growing. Exacerbating the problem in many schools now is the advancement of electronic forms of communication which are sometimes being used to bully and/or harass in an insidious and sometimes much more hurtful way than other forms.¹⁵

While this document does not argue that bullying is the primary instigator behind attacks at schools, or that even eliminating it completely would always prevent an attack from occurring, the literature provided by the above respected authorities strongly suggests that schools that actively build and maintain a proper climate for students, empower and train staff, and actively deter bullying behaviors between students can significantly impact their risk when it comes to school shootings.

School Climate: Sharing and Reporting

Schools can and should be continually proactive about addressing the issue of bullying and other school climate issues that may lead to the feeling of being “persecuted, bullied, threatened, attacked, or injured” that may contribute to an individual’s engaging in violence. Nevertheless, entirely eliminating the possibility that students will have those feelings or other negative experiences in a school setting is unrealistic, and the extreme measures that would be necessary to even attempt to do so could prove counterproductive. Therefore, a second important aspect of school climate is the extent to which it encourages communication and sharing of problems and concerns when they do arise as well as reporting of perceived threats.

The final report of the U.S. Secret Service and U.S. Department of Education’s Safe School Initiative, already discussed, listed ten “key” findings about school attacks that may have “implications for the development of strategies to address the problem of targeted school violence.”¹⁶ Of these findings, several are of direct consequence in whether or not a school fosters a climate as described above:¹⁷

- Prior to most incidents, other people knew about the attacker’s idea and/or plan to attack;
 - In 81 percent of incidents, at least one person had information that the attacker was thinking about or planning the school attack;
 - In 59 percent of incidents, *more than one* person had information about the attack before it occurred;
- Most attackers engaged in some behavior prior to the incident that caused others concern or indicated a need for help;
- In many cases, other students were involved in some capacity.

The immediate question for many after reading the above findings is: “If others knew about an attack before it occurred, why wasn’t the attack prevented?” The basis for that answer is perhaps partially found in another statistic from the Secret Service and Department of Education report: in 93 percent of these cases, the person who knew was a peer, such as a friend, schoolmate, or sibling, while in only two cases did an adult have information about an idea or plan to attack.¹⁸ In other words, while it was highly

¹⁵ Gateskill

¹⁶ Vossekui, et al, p. 31

¹⁷ Based on Vossekui, et al, p. 25-26

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 25

likely that for a given attack at least one other person knew about the idea or plan to attack, it was highly unlikely that that person was in a position of authority to garner the necessary resources to do something about it, because very rarely was that person an adult.

A continuing attempt to answer that question takes the form of another Secret Service and Department of Education jointly produced report, entitled, “Prior Knowledge of Potential School-Based Violence: Information students learn may prevent a targeted attack.” In this report, researchers attempted to discern why “bystanders” – that is, those with prior knowledge of an attack – acted the way they did in the run-up to an attack.¹⁹ One key finding of the report was as follows:

School climate affected whether bystanders came forward with information related to threats. Some bystanders reported that the school climate influenced their decisions to share information with the school staff regarding the threats. Bystanders who came forward with information commented that they were influenced by positive relations with one or more adults, teachers, or staff, and/or a feeling within the school that the information would be taken seriously and addressed appropriately. Similarly, students who displayed a reluctance to come forward indicated that they anticipated a negative response from the school had they shared information.²⁰

The Kentucky Center for School Safety also lists as its number one commonly found school climate/culture-related issue, “Lack of Teacher/Staff Connectivity With Students.”²¹ The KYCSS report further states:

Too often, we visit schools where a significant number of students indicate having a feeling of disconnection from all of the adults in the building. As a consequence of this feeling, they tell us, there is no staff member to whom they would turn if the need arose. These students, when probed, will indicate that they feel this way, in essence, because their perception is that there is an inconsistency of actions and/or a lack of caring and trust on the part of many of the staff members in their respective schools.²²

These findings strongly suggest that ensuring that a school’s climate and culture encourage positive and trusting relationships between students and staff can have a significant impact in evaluating possible threats, and if need be, preventing them from being carried out.

School Climate: Recommendations

The U.S. Secret Service and Department of Education publication, “Threat Assessment in Schools: A Guide to Managing Threatening Situations and to Creating Safe School Climates,” states:

Cultures and climates of safety, respect, and emotional support can help diminish the possibility of targeted violence in schools. Environments in which students, teachers and administrators

¹⁹ Pollack, et al, p. 4

²⁰ Ibid., p. 7

²¹ Gateskill

²² Ibid.

pay attention to students' social and emotional needs as well as their academic needs will have fewer situations that require formal threat assessments.²³

The Secret Service, U.S. Department of Education, Kentucky Center for School Safety, and other organizations have compiled a wealth of information on the overarching principles that school officials should maintain in establishing a healthy school climate as well as many of the concrete steps they can take in that pursuit. School officials would be wise to consult these documents in full. For the purposes of this document, we have included a selection of goals and recommendations that we hope can serve as a starting point in this continual process:²⁴

- Cultures and climates of safety should be ones in which teachers and administrators pay attention to students' social and emotional needs as well as their academic needs;
- A culture of safety should create "shame free zones" in which daily teasing and bullying is not accepted as a normal part of the adolescent culture;
- School administrators and teachers should strongly and consistently enforce all rules and policies that the school and/or district have governing bullying/harassment;
- Educators have long known that it is important for students to develop healthy relationships with their peers at school; educators should recognize that it may be just as important for students to feel a definite sense of connection to (at least some members of) the school's staff;
- In creating a climate of safety, schools should aim to ensure that students have a positive connection to at least one adult in authority. Each student should feel that there is an adult to whom he or she can turn for support and advice if things get tough, and with whom that student can share his or her concerns openly without fear of shame or reprisal;
- Schools should emphasize personal contact and connection between school officials and students and should take steps to identify and work with students who have few perceptible connections to the school;
- Schools should consider the idea that "silence is far from golden." Schools should make efforts to break the "Code of Silence" pervasive in many schools, which has the effect of forcing students to handle their pain and problems on their own, without the benefit of adult support, and also suggests to the student that they should not bring any concerns that he or she may have about a peer's behavior to the attention of responsible adults;
- Law enforcement officers and educators should convey clearly to students that merely reporting information about potential threats will not subject the student to negative consequences and/or liability.

For more information on this subject, please refer to:

- Kentucky Center for School Safety: Common Issues Found in Safe School Assessments
- Secret Service / Department of Education: Threat Assessment in Schools: A Guide to Managing Threatening Situations and to Creating Safe School Climates
- Secret Service/Department of Education: Prior Knowledge of Potential School-Based Violence: Information Students Learn May Prevent a Targeted Attack

²³ Fein, et al, p. 6

²⁴ Goals and recommendations selected/adapted from or based upon: Fein, et al, p. 11-13; Gateskill, p. 2-3; Pollack, et al, p. 8

- Secret Service / Department of Education: The Final Report and Findings of the Safe School Initiative: Implications for the Prevention of School Attacks in the United States

Threat Assessment/Behavioral Intervention Teams

As already discussed in detail in this document, many prior active shooter incidents in schools involved individuals who exhibited behaviors that raised the attention of others prior to the act being committed. However, these “red-flags”²⁵ may not provide the warning and possible prevention of an active shooter event if (1) an environment which is conducive to reporting these indicators does not exist, (2) they are not reported to a team of professionals capable of understanding their implications, and (3) they are not considered in the broader context of the general patterns and trends of the individual’s overall behavior or misconduct.

Schools should have a dedicated threat assessment team or Behavioral Intervention Team (BIT) that meets at a minimum once every two weeks and preferably weekly. These teams should employ a multi-disciplinary approach to not only assess existing threats but also focus on preventing the threat or crisis from occurring. According to the National Behavioral Intervention Team Association, the role of these teams is described as follows:

While effective threat assessment techniques are a part of BIT function, these teams focus on a caring and preventive approach that incorporates the school, the district, community resources and the family to support the student. Teams intervene with specialized knowledge to identify the earliest signs of potential crisis rather than waiting for clear signs of an impending threat and reacting. Teams develop success plans for students that may include disability support, treatment requirements, and academic assistance. BIT can be coordinated within or across districts and can include appropriate community agencies where available and required.

The team tracks “red flags” over time, detecting patterns, trends, and disturbances in individual or group behavior. The team receives reports of disruptive, problematic or concerning behavior or misconduct (from co-workers, community members, friends, colleagues, etc.), conducts an investigation, performs a threat assessment, and determines the best mechanisms for support, intervention, warning/notification and response. The team then deploys its resources and resources of the community and coordinates follow-up.²⁶

The key players on such a team might include a mix of the following:²⁷

- Designated chair(s);
- Case managers;
- District superintendents and/or asst. superintendents;
- School guidance counselors;
- School psychologists/counseling directors;
- District counseling coordinators;
- School health professionals (e.g., school nurse, PA, etc.);

²⁵ NABITA

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

- School/district disability service director/coordinator;
- School principal;
- Assistant principal responsible for student conduct and/or discipline;
- [School Resource Officer];
- [School security officer];
- District legal counsel;
- School/district faculty representative;
- District media relations/public relations coordinator;
- School/district PTA representative;
- Academic affairs professionals and faculty;
- Human resources or teachers' union representative;
- District Employee Assistance Program (EAP) coordinator;²⁸
- Other offices designated as members of the BIT.

For more information on this subject, please refer to:

- National Association of School Psychologists: [*Threat Assessment: Predicting and Preventing School Violence*](#)
- National Center for Higher Education Risk Management: [*2009 Whitepaper – 2nd Generation Behavioral Intervention Best Practices*](#)

Awareness: Pre-Incident Indicators

Along with establishing and working to foster a culture and climate of safety, openness, and respect, a school and its inhabitants should be cognizant of certain behavioral signs – commonly termed “pre-incident indicators” – that an individual might exhibit prior to launching an attack. Instinct may spur some people to approach the task of identifying individuals that may be at risk for planning and launching an attack by identifying certain common characteristics or developing a sort of “profile” of potential attackers; this approach is wrong. Rather, authoritative sources strongly suggest that “rather than trying to determine the ‘type’ of student who may engage in targeted school violence, an inquiry should focus instead on a student’s *behaviors and communications* to determine if that student appears to be planning or preparing for an attack.”²⁹

The United States Secret Service, Department of Education, and Federal Bureau of Investigation all have conducted extensive investigations that support this view. The very first key finding of the Secret Service and Department of Education Safe School Initiative (SSI), states: “there is no accurate or useful ‘profile’ of students who engaged in targeted school violence.” Indeed, the SSI report found that attackers ranged across categories in age, racial/ethnic background, family situation, academic performance, social standing/relationships, and disciplinary history.³⁰ Likewise, the FBI describes efforts to develop a coherent profile as “shortsighted, even dangerous” and expresses concern that such discussion, often

²⁸ Per NABITA: “many corporations use EAP (Employee Assistance Programs) for employees who are experiencing psychological or coping problems.” This would be applicable if the team’s responsibilities are extended to employee concerns.

²⁹ Vossekul, et al, p. 34

³⁰ See Vossekul, et al, p. 19-20, 34

perpetuated by the media, “can end up unfairly labeling many nonviolent students as potentially dangerous or even lethal.”³¹

The appropriate course of action is to raise awareness of types of behaviors and communications that a student of any type might display before engaging in a violent or potentially deadly act. Once again, it is important to reemphasize findings across agencies that individuals do not simply “snap” – i.e., these acts are typically not sudden, impulsive, or random acts of violence. Rather, previous attacks “appeared to be the end result of a comprehensible process of thinking and behavior – behavior that typically begins with an idea, progresses to the development of a plan, moves on to securing the means to carry out the plan, and culminates in an attack.”³² As such, being aware of how those behaviors and thoughts may be exhibited can expand the opportunity for schools to prevent those ideas and plans from being carried out.

Pre-Incident Indicators: Students

Behaviors and communications that qualify as pre-incident indicators vary. Potential attackers may explicitly lay out their thoughts or plan to others or via different mediums of expression; others may give more subtle indications that they are thinking of or planning to harm themselves and others. As the FBI puts it, “a threat is one observable behavior; others may be brooding about frustration or disappointment, fantasies of destruction or revenge, in conversations, writings, drawings and other actions.”³³

Before discussing more specific pre-incident indicators, it is also important to mention that a student that exhibits a pre-incident indicator or even multiple pre-incident indicators does not automatically pose a threat to a school and its inhabitants. Rather, recognition and reporting of these indicators to an appropriate party such as the school threat assessment team can serve as the impetus for the initiation of what the Secret Service, Department of Education, FBI and other authorities describe as a “threat assessment” process, which will be discussed in more detail below. Only then should the appropriate stakeholders take action to determine the authenticity and severity of a potential threat. Still, being knowledgeable about patterns evident in the behavior of past offenders can help stakeholders – including students – build a sound awareness upon which they can increase the likelihood of noticing, and subsequently reporting, signs of trouble.

The following selected findings from the Secret Service / DOE Safe School Initiative may shed light on what might and what might not be a common pre-incident indicator:³⁴

- Most attackers engaged in some behavior, prior to the incident, that caused others concern or indicated a need for help;
- Most attackers had difficulty coping with significant losses or personal failures. Many had considered or attempted suicide;
- Most attackers had access to and had used weapons prior to the attack.

³¹ O’Toole, p. 2

³² Fein, et al, p. 18

³³ O’Toole, p. 7

³⁴ Vossekul, et al, p. 34 – 36

The Secret Service / DOE Threat Assessment in Schools Guide also includes the following behaviors as raising concern about potential violence.³⁵

- Ideas or plans about injuring him/herself or attacking a school or persons at a school;
- Communications or writings that suggest that the student has an unusual or worrisome interest in school attacks;
- Comments that express or imply the student is considering mounting an attack at school;
- Recent weapon-seeking behavior, especially if weapon-seeking is linked to ideas about attack or expressions about interest in attack;
- Communications or writings suggesting the student condones or is considering violence to redress a grievance or solve a problem; and
- Rehearsals of attacks or ambushes.

Additionally, the FBI says that “one of the most important clues that may precede an adolescent’s violent act” is something it terms “leakage.” According to this definition, a version of leakage occurs when:

a student intentionally or unintentionally reveals clues to feelings, thoughts, fantasies, attitudes, or intentions that may signal an impending violent act. These clues can take the form of subtle threats, boasts, innuendos, predictions, or ultimatums. They may be spoken or conveyed in stories, diary entries, essays, poems, letters, songs, drawings, doodles, tattoos, or videos.³⁶

The above highlights two important points. One is that the focus is clearly on certain types of behavior and communications, rather than on the qualities of a particular student. Two is that concerning behaviors occur on a wide range of levels, from subtle indicators to explicit threats. That does not mean that a certain type should be seriously addressed while another ignored; it is entirely possible that in one situation a subtle behavior masks a very real threat, whereas in the other what seems like an explicit threat is not intended to ever be carried out. Nevertheless, as the FBI states, “all threats are NOT created equal... However, all threats should be assessed in a timely manner and decisions regarding how they are handled must be done quickly.”³⁷ This further supports the need for the establishment and adherence to a well-developed threat assessment process.

One additional consideration not fully addressed in the reports cited above is the way in which technological advances and the rise of social media have expanded the arena in which students express themselves and communicate with one another. For many adolescents, these new platforms do not merely supplement traditional mediums of communication, but are often the primary means through which they communicate. Therefore, it is important that adults with a stake in school security adapt to this changing landscape. Students increasingly, and often anonymously, can turn to the Internet to research past attacks or methods of obtaining or constructing weapons, or to communicate with others with shared interests. Furthermore, the frequency with which student’s threats have been made via platforms such as Facebook or Twitter show that this is neither a fad nor a future development for which school officials have time to prepare; it is happening now and requires immediate and continuing

³⁵ Fein, et al, p. 50

³⁶ O’Toole, p. 16

³⁷ Ibid., p. 5

attention. The ability to anonymously make threats via the Internet and social media also poses a new challenge in identifying the source of threats once known in addition to assessing their viability. When a serious but anonymous threat presents itself, school officials and local law enforcement may need to employ technical assistance along with traditional investigative techniques to determine the source of the threat.

In conclusion, this section should by no means be taken as an exhaustive or complete list of what may qualify as a pre-incident indicator. It merely recaps what some of the most authoritative voices on preventing violent attacks as well as experts on our educational system as a whole have identified as historical trends of past offenders. As such, it is intended to introduce a line of thinking and provide some common examples to stakeholders in school security measures. Stakeholders should not dismiss the value of old-fashioned intuition, which may not directly conform to any of the above situations. As the Secret Service and Department of Education have pointed out, while in some cases members of a school were aware of an individual's detailed idea or plan of attack, others merely "knew something 'big' or 'bad' was going to happen."³⁸

Pre-Incident Indicators: Adults

In the discussion so far, there has been an implicit and sometimes explicit focus on students in particular as the most important group in this discussion – at least as far as posing a potential threat to fellow students or teachers. However, history has unfortunately shown that adults are also capable of posing threats to the occupants of a school. To the victims of an attack and those surrounding them, it hardly matters whether a fellow student or an adult committed the act; the more important thing is that a potential offender – regardless of age – is identified and stopped before they commit the act. While the conditions and motives that lead an adult to commit a violent act at a school typically may differ from those of a student, it is also believed that an adult, such as an employee, that commits a violent act does not "snap" but rather displays behavioral indicators over time that lead up to the event.³⁹ The Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) report, "Active Shooter: How to Respond," provides guidance on recognizing potential workplace violence in adults. Like the section on student pre-incident indicators above, DHS cautions, "this list of behaviors is not comprehensive, nor is it intended as a mechanism for diagnosing violent tendencies." Rather, this document recommends that, as for students, schools have a process in place to assess potential threats and, when necessary, to do so in coordination with local law enforcement and other external stakeholders. The following are selected "potentially violent" behaviors by employees:⁴⁰

- Increased use of alcohol and/or illegal drugs;
- Unexplained increase in absenteeism; vague physical complaints;
- Noticeable decrease in attention to appearance and hygiene;
- Depression/withdrawal;
- Noticeably unstable, emotional responses;
- Suicidal: comments about "putting things in order";
- Talk of previous incidents of violence;
- Empathy with individuals committing violence;

³⁸ Vossekul, et al, p. 25

³⁹ DHS, 2008, p. 10

⁴⁰ Selected from DHS, 2008, p. 10

- Increase in unsolicited comments about firearms, other dangerous weapons and violent crimes.

These points underscore that, while it is essential to pay attention to the behavior of students at a school, stakeholders should not sacrifice paying attention to the adults – including administrators, teachers, other staff, and parents – in being cognizant of pre-incident indicators.

It is also recommended that schools perform a pre-employment background check and periodic re-checks on all employees. This recommendation was recently echoed by the Sandy Hook Advisory Commission, which recommended “requiring background screening for all staff in schools.”⁴¹ The following list includes the types of information school officials should consult as part of a pre-employment background check within the laws governing access and use for making informed hiring decisions. It is also recommended that schools conduct a periodic background check on all employees every three years.

- Former employment data;
- DMV records;
- Residential address history verification;
- Credit check;
- Criminal records check;
- Education verification;
- Civil history;
- National wants and warrants;
- Social security verification;
- Drug testing;
- Finger print screening.

If a more in-depth pre-employment background screening is desired, it is recommended that the school contact a local private investigator.

Responding to Potential Threats: The “Threat Assessment” Process

As described above, there is compelling evidence that a school’s climate and culture can lead to important gains in (1) preventing students from contemplating violence in the first place, but also in (2) ensuring that students, if they observe possible or evolving threats, feel comfortable, and indeed, obligated, to report them to an adult and that, in turn, this information is provided to the school’s threat assessment team or Behavioral Intervention Team. The above section on pre-incident indicators further supports the contention that making students and staff cognizant of telltale behaviors often associated with the lead up to an attack can help in this process.

We should note that school officials may also want to consider establishing other channels and mechanisms to report threats and concerns in order to strengthen this process. While cultivating healthy student and staff relationships cannot be overemphasized in this regard, it is possible that students in certain circumstances still may feel uncomfortable raising concerns directly with an adult. Therefore, schools may benefit from instituting tools, such as anonymous tip lines, so that students feel they have an option they are comfortable with using if they feel the need to report a concern. It is worth

⁴¹ Sandy Hook Advisory Commission, p. 14

examining what options may exist that would be familiar to today's adolescents, including online anonymous comment mechanisms or anonymous text message systems.

However, all of these steps are for naught if the school does not respond to reports or observations of potential threats in an appropriate, timely, fair, and effective manner. Not only will failure to do so potentially put the school at immediate risk if a real threat goes unaddressed, but also can quickly undermine the foundations of a positive school climate if students or staff do not feel that their concerns are acted upon or taken seriously. Indeed, the Secret Service and Department of Education Bystander Report points to "a feeling within the school that the information [reported] would be taken seriously and addressed appropriately" as one factor that led individuals to share concerns with an adult.⁴² Conversely, "students who displayed a reluctance to come forward indicated that they anticipated a negative response from the school had they shared information."⁴³

The United States Secret Service, Department of Education, and Federal Bureau of Investigation all recommend that schools develop and adhere to a well thought out "threat assessment" process to maximize the chance that tips about or indicators of potential violence are dealt with in an appropriate and timely manner. The FBI describes the goal of threat assessment as follows:

Threat assessment seeks to make an informed judgment on two questions: how credible and serious is the threat itself? And to what extent does the threat[ening person] appear to have the resources, intent, and motivation to carry out the threat?⁴⁴

The Secret Service and Department of Education furthermore outline the components of a threat assessment as follows:

In a situation that becomes the focus of a threat assessment inquiry or investigation, appropriate authorities gather information, evaluate facts, and make a determination as to whether a given student [or adult] *poses* a threat of violence to a target. If an inquiry indicates that there is a risk of violence in a specific situation, authorities conducting the threat assessment collaborate with others to develop and implement a plan to manage or reduce the threat posed by the student in that situation.⁴⁵

It would be redundant in this document to elaborate on every key component or important step that a well-crafted threat assessment should include; the Secret Service and Department of Education Guide, "Threat Assessment in Schools," ("the Guide") is of particular superiority in this regard and could be repeated verbatim here. It is highly recommended that critical stakeholders closely consult this document in establishing, altering, or maintaining their school's threat assessment process. However, the Guide suggests that the following six key overarching principles should guide the threat assessment process:⁴⁶

⁴² Pollack, et al, p. 7

⁴³ Ibid., p. 7

⁴⁴ O'Toole, p. 5

⁴⁵ Fein, p. 29

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 29

- Targeted violence is the end result of an understandable, and oftentimes discernable, process of thinking and behavior;
- Targeted violence stems from an interaction among the individual, the situation, the setting, and the target;
- An investigative, skeptical, inquisitive mindset is critical to successful threat assessment;
- Effective threat assessment is based upon facts, rather than on characteristics or “traits;”
- An “integrated systems approach” should guide threat assessment inquiries and investigations;
- The central question in a threat assessment inquiry or investigation is whether a student *poses* a threat, not whether the student has *made* a threat.

The Guide also includes discussions about establishing the authority to conduct inquiries and investigations, issues regarding information-sharing in that process, legal considerations, and the skills and training valuable to threat assessment teams and processes. Further chapters discuss in detail the important steps of a threat assessment process as well as guidance on managing a threatening situation if it has been established.

For more information on this subject, please refer to:

- FBI: A School Shooter: A Threat Assessment Perspective
- US Secret Service: Threat Assessment in Schools: A Guide to Managing Threatening Situation and Creating Safe School Climates

Unique Threats in Context of the Surrounding Community

Schools do not operate in a vacuum; they are affected not only by the trends influencing events within their confines, but also by the events that occur in the surrounding area and community. As such, the prevention and mitigation aspect of security should look beyond those individuals, mainly students, teachers, and staff, that make up the bulk of its population on a given day. Just as school officials should be cognizant of what is happening among both adolescents and adults on a daily basis and should be prepared to assess potential threats as they arise, they should also understand unique factors in the surrounding community that could create risk for a school’s occupants. For example, a school located in an area known for a prevalence of gang activity, or located close to a high-profile site such as a government building that might be at increased risk of targeting, could fall victim to violence that is not immediately directed at it but nevertheless spills onto its grounds.

Unpredictable Threats

The discussion thus far has attempted to shine light on the steps a school can take to create an invisible layer of security based on a healthy climate and culture that (1) reduces the factors that may lead one to violence and (2) increases the likelihood that individuals contemplating violence can be identified and stopped prior to taking action. Unfortunately, there are instances of violence that are beyond the realm of predictability; the horrendous actions of the gunman at Sandy Hook Elementary prove this point. Threats by adults entirely external to the school community may be the most difficult to detect but have also been the outlier in the record of previous incidents or threats of extreme violence at schools. In the wake of Newtown, the possibility of such a threat cannot be discounted but, if detected in advance, it is likely to come to light through different sources such as law enforcement encounters or psychiatric care than through the direct observation of pre-incident indicators at the school itself, by the school community, or via the threat assessment process described above.

Furthermore, the above discussion on climate, culture, and threat assessment procedures focuses on ideas and methods that are inherently subjective in parts and ultimately imperfect; schools should be cognizant that even the healthiest of climates and most honed threat assessment processes may fail to identify every single potential threat. As such, the remainder of this document deals with the steps that schools can take to identify weaknesses and gaps, mitigate and prevent such violence through physical security measures, undertake the necessary process and training steps to be prepared for such acts, and ultimately respond to an active event if it, unfortunately, becomes real.

Prevention and Mitigation: Physical Security Measures

Physical measures should by no means be the sole contributor to a school's security system nor can any reasonable physical security measure in a school environment absolutely prevent an individual intent on violence from doing harm. However, the construction and design, add-ons, and other physical tools can significantly enhance a school's security posture by both deterring potential offenders from taking action in the first place and, if they do take action, detect their presence and movement, delay their progress, limit their access, more quickly trigger a law enforcement response, and defend against their violent behavior. Proper physical tools should complement and enhance non-physical security policies and procedures and should not be viewed separately from these. Indeed, relying on overbearing physical measures in a stand-alone manner may have deleterious effects on school atmosphere, ironically creating conditions prone to greater violence.⁴⁷ Choosing what physical tools to employ must also be based on each school's unique assessment of their particular threats/hazards, gaps and vulnerabilities given their environmental circumstances, human resources, protocols, and procedures. One standard school of thought for minimizing a facility's physical susceptibility to attack and other undesired behavior is known as Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED). CPTED is based on three strategies, each of which can be useful for school administrators in considering their goals in developing exterior physical security measures:⁴⁸

- **Territoriality** – expressing ownership and defining clear borders through the use and maintenance of buildings, fences, pavement, signs, and landscaping;
- **Natural surveillance** – the physical ability to see what's going on in and around your school, which can be either enhanced or obstructed depending on placement of physical features like walls, shrubs, vehicles, signs, locations of certain activities, and gatherings of people;
- **Access control** - the ability to decide who gets in and out of your school, often through the judicious placement of entrances, exits, fencing, landscaping, and lighting.

According to the Department of Homeland Security, asking questions about territoriality, natural surveillance, and access control can lead to solutions that:⁴⁹

- Increase the [perpetrator's] effort to commit crime or terrorism [or, in this case, an active shooter event];
- Increase the risks [for the perpetrator] associated with such actions;
- Reduce the rewards [for the perpetrator] associated with such actions;
- Remove the excuses as to why people do not comply with the rules or behave inappropriately.

⁴⁷ FEMA, 2012, section 2, p. 34

⁴⁸ Adapted and combined from, FEMA, 2012, Section 2, p. 18 and Schneider, *CPTED 101*

⁴⁹ FEMA, 2012, Section 2, p. 19

One benefit of approaching security through a CPTED lens is that CPTED principles can be applied in a variety of scenarios, including at existing facilities. They also can involve highly cost-effective solutions to security, which is relevant given the limited resources many schools have in their efforts to create a safer environment at their facilities.⁵⁰

The Department of Homeland Security recommends designing secure facilities on the basis of establishing concentric “layers of defense” around the valued asset – in this case, a school and its occupants.⁵¹ These layers begin with an outer perimeter and move inward towards the interior of the school building itself. According to DHS, the “layers are mutually independent and designed to reduce the effectiveness of an attack by attrition, i.e., each layer is designed to delay and disable the attack as much as possible.” This concept is termed **protection-in-depth**, and is illustrated by Figure 1 below:

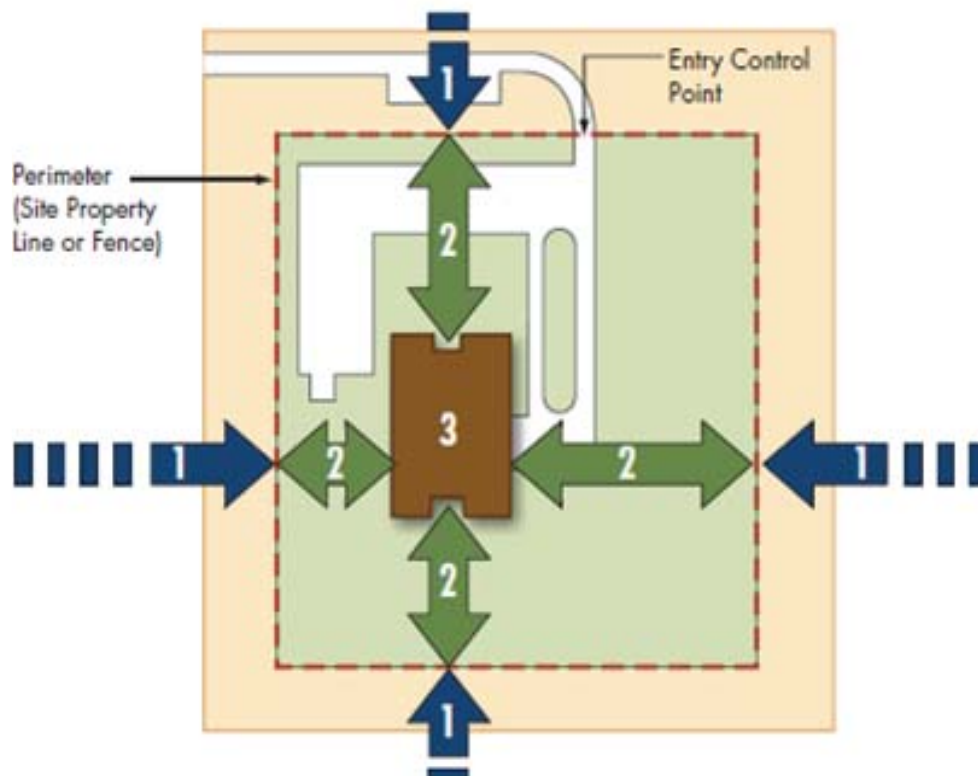


Figure 1: Protection-in-depth Concept. Adapted from FEMA 428/Buildings and Infrastructure Protections Series-07

⁵⁰ FEMA, 2012, Section 2, p. 19

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 22

Outermost Exterior and Perimeter Security

Fencing and Gates: Overview and Common Vulnerabilities

Fencing and gates should be considered the outermost physical component of security for schools – both the first physical and the first psychological barrier that a violent individual must overcome. Fences and gates serve multiple purposes, from establishing clear territoriality as outlined in CPTED strategies to making it physically difficult to enter a school’s premises without entering through designated, controlled entrances, hence enhancing access control. Fences can also play an important role in establishing a secure perimeter in the event of an active threat situation, which is crucial both in (1) denying suspects easy escape routes and (2) in keeping concerned parents and other members of the community at a distance so as to avoid their interfering with efforts to neutralize the threat and assist those in need. Since activities like recess and gym classes frequently occur outside of the main school building, perimeter fencing or other perimeter demarcation like hedges are also the only physical impediment that might be employed to protect the outdoors areas of the school.

Both in school assessments conducted specifically for the purposes of this document and in previous studies of individual school security systems, schools were found to be without perimeter fencing or other delineations indicating the boundaries of school property, or had fences that were dilapidated or ineffective. (see Figure 2)



Figure 2: Inadequate perimeter fence.

Not only do these conditions increase the possibility of unauthorized access to school property, but also indicate from a psychological standpoint that a given school is vulnerable, which diminishes deterrence and undermines the goal of establishing territoriality. In addition, our experts also found multiple sites with only a single entry/exit route to the school from public roads, which creates a single point vulnerability if that entry/exit is impassable or otherwise obstructed. (see Figure 3)



Figure 3: Red circle demarcates single point entry/exit into school property.

Fencing and Gates: Best Practices

Fencing is not the end-all-be-all of school security or even perimeter security. However, certain factors – such as fence location, height, type, and maintenance, can maximize returns on security if used properly. Choice and placement of fencing should balance priorities of denying access while also allowing for maximum surveillance of surrounding areas from inside of school grounds. For example, a ten foot-high concrete wall may do an excellent job of denying access other than through designated entry points, but may increase a school’s vulnerability in other ways by providing concealment of suspicious activity that can’t be viewed from inside such a wall. As such, best practices for fencing include:⁵²

- Install fencing that denies climbing holds as well as opportunities to bypass underneath;
- Carefully choose materials for fences and landscaping that provide opportunities for natural surveillance and access control;
- Use fencing material that clearly demonstrates territorial ownership;

⁵² Best practices based in part on Texas State University, Chapter 5, p.5

- Fencing should be free of any vegetation. Bushes, trees, containers, tanks, or any object that might provide a hiding place should be removed from the proximity of the fence. Eliminating places to hide can discourage a person from crawling under, climbing over, or cutting through the fence. (see Figure 4)



Figure 4: Example of a school fence. Source: Internet.

Because it is necessary to provide efficient points of access for students, staff, visitors, and service providers via personal vehicles, buses, or by foot, gates or other exterior access points must accompany exterior security features like fences.

According to the Department of Homeland Security:

The objective of the access point is to prevent unauthorized access, while at the same time controlling the rate of entry for vehicles and pedestrians. An access point is a designated area for authorized school building users, such as employees, visitors, and service providers. Access points along the defended perimeter are commonly shared between the first and second layers of defense, providing observation of approach, controlled entry, and queuing areas...Although the access itself is from a public roadway, these site features are within the site property line and from part of the first defense layer.⁵³

The nature of such access points depends on a particular school's deemed level of risk; in high-risk schools, an entry control point or a manned guard building with corresponding levels of screening and a sturdy gate may be ideal; in others, active monitoring at exterior entry points may be deemed unnecessary, impractical, or counterproductive. A third option is to allow free entry and exit during

⁵³ FEMA, 2012, Chapter 2, p. 29

designated arrival and departure times, while enacting more stringent perimeter screening and access control during daytime school hours and after school hours. The following best practices for perimeter access control measures, such as gates, should be considered:⁵⁴

- Active perimeter entrances should be designated so that security personnel can maintain full control without creating unnecessary delays. This can be accomplished by the provision of a sufficient number of entry points to accommodate the peak flow of pedestrians and vehicular traffic, as well as adequate lighting for rapid and efficient inspection;
- At the same time, the number of access points into a site should be minimized because they are a potential source of weakness in the controlled perimeter, and are costly to construct and operate. However, at least two access control points should be provided in case one is shut down or obstructed for various reasons;
- Whenever possible, commercial, service, and delivery vehicles should have a designated entry point to the site, preferably away from high-risk buildings.

Fencing and Gates: Other Considerations⁵⁵

- Do site entries provide for the ready passage of fire trucks and other emergency vehicles?
- Are gates available for closing access points when necessary?
- Do perimeter fences, walls, or “hostile vegetation” provide sufficient access control, surveillance, and territoriality?
- Is the perimeter of the site secured to a level that prevents [or delays] unauthorized vehicles or pedestrians from entering, and does this occur as far from the school building as possible?
- Are perimeter barriers capable of stopping vehicles?

For further discussion of perimeter security measures such as fencing and gates, refer to FEMA, 2012, Section 2.3.4. and 2.3.5.

Additional Consideration: Exterior Lighting⁵⁶

Most schools in the United States, perhaps with the exception of those in Alaska or other northern states, rarely have significant numbers of students and faculty inside the school during hours of darkness on a routine basis, as the school day coincides with daylight hours in most schools. Therefore, exterior lighting may be a secondary security concern and more closely related to deterring vandalism and property theft during non-school hours. Exterior lighting is nonetheless a consideration for more comprehensive site design – including that based on CPTED – and may be of interest to school officials or others interesting in improving this aspect of school management.

For more information on best practices regarding lighting of exterior areas of school facilities, school officials may consult the following documents:

- Texas State University, Security Design Manual for Schools, Chapter 23
- FEMA 428: Primer to Design Safe School Projects in Case of Terrorist Attacks and School Shootings, Edition 2 – Building Vulnerability Assessment Checklist, Section F, p. 8

⁵⁴ Based on FEMA, 2012, Chapter 2, p. 29-30

⁵⁵ Selections from FEMA, 2012, Building Vulnerability Assessment Checklist (Section F, p.4-5)

⁵⁶ For more information, see Texas State University, Ch. 23; FEMA, 2003, Ch. 2, p. 25

- Campus Safety Magazine: [4 Lighting Maintenance Tips](#)
- Florida Department of Education, Florida Safe School Design Guidelines, Section 2 – Site Design

Landscaping: Overview and Common Vulnerabilities

Landscaping – including landforms, water features, and vegetation – has the potential to both serve as an enhancement of overall school security and as a detriment to it. As an enhancement, landscaping can define and designate spaces, deter or prevent unwanted surveillance and unauthorized access, and even provide a level of blast shielding in the event that an offender attempts to utilize explosive devices in an assault on school property.⁵⁷ At the same time, school officials should be cognizant that, if misused, misplaced, or neglected, landscaping can conversely be detrimental to school security, providing hiding places for people, weapons, and explosive devices, blocking lighting, inadvertently providing routes of unauthorized access, blocking lines of sight necessary for natural surveillance, or damaging other security devices.⁵⁸ For example, in one school assessment conducted by our experts, vegetation next to a perimeter fence was excessively overgrown, which not only undermined territoriality by indicating neglect of school property and blocked lines of sight away from the facility, but also physically damaged and rendered ineffective the fence at that location.

Landscaping: Best Practices

Changes to landscaping of various degrees can enhance security on school grounds. These relate to the placement, type, and maintenance of certain aspects of landscaping. In utilizing landscaping to minimize risk and maximize security, the following best practices should be considered:⁵⁹

- Tall features of landscaping, such as trees, should be kept at sufficient distance from buildings so as to prevent roof and upper-level window access to school property;
- Avoid dense vegetation close to buildings, as it may screen various forms of illicit activity;
- Trim trees to permit cross-campus visibility;
- Use landscaping elements to control access and define public, semipublic, semiprivate, and private areas;
- Use landscape elements to protect sensitive operations, gathering areas, and other activities from surveillance without creating concealment for covert activity;
- Use thorn-bearing and sharp-leaved plant species to create natural physical barriers to deter aggressors, keeping in mind they may also impede emergency egress.

Landscaping: Other Considerations⁶⁰

- Is shrubbery limited to a maximum height of 3 feet and tree branches to a minimum height of 6-8 feet so as to ensure visibility at eye-level on the ground?
- Are trees at least 10 feet from buildings, preventing window and roof access?
- Does placement of bushes, trees, and shrubbery minimize opportunity to use as hiding space?
- Does landscaping inhibit lines of sight within, into, or beyond the campus?

⁵⁷ Texas State University, Chapter 10, p. 1

⁵⁸ See Texas State University, Chapter 10, p. 1; FEMA, 2012, Chapter 2, p. 10

⁵⁹ Based on recommendations in Texas State University, Chapter 10, p.2

⁶⁰ Based on FEMA 2012, Section F, p. 7; Texas State University, Chapter 10, p. 2-3

For an extended list of suggestions on the topic of landscaping, please refer to the Texas School Safety Center's *Security Design Consideration for Instructional Facilities: Reference Guide*, chapter 10.

Parking and Vehicular Zones: Overview and Common Vulnerabilities

***Note:** It is important to acknowledge that this section on vehicles and the following section on buses in the school zone are focused on best practices for security purposes. Some of these may overlap with best practices for student safety and visibility in vehicle and bus zones near the school, but some practices may even be at odds with student or pedestrian safety in such zones depending on school configuration and considerations such as crossing guards. These practices should not be employed in a vacuum without first considering the effect on student and pedestrian safety from vehicular accidents due to reduced visibility or impeded flow of traffic and with adjustments made accordingly.

Parking lots and vehicular access zones provide ready and reliable school access for students, staff, parents, and other visitors. At the same time, vehicles can provide potential attackers with a means of concealing and transporting weapons, can be used as a tool in overpowering physical security infrastructure, and can even serve as weapons in and of themselves. As such, school officials should be cognizant of their simultaneous goals of providing convenience for school visitors and occupants while maximizing security in areas accessible to vehicles.

Parking and Vehicular Zones: Best Practices

Proper design, placement, and use of parking and vehicular zones contributes to various aspects of school security, including access control, natural surveillance, and student monitoring. It is important that schools have physical designs in place that facilitate observation and management of vehicular flow while protecting the school building and those inside from the hazards associated with vehicles and their operators. Goals should include maximizing visibility of vehicles and their occupants from inside the school building while keeping vehicles at a great enough distance to prevent their use in an attack on the school building or those inside. Best practices for parking and vehicular zones include:⁶¹

- Restrict external access to parking areas to a limited number of controlled entrances;
- Provide clear signage and posted rules as to who is allowed to use parking facilities and when they are allowed to do so;
- Designate separate parking lots for student use, especially for high schools, in order to monitor students who may leave or arrive at campus during school hours. Secure these parking lots and, if possible, supervise during peak-use times;
- Avoid long, straight parking layouts that allow cars to generate speed or, if unavoidable, use speed-lowering measures such as speed bumps;
- Place parking areas in a location that facilitates visual surveillance via windows from inside administrative offices and classrooms in the building.

Parking and Vehicular Zones: Other Considerations⁶²

⁶¹ Based on Texas State University, Chapter 7. For additional guidance, see FEMA 2012, Chapter 2, p. 40-41

⁶² Selected from "Building Vulnerability Assessment Checklist" from FEMA, 2012, Section F, p. 9 - 11

- Are vehicle circulation routes to service and delivery areas, visitors' entry, bus drop-off, student parking, and staff parking separated as needed and do they function safely in the context of the site?
- Are designated entries, routes, and parking lots for after-hours use clearly identified and controlled within the context of the site?
- Are parking areas within view of the main office, other staffed areas, or surveillance cameras?
- Do signs or posted rules clearly identify who is allowed to use parking facilities and when they may do so?
- Is visitor parking located near the main entrance to the school, with clear signs directing visitors to the main office?
- In high schools, are parking spaces numbered and marked for the designated users: students, faculty, staff, and visitors?
- Are unassigned parking spaces minimized, especially in student parking zones?
- Is access to parking areas limited by curbs, fencing, gates, and a minimum number of entry points?

Additional Consideration: Bus Loading and Unloading Zones

In addition to regular parking and vehicular zones, bus loading and unloading zones are of particular importance in ensuring the safety of students and staff against threats such as an active shooter. Multiple schools examined by our experts in preparation of this report had some of their most prominent vulnerabilities associated with these areas. Vulnerabilities regarding bus loading and unloading are related to both aspects of the physical site in which they operate and the procedures that they follow within that site. Because these factors cannot be reasonably separated from one another, we have decided to include the discussion of physical aspects of bus zones along with procedural ones in the "Daily Policies and Procedures" section found later in Layer One. It is highly encouraged that readers of this document pay attention to the discussion provided there, which includes important information on physical site security.

Exterior Monitoring and Surveillance: Overview and Common Vulnerabilities

Surveillance equipment installed on the outdoor grounds of a school or on the exterior of the building itself can serve several purposes. For one, "cameras help distinguish between outsiders who do not belong on campus and students and employees who do."⁶³ This ability can be helpful, especially to administrative or security staff who may gain from extra time in identifying a threatening individual approaching the school and taking appropriate preventive measures. Exterior surveillance equipment can also be beneficial in monitoring blind spots that cannot easily be viewed from inside the building unassisted or high activity exterior areas such as bus loading/unloading zones, vehicular drop-off points, parking lots (see Figure 5), playgrounds, sports fields, and others – especially when these areas may be difficult to view from a school's administrative or security office or when a human monitor cannot be placed there. Cameras also allow for observation of a suspicious person from a safe distance without direct contact. Cameras also provide deterrent value by indicating that a school takes security seriously and that a would-be-assailant is under observation without knowing who is watching and when. In several school assessments, our experts found that external surveillance equipment was often

⁶³ Arizona, p. 4

hampered by blind spots (see Figure 6), which undermined its effectiveness, or that external surveillance equipment did not properly function (see Figure 7) or exist at all.



Figure 5: Sample surveillance camera view of parking lot area.

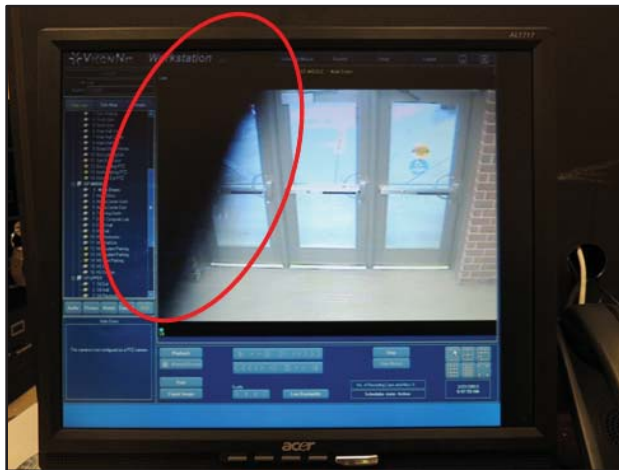


Figure 6: Camera view is obscured.



Figure 7: Non-functioning camera.

Exterior Monitoring and Surveillance: Best Practices

According to the Texas School Safety Center:

Closed circuit television (CCTV) is a primary choice for remote surveillance systems. These units have become very economical and easily mounted where they are less intrusive. CCTV deters outsiders who do not belong on campus and deters students from committing malicious acts. In the event a crime occurs, footage or photographs from the CCTV can be used to identify and prosecute the individuals involved.⁶⁴

In line with those desired benefits, the following best practices should be considered by school officials in installing, upgrading, or maintaining surveillance equipment:⁶⁵

- Provide parking lots with CCTV cameras connected to the security system and adequate lighting capable of displaying and videotaping lot activity;
- Substitute CCTV cameras where topography, existing conditions, or aesthetic objectives make observation of pedestrians and vehicles from within the school difficult or undesirable to achieve;
- Tie camera monitoring into existing emergency action plans and procedures;
- Cameras should be placed on avenues of approach to the building to detect potential intruder(s)/assailant(s);
- Exterior school main reception area entryway should have a video intercom and camera coverage to identify personnel requesting access to the school.

Exterior Monitoring and Surveillance: Other Considerations

In installing or maintaining exterior surveillance equipment, school officials should consider other factors that affect the proper functioning and use of a system both in general terms, and more specifically, the challenges of installing technology in an outdoor environment. School officials may also want to consider the following:⁶⁶

- Have housing designed to protect against tampering, vandalism, and extreme temperature or moisture;
- Use lenses which capture useful images under existing lighting conditions [including during the day and at night];
- Have an uninterruptable power supply and connected to the building's emergency power;
- Install exterior video and power cabling to the cameras in a conduit, which provides protection from environmental degradation as well as tampering;
- Cables running up poles or buildings to the cameras are vulnerable to vandalism and tampering and must be in a conduit for protection.

For more information on different camera technologies, installation choices, and checklists, please refer

⁶⁴ Texas State University, Chapter 45, p. 2

⁶⁵ Best practices adapted or selected from FEMA, 2012, Chapter 2, p. 41; Texas State University, Chapter 45, p. 2-4

⁶⁶ Adapted or selected from Texas State University, Chapter 45, p. 3-4

to the following:

- Texas State University, *Security Design Consideration for Instructional Facilities*, [Ch. 45](#)
- *Primer to Design Safe School Projects in Case of Terrorist Attacks*, Appendix F, Section 6 Checklist: Security Systems
- National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities: [School Security Technologies](#)
- National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities: [Improving School Access Control](#)
- SchoolFacilities.com: [CCTV in the School Environment](#)

Exterior Security – Building Exterior

Main Entrance: Overview and Common Vulnerabilities

According to the Department of Homeland Security:

To control access and limit intrusion, visitors should be guided to a single control point and required to pass directly through to administration reception areas when entering or leaving the school. The combination of a main entry with a carefully located and constantly staffed administrative area can enhance the supervision of school entries, stairs, and hallways without the need for an additional assigned monitor.⁶⁷

The above passage shows why a school’s main entrance is one of the most important aspects of overall school security. Because it is a commonly advised best practice to funnel visitors to a single, main entrance – and, indeed, to prevent their entry altogether through any other location – it is imperative that schools carefully consider the physical security tools that will allow convenient access by visitors while preventing that of potential assailants at this location.

Unfortunately, the deadly events at Sandy Hook Elementary in Newtown, Connecticut in December 2012 confirm that importance. According to existing reports as of writing, Sandy Hook Elementary actually followed multiple best practices in regards to physical security. For example, it is believed that all other doors and entrances were closed and locked to the outside at the time of the shooting, which may have played a role in forcing the gunman to attempt to gain access via the main entrance.⁶⁸ The school was furthermore equipped with an intercom/camera system that assisted in screening visitors prior to entry.⁶⁹ Nevertheless, the gunman was apparently able to exploit one vulnerability by shooting through a front door, which was reportedly made from glass.⁷⁰ From there, it is apparent that the gunman had to overcome few if any obstacles – aside from heroic teachers and administrators who attempted to confront him – in his path of destruction.

In assessments of multiple schools throughout the United States in preparation of this document, main entrance vulnerabilities were some of the most common that our experts encountered. Common vulnerabilities in main entrances included:

⁶⁷ FEMA, 2012, Chapter 3, p. 42

⁶⁸ Gray

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Blodget

- Limited or no opportunity for pre-screening of visitors before entry;
- Unsecured or minimally protected main reception areas;
- Single sets of doors that prevent or make difficult entrapment of a potential assailant; (see Figure 8)
- Non-ballistic protective doors, often made of non-ballistic protective glass;
- Surveillance cameras that were malfunctioning; blind spots in area under surveillance; unmonitored and not readily viewable surveillance feeds; (see Figure 9)
- Administrative areas without panic buttons or without easily activated (i.e., within hands reach) panic buttons.



Figure 8: Single set of doors.



Figure 9: Unmonitored and not readily viewable surveillance feeds.

Main Entrance: Best Practices

Readers will notice that many of the following best practices for a school’s main entrance area will be reiterated sporadically in other sections below, such as those covering exterior doors, access control, and surveillance equipment. Although this may seem redundant, we believe this is useful for two reasons: (1) to organize various suggestions across categories into a single, readable section, and (2) to emphasize the importance of some of the implements related to main entrances that will be described here.

The Florida Department of Education offers guidelines applicable to main entrances that school officials should consider in establishing best practices for this crucial area of security. The included diagrams may be of use when envisioning such practices:⁷¹

- Position a primary control point in the lobby between the main entry and all other areas of school;
- Direct visitors through this single control point at main entry;
- Locate a staffed administration area or desk adjacent to main entry and connected to the lobby;
- Design lobby areas that can be easily secured;
- Utilize extensive interior glazing and windows in lobby area to encourage natural surveillance;

⁷¹ Best practices and diagrams selected or adapted from FLDOE, Section 3, p. 33-35

- Provide an escape route from staffed administration reception area for emergency egress out of lobby area.

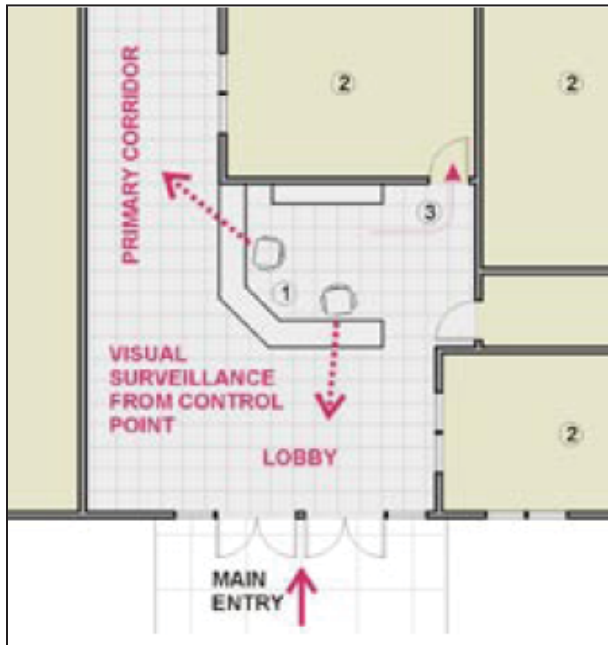


Figure 10: Main entrance with direct access vulnerabilities (no entrapment area; limited natural surveillance of outdoors; potential to bypass front desk area).

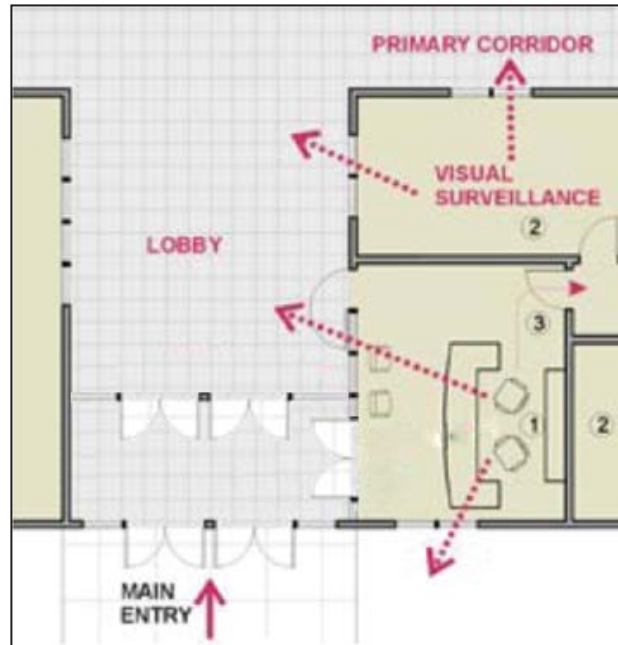


Figure 11: Main entrance utilizing best practices.

Source: [Florida Safe Schools Design Guidelines, Section 4, page 33](#)

- Locate administration areas adjacent to the main entry and lobby;
- Provide the reception/visitor information area with adequate protection by utilizing a counter and, when necessary, a protective shield;
- Incorporate extensive interior glazing in administration areas to provide unobstructed views and natural surveillance;
- Design and locate the administration area to reinforce its role as the guardian of school facility;
- Provide seating at reception/visitor information areas;
- Consider installing an electronic lock system that can allow main office staff to automatically lock all school doors, including exterior doors and interior classroom doors, from a central control station.

Main Entrance: Other Considerations

Additionally, based on recent assessments of schools across the United States, our experts suggest the following for main entrance areas:

- Consider installing a panic button at receptionist's desk;
- Consider installing a video intercom system on building exterior to enhance access control;
- Consider installing an automatic locking mechanism to ensure main entry door is locked during school hours;

- Consider installing ballistic protective glass;⁷²
- Consider moving surveillance monitors to security officer's desk and receptionist's desk/computer, so as to be viewed at eye level. Re-direct responsibility of proactive viewing of most critical cameras (especially that of main entry) to stationary administrative staff members, who can take ownership of specific cameras and report anomalies to appropriate security staff.
- Consider installing ballistic protective steel plating on vertical facing of desk front and side wall; (see Figure 12)
- Consider installing two sets of doors to create an entrapment area; (see Figure 13)
- Consider using a visitor management system to verify that guests are authorized to visit the campus; (see Figure 14)
- Consider escorting visitors (or delivery personnel) into the building;
- Ensure door-locking mechanisms meet applicable life safety and fire codes.



Figure 12: Red arrows indicate ballistic steel plating.



Figure 13: Two sets of doors.



Figure 14: Visitor management system.

⁷² For more information, see: <http://usbulletproofing.com/USBPStandards.htm>

Exterior Doors: Overview and Common Vulnerabilities

Our experts found that proper installation and use of doors was a challenge – and hence, a common source of vulnerability – for many schools. This is because doors must serve competing priorities – such as denying entry to a school by unauthorized individuals (i.e., denying passage) while at the same time maximizing the ability of students, teachers, and staff to move through doors either into or out of a school, which is important for day-to-day function and may be particularly essential in a time of emergency (e.g., facilitating evacuation during a fire).

In assessment of schools, our experts found multiple vulnerabilities with regards to exterior doors, including:

- Door hinges unprotected and on the exterior of the building; (see Figure 15)
- Doors that did not automatically close and lock on their own with an adjustable spring or air return or instances of such hardware malfunctioning;
- Doors that otherwise needed adjustment or did not close properly; (see Figure 16)
- Unsecured and unmonitored service doors. (see Figure 17)



Figure 155: Unprotected hinges.

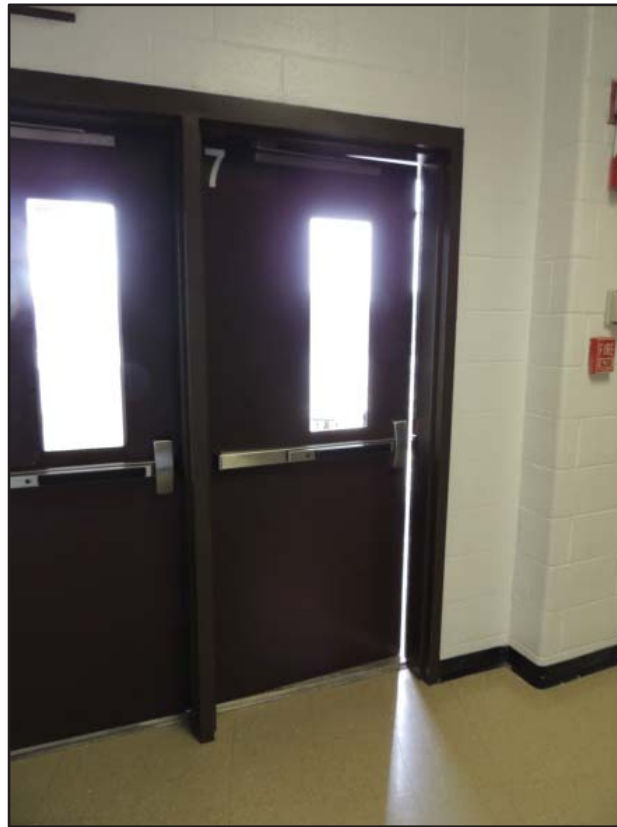


Figure 16: Doors that do not close properly.



Figure 17: Partially opened service door.

Exterior Doors: Best Practices

On the exterior of a school building, school administrators should consider the number, placement, installment, and hardware quality of doors in efforts to maximize gains in security. As described above, doing so properly can lead to significant results in keeping intruders on the outside while allowing students and staff to exit safely in the case of emergency. Indeed, the importance of following best practices on the topic of exterior doors is highlighted by the attention received in the recently released Sandy Hook Advisory Commission Interim Report of Findings, which recommended that the State of Connecticut require all exterior doors in K-12 school to “be equipped with hardware capable of implementing a full perimeter lockdown.”⁷³

School officials should consider the following best practices on this topic:⁷⁴

- The number of exterior doors should be minimized, especially those able to be opened from the outside;
- Exterior doors should be constructed of steel aluminum alloy or solid core hardwood and designed and certified to resist thrown or wind-blown objects;
- Doors should have an adjustable spring or air return to ensure they are always closed and should be inspected on a regular basis to ensure they are functioning properly;
- Doors vulnerable to unauthorized use by students are made more secure by installing door alarms, delayed opening devices, sensors, or cameras that monitor doors from administration;

⁷³ Sandy Hook Commission, p. 10

⁷⁴ Adapted or selected from Texas State University, Chapter, 20, p. 4-5; FEMA, 2012, Chapter 4, p. 27-28

- All exit doors should be equipped with emergency exit hardware and not locked or secured by any other means, and should under no circumstances be otherwise locked or chained shut;
- Exterior doors should have little or no exposed hardware and hinges should have non-removable pins; (see Figure 18)
- Place doors away from windows so that, if the windows are broken, the doors cannot be unlocked.



Figure 18: Exterior door with protective hinge covering.

Exterior Doors: Considerations⁷⁵

- Does exterior door security hardware allow egress from the school building at all times?
- Are exterior doors sized and arranged to reduce congestion and avoid crowding?
- Where exterior doors are protected from the weather, do they serve as concealed areas for unwanted activity?
- Is the number of exterior building entries and exits/doors kept to a minimum, and are all controlled or supervised?
- Can exterior doors be electronically locked to block visitors' entry into the building?
- When the main entry doors are unlocked, can securable internal doors oblige visitors to confer with the receptionist to gain entry beyond the reception area?
- Are exterior foyer doors offset from interior ones?
- Do exterior doors along the line of security screening meet requirements of UL 752, Standard for Safety: Bullet-Resisting Equipment?
- Are all exit doors and gates equipped with emergency exit hardware and not locked or secured by any other means?
- Are all exterior doors designed to prevent unauthorized access into the building?
- Do exterior doors have narrow windows, sidelights, fish-eye viewers, or cameras to permit seeing who is on the exterior side?
- Are exterior doors airtight?

⁷⁵ Adapted or selected from FEMA, 2012, Section F, p. 16, 18, 21-23, 36-38

For further information on this topic, school officials may reference:

- NCEF: [Building Access Control Checklist](#)
- FEMA: *Primer to Design Safe School Projects in Case of Terrorist Attacks* - Chapter 4, p. 27-28

Exterior Locks: Overview and Common Vulnerabilities

Locks are a common tool in overall physical security measures at schools. Locks, simultaneously with doors, must both promote access control and efficient entry/egress when needed. Locking systems should not be analyzed independently of the doors in which they are placed (refer to the above section on doors for further discussion), nor should the effectiveness of doors be analyzed independent of the locking systems that support them. Both factors go “hand-in-hand” – a well-placed door made of appropriate materials is far less effective if not paired with an appropriate locking system; likewise, a good locking system is not effective if the door it supports can be defeated due to other weaknesses in door placement, materials, or hardware. It is important to keep in mind that lock systems are readily undermined if not paired with adequate management of keys/unlocking implements – a subject that will be addressed in the procedural section of this document. In our experts’ assessment of schools, some schools were found to have exterior doors with the locking mechanism exposed to the outside of the building, creating an unnecessary vulnerability (see Figure 19).

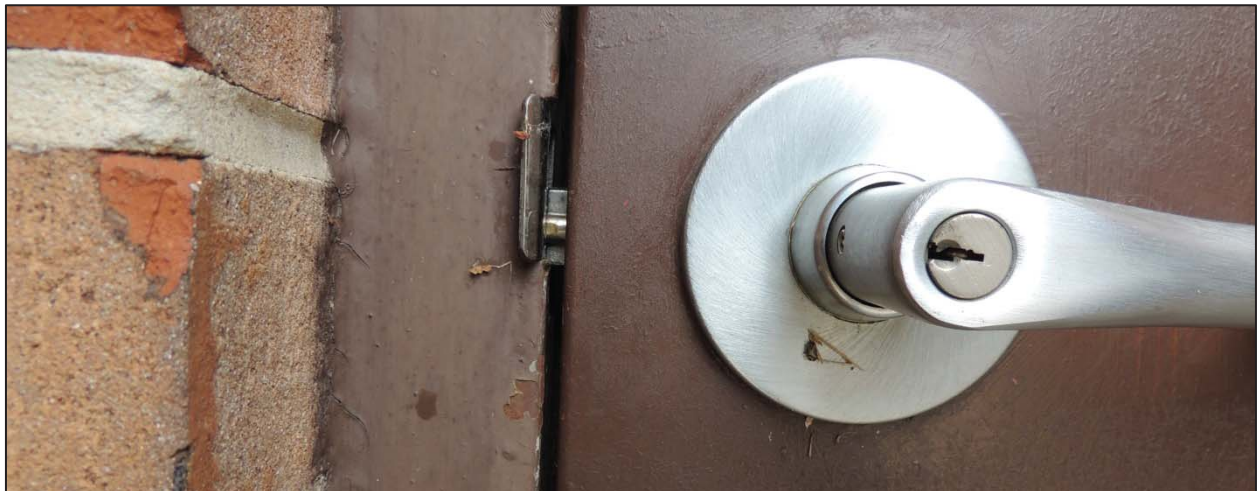


Figure 19: Exterior doors with locking mechanism on the outside of building.

Exterior Locks: Best Practices⁷⁶

- Ensure door-locking systems allow for emergency exiting without impediment.
- Use highly pick-resistant locking systems.
- Protect all exterior door-lock cylinders by securing them to prevent cylinder removal.

Exterior Locks: Considerations⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Adapted or selected from Texas State University, Chapter 21, p. 5-6

- Are locks with single cylinders and interior thumb turns on doors with glass panels more than 36 inches away from the nearest glass panel?
- Do deadbolt locks seat at least one inch into the doorframe or lock-bolt receiver?
- Do all door-locking systems meet applicable life safety and fire codes to allow emergency evacuation?
- Are door jambs sufficiently strong to meet the strength of locks?
- Have all externally mounted locks and hasps been replaced with internally locking devices?⁷⁸

Exterior Windows: Overview and Common Vulnerabilities

The incorporation of exterior windows can serve both as a security enhancement – through the increase in natural surveillance and potential for emergency egress that they provide – and stand as a vulnerability – in that they may provide access opportunities for intruders and may create hazards if broken glass serves as a projectile. Consideration of exterior windows is especially resonant given the recent events at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Connecticut, when it is believed that the assailant gained access to the school by shooting through a glass door that was otherwise locked. Our experts also commonly found schools to have windows – particularly in key areas such as the main entrance – that were susceptible to an assailant and did not utilize ballistic-resistant materials.

Exterior Windows: Best Practices

Several goals should be kept in mind when considering the topic of exterior windows in school design. Windows should be as resistant as possible to an assailant like an active shooter, and allow students and staff to monitor events outside the building as well as communicate with outside responders in an emergency situation. At the same time students and staff might need to use them as secondary escape routes in the case of an emergency like a fire, or even active shooter (as the Virginia Tech shooting, in which several students escaped the gunman by exiting through windows, proves).⁷⁹ Given these considerations, best practices for exterior windows include:⁸⁰

- Windows that face traffic should have protective coatings applied to enhance their resistance;
- Windows should be protected against forced entry with efforts to minimize any sacrifices to visibility;
- Locate windows strategically to provide natural light and natural surveillance;
- Place windows at main entrance to enhance visual surveillance to parking lots and pedestrian routes. In high risk schools, minimize the number and size of windows in a façade (know that this will lessen the amount of natural surveillance allowed);
- Avoid glass walls or windows at emergency exits to facilitate escape;
- Avoid wire glass due to the injuries it can cause by becoming flying debris;
- Place guards (i.e. grills, screens, or meshwork) across window openings by affixing them firmly to the structure to protect against covert entry;
- Design windows, framing, and anchoring systems to minimize the effects of explosive blasts, gunfire, and forced entry;
- Place windows away from doors so that, if the windows are broken, the door cannot be unlocked.

⁷⁷ Adapted or selected from Texas State University, Chapter 21, p. 4-5

⁷⁸ Adapted from FEMA, 2012, Chapter 4, p. 28

⁷⁹ FEMA, 2012, Chapter 3, p. 23

⁸⁰ Best practices based on selections or adaptations from FEMA, 2012, Chapter 3, p. 40; Chapter 4, p. 23-26;

Exterior Windows: Considerations⁸¹

- Do classroom windows enhance visual surveillance of the school grounds?
- Does door and window security hardware allow egress from classrooms at all times?
- Are windows designated for escape readily operable and not blocked by grills or screens?
- Do windows facilitate surveillance from the reception area, providing, on the outside, an unimpeded view of the main entry and drop-off and visitor parking areas?

Physical Access Control: Overview and Common Vulnerabilities

Access control is an essential part of school security and one that involves both physical and procedural aspects for a given school. Access control can be a security component at each of the layers outlined above and even create sub-layers within each layer. Physical and procedural access control measures can be part of the outermost layer of security to the innermost. For example, it is common to think of access control as primarily a tool at the main entrance of a school – indeed, a place where access control is undoubtedly very important. But access control can play an important role even for individuals who have gained initial access to the building by denying access to key areas deeper within the building. Unfortunately, some of the physical tools that assist in access control can be prohibitively expensive in certain situations and may also create undue burdens on environments like schools which not only rely on a level of openness to promote a healthy learning environment for students but also are inherently public institutions in nature that must provide access for parents and the community at-large. Nevertheless, schools should attempt to weigh these considerations against the reality that some level of access control may allow a school to continue to serve its primary functions while going a long way to prevent threatening individuals access to their property.

It is important to remember that, like most physical security tools, those providing access control are rapidly diminished in value when not accompanied by proper procedures that govern their use. As NCEF puts it:

If windows and doors are left unsecured and unsupervised, the choice of access control device is of no consequence. But once a school has committed to controlling access, decisions have to be made about which technologies to use.⁸²

Physical Access Control: Best Practices

The same philosophy that underlies the overall layered approach to security underlies that of access control: access control measures create one or more obstacles that a potential offender must cumulatively overcome in realizing their violent aims (see BIPS 3-40 for “cumulative” discussion). As DHS states:

Ideally, access control systems should keep shooters out of a building completely, but in case a shooter manages to penetrate a building, the systems should include the ability to close and secure doors remotely, and thereby limit access to vulnerable targets. Limited access forces a shooter to spend more time searching for targets, giving the building occupants more time to evacuate to a safe area or seek cover in safe rooms. The delay also allows response forces more

⁸¹ Selected from FEMA, 2012, Section F – “Building Vulnerability Assessment Checklist”, p. 14, 16, 22

⁸² Schneider, *School Security Technologies*, p. 1

time to arrive on the scene to neutralize the threat or reduce casualties. Such systems also have the potential to trap the shooter in a specific area, increasing the chances of a positive outcome with no injuries. Immediate video assignment may give the staff the ability to notify law enforcement of an emergency and identify the exact location of the threat.⁸³

As such, school officials should consider the following in establishing appropriate access control at their facilities.⁸⁴

- Establishing a single, controlled, clearly marked entry point that requires passage by/through administrative reception areas for visitors at a school;
- Signs should be placed throughout the school campus, particularly around parking areas, directing visitors to the main reception area, (see Figure 20)
- Positioning the main entry area so as to allow for unobstructed surveillance of lobby doors, stairwells, and perpendicular hallways.
- Placing the administrative area on an exterior wall to allow for additional surveillance of outside areas, especially visitor parking, drop-off areas, and exterior routes leading to the main entrance;
- Placing administration areas adjacent to main entry areas, allowing for visual surveillance between administrators and students or visitors, and providing them with a lockable door, working telephone and, ideally, two remote exits;
- When feasible and appropriate, installing security camera(s) in the lobby/main reception area; (see Figure 21)
- Controlling further access to areas containing classrooms and other areas frequently used by students, teachers, and staff by:
 - Using materials for such walls or doors that are difficult to penetrate quickly;
 - Installing a central control station that can remotely close and secure all internal doors.



Figure 20: Signs directing visitors to main reception area.



Figure 21: Camera in main reception area.

Access Control: Other Considerations

There is an array of physical devices that can be co-opted in an effort to enforce effective access control. To repeat a point from above, physical tools meant to enhance access control are only as effective as

⁸³ FEMA, 2012, Chapter 3, p. 42

⁸⁴ Based on FEMA, 2012, Chapter 3, p. 42

the individuals and procedures that define their use. Furthermore, the most advanced technology manned by highly trained individuals at the front entrance of a school is rendered irrelevant if an intruder can easily enter through an unlocked back door. That being said, school officials looking to leverage physical tools and technology in an earnest and well-informed effort to improve access control can benefit from more detailed discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of the myriad options that exist, from door, lock, and key varieties to surveillance technologies – some of which will be described in more detail in the interior security sections below.

For more information, the following sources may prove useful:

- National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities: [School Security Technologies](#) (Tod Schneider, July 2010)
- Texas School Safety Center: *Security Design Criteria Manual for Schools*, Chapter 40 – Access Control

Building Interior Security

Ideally, schools will be able to prevent an armed attacker from gaining access to the school interior, through methods described in sections above. In practice, it is very possible that an armed assailant will succeed in at least gaining partial entry to the school interior. Hence, interior physical security measures of various degrees can be a valuable part of a school’s overall physical security infrastructure. Some physical measures – such as doors, locks, and windows – can prevent or at least delay an active shooter from freely moving throughout a school at large or from entering classrooms where students and teachers may be located. Others, such as security cameras or other monitoring systems, can assist in locating and identifying a threat and hence minimizing the time it takes for responders to neutralize that threat. In any case, interior physical measures play the same role as other physical measures; they complicate an attacker’s freedom of movement and action and have the potential to add precious seconds and minutes to the time it takes for an attacker to realize their goals.

Interior Doors and Locks: Overview and Common Vulnerabilities

According to the National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities (NCEF), interior doors serve the following purposes:⁸⁵

- Controlling the movement of people among school spaces;
- Controlling noise and air flow;
- Acting as flame and smoke barriers during a fire;
- In a lockdown and during classroom instruction, serve as security barriers.

According to NCEF, the most important function of a door from a security standpoint is to control entry; this must be balanced, however, with a door’s ruling factor from the standpoint of fire safety, which is exit function as a “means of egress.” NCEF describes as “iron-clad” the rule that “egress doors can prevent entry but they can *never* prevent exit.” This once again highlights the need for a comprehensive approach to ensuring safety and security at schools and the essentiality of preventing and preparing for an active shooter event only within that larger context (in this case, the danger of fire at schools). For

⁸⁵ NCEF, *Door Locking Options in Schools*, p. 1

more information on building and fire code provisions regulating egress doors see the NCEF's publication: "Door Locking Options in Schools".

Two of the most well-known and horrific active shooter events at educational institutions in the United States – those at Columbine High School in 1999 and those at Virginia Tech University in 2007 – highlight the potential importance of proper interior door and lock implementation in schools.⁸⁶ In the case of the Columbine High School shooting, an event that led to 15 deaths and 24 injuries and which lasted 46 minutes, it is of note that throughout the entire duration of the attack, neither of the two shooters ever entered a locked classroom. In the Virginia Tech case that led to the deaths of 32 and the injury of 17 others, it is of note that none of the four classrooms in which the shooter entered and shot students and instructors had interior locks, despite attempts in at least two of the classrooms to barricade the door or prevent the shooter from entering. It is further notable that all individuals in the Virginia Tech case that managed to hide in a locked room survived.

It is of further note that the Interim Report of Findings produced by the Sandy Hook Advisory Commission, in the wake of the horrific events that occurred in Newtown, Connecticut, recommended that the State of Connecticut require "all classrooms in K-12 schools [to] be equipped with locking doors that can be locked from the inside by the classroom teacher or substitute."⁸⁷

Interior Doors and Locks: Best Practices

Specifically in relation to the risk posed by an active shooter in the interior of a school, doors and locks serve several functions both in controlling entry and providing egress:⁸⁸

- Preventing entry of dangerous people and goods into the school and into the occupied spaces within it;
- Facilitating rapid lockdowns;
- Allowing rapid entry of police and rescue personnel;
- Preventing perpetrators from barricading themselves in a classroom or other space, particularly if holding hostages.

Discussion of interior doors and locks at schools includes doors to classrooms and other rooms as well as doors or gates employed in between various sections or wings of a school such as corridor doors. School officials should consider the functions above in ensuring that interior doors positively impact overall school security, including their ability to deny access to an intruder and protect those behind them, delay or channel the movement of an assailant through the interior, assist responders in moving freely to confront a threat or provide assistance to those in need, allow for safe and efficient egress, and conform to fire codes and other local, state, and federal regulations. These considerations involve the placement, material, and hardware of interior doors in schools. The following best practices should be kept in mind by school officials examining interior locks and doors:⁸⁹

⁸⁶ See FEMA, 2012, Ch. 3, p. 23 – 26

⁸⁷ Sandy Hook Advisory Commission, p. 10

⁸⁸ NCEF, *Door Locking Options in Schools*, p. 3

⁸⁹ Based on selections or adaptations from: NCEF, *Door Locking Options in Schools*; NCEF, *Improving Access Control*; Texas State University, Chapters 20 – 21; FEMA, 2012, Chapter 3, p. 43

- Doors should be constructed of steel, aluminum alloy, or solid-core hardwood. Glass doors as a security matter are less than ideal. If necessary, glass doors should be fully framed and equipped with burglar-resistant tempered glass;
- Ideally, a central control station should have the ability to close and secure all internal doors when an alarm is sounded. Effective access control will enable the central control station to restrict the movement of an assailant and direct the safe escape of students;
- Double doors should be secured with heavy-duty, multiple-point, long flush bolts;
- There should be no recessed doorways;
- Interior corridor doors should be equipped to prevent criminals or vandals from locking or chaining hall doors in order to slow down security officers' pursuit;
- Use door hardware which allows staff to quickly lock rooms from the inside without stepping into the hallway;
- Ensure classroom locks can be unlocked from the inside by applying pressure to the handle or knob;
- Ensure all door-locking systems meet applicable life safety and fire codes to allow emergency evacuation.

Interior Doors and Locks: Other Considerations

School officials face an array of door hardware and lock choices in considering the goals above. As with other security technologies, making these choices is dependent on a particular school's needs and resources. For example, schools in warm weather climates or with portable classrooms that open directly to the outdoors may require different doors and locking systems than those located within the confines of an enclosed building.⁹⁰ Furthermore, new lockset technologies may offer room for improvement in the security benefits provided by certain types of doors and locks. For example, many classroom doors for decades utilized locking systems that denied entry to those on the outside but allowed for easy exit on the part of those on the inside, technology that helped meet some of the goals outlined above. However, this common system required teachers to open their door and step into the hallway to lock the door before closing it again in the case of a lockdown, potentially putting the teacher at risk or offering a violent attacker opportunity to gain entry to a classroom. Newer "classroom security function" locksets allow for the door to be locked without leaving the room, and may prove useful in narrowing that security gap.⁹¹ For more details regarding specific options and guidelines for different door types and locksets see Texas State University, Ch. 20 or NCEF, *School Security Technologies and Door Locking Options in Schools*.

⁹⁰ NCEF, *Door Locking Options in Schools*, p. 2

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 2

Interior Windows: Overview and Common Vulnerabilities



Figure 22: Example of non-ballistic resistant glass near and in door, creating vulnerability to assailants.

There are two primary security considerations in regards to interior windows, in particular those that provide lines of sight into/out of classrooms and other populated areas such as windows built into or adjoining classroom doors.⁹² The first is allowing for natural surveillance of hallways and immediate areas surrounding classrooms and other areas, which may be important in allowing those inside of a classroom to recognize or appraise a danger outside of the classroom and take appropriate response measures. It is also important for those inside of the classroom to be able to see who is at the door before allowing an individual entry to the classroom. The second consideration, and one with particular relevance to an active shooter situation, is minimizing a window's vulnerability during response procedures such as a lockdown. Such windows must prevent or greatly hamper an assailant's ability to bypass a locked-down door by either gaining direct access through broken glass or using a breach in the window to unlock the door from the inside. (see Figure 22)

Previous incidents serve to emphasize the importance of this factor. For example, in 2005 a 16-year-old attacker killed six people hiding in a locked classroom in Red Lake High School in Minnesota by shooting and subsequently stepping through a tempered glass window that ran vertically alongside the classroom door.⁹³

Interior Windows: Best Practices

There are several best practices with regards to interior windows that can minimize the ability of an assailant or unauthorized individual to gain access to interior areas such as classrooms. These relate to the size, placement, and material used for windows, and include the following:

- Minimize the size of windows or install multiple smaller windows interspersed by barriers so as to prevent providing adequate space for entry by assailant;
- Place windows at sufficient distance from interior locking mechanism to prevent or make difficult opening a door or lock from inside;
- As a cost-effective measure, consider concealing or obscuring window views during events such as a lockdown to prevent assailant from ascertaining status or presence of persons inside of classroom;
- Consider steel-plating (hardening) window frames to lessen window vulnerability;
- If feasible and if resources permit, consider installing ballistic-resistant windows for interior spaces such as classrooms.

⁹² See FLDOE, p. 40

⁹³ Huppert

Interior Surveillance Equipment: Overview and Common Vulnerabilities

According to an article in *School Planning and Management*:

Cameras provide two levels of safety and security for school building users. The first is the benefit of video analytics in crisis situations that, fortunately, are few and far between for school districts. The second is the benefit of discouraging inappropriate and illegal behavior, such as bullying and trespassing.⁹⁴

There are multiple benefits to installing a surveillance system in a school. For one, “video systems can provide responders with the capability to rapidly assess a situation and safely conduct surveillance of suspicious persons, as well as provide an immediate assessment of a triggered alarm.”⁹⁵ Surveillance systems can also arguably enhance overall school culture – not only by indicating to occupants of a school that their behavior is being monitored, but also by reducing the very bullying and destructive behavior that reports have cited as often being contributive to the mindset that might lead one to undertake such horrific actions.

In our experts’ assessments of schools, it was often found that surveillance systems suffered from a number of problems that could prove to be deleterious to a school’s overall state of security. The following vulnerabilities were found:

- Malfunctioning or broken cameras; (see Figure 6)
- Blurry, obscured, or intermittent camera feeds; (see Figure 7)
- Cameras easily subject to vandalism and tampering;
- Poor or non-existent active monitoring and storage of feeds.

Active monitoring (employing monitors to watch cameras in real-time) is more expensive than passive monitoring (camera feeds that are recorded but not watched in real-time), due to additional staffing and equipment costs. However, active monitoring can provide school officials and law enforcement with opportunities to respond to crimes that they would not otherwise have immediately recognized. Having trained staff monitor a live feed can provide first responders with information about potential dangers, people of interest, and other circumstances at the scene. Such information can enhance school safety and security.

Interior Surveillance Equipment: Best Practices

Despite potential downsides, surveillance systems – if installed and monitored correctly – have the potential to lead to significant positive gains in security, depending on a school’s needs. According to the Texas School Safety Center (TXSSC), “Closed circuit television (CCTV) is a primary choice for remote surveillance systems. These units have become very economical and easily mounted where they are less intrusive.”⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Kollie

⁹⁵ FEMA, 2012, Ch. 3, p. 48

⁹⁶ Texas State University, Ch. 45, p. 2

The following best practices should be considered by school officials in deciding if and how to install surveillance systems in their school:⁹⁷

- When feasible and appropriate, consider providing security camera(s) in the lobby area for electronic surveillance and access control;
- Cameras should be installed throughout the facility to enable staff to identify and assess any threats;
- Each room and hallway should have a camera that can be operated from a central location to ensure safety and provide a rapid means to determine the exact nature of any suspected threat to better direct response actions.
- Pictures printed from surveillance equipment should provide clear enough images to identify suspects in a court of law.⁹⁸

Interior Surveillance Equipment: Other Considerations

There exists an array of technologies that support physical surveillance systems in schools, and school officials should choose based on their consideration of the above topics and given their unique needs and resources. Based on this, school officials may find it useful to consider these additional questions:⁹⁹

- Do CCTV camera systems cover appropriate areas of the school and record to digital or tape devices?
- Do CCTV cameras use lenses that capture useful images under existing lighting conditions? Is infrared used if needed for dark areas or at night?
- Are cameras triggered by motion or intrusion?
- Are camera housings designed to protect against tampering, vandalism, and exposure to extreme temperature or moisture?
- Do cameras have an uninterruptible power supply, and are they connected to the building's emergency power supply?
- Does system utilize DVR recording capability?

Advances in technology also have created new options for facilities such as schools in installing surveillance systems. For example, many facilities are moving towards installing Integrated Security Management Systems (ISMS), which are designed to tie together multiple security technologies – such as cameras, alarms, communication, and access control devices (many of which are discussed further below) – in one, compatible system.¹⁰⁰ Many of these new systems are Internet Protocol (IP) based, which may allow for more intelligent, flexible, easy-to-use, reasonably priced systems and be relatively easily handled by a school's existing IT department.¹⁰¹ The Sandy Hook Advisory Commission, in response to the Newtown, Connecticut tragedy of December 2012, recently recommended that schools consider “the usage of IP enabled cameras” in schools to “support response capacity.”¹⁰²

⁹⁷ Selected or adapted from FEMA, 2012, Ch. 3, p. 42

⁹⁸ Texas State University, Ch. 45, p. 2

⁹⁹ Selected or adapted from FEMA, 2012, Section F, p. 47 (“Building Vulnerability Assessment Checklist”)

¹⁰⁰ See NCEF, *Improving School Access Control*, and Schneider, *School Security Technologies*

¹⁰¹ See D-Link, p. 2

¹⁰² Sandy Hook Advisory Commission, p. 13

For more information on choosing and installing a surveillance system, as well as balancing student privacy with school safety, see the following:

- National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities – [School Security Technologies](#)
- National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities – [Selecting Security Technology Providers](#)
- Department of Homeland Security – *Primer to Design Safe School Projects in Case of Terrorist Attacks and School Shootings*, Section F
- Department of Education: [Balancing Student Privacy and School Safety: a Guide to the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act for Elementary and Secondary Schools](#)

Communications and Alarm: Overview and Common Vulnerabilities

Choosing and installing adequate communications systems is a fundamental part of a school’s security infrastructure. In an active shooter situation, schools must be able to both communicate rapidly and clearly with outside responders as well as alert their occupants to the threat and advise action. Additionally, it is important that occupants of a school have the ability to readily establish communication with and relay information to a school’s main administrative or security offices from various locations throughout the school, including classrooms. As the NCEF puts it, “a teacher shouldn’t have to choose between staying with students and calling for help.”¹⁰³

NCEF points out that weaknesses in communication systems often include:¹⁰⁴

- Unreachable areas, such as playgrounds, bathrooms, boiler rooms or basements, due to lack of radio reception, wiring, speakers, or phones;
- Dysfunctional equipment that works inconsistently, due to bad weather, leaky roofs, or deferred maintenance;
- Reliance on towers or systems that predictably overload in genuine emergencies;

Communications and Alarm Systems: Best Practices

The Department of Homeland Security describes the following as important components of a school’s communications system:¹⁰⁵

- Telecommunications systems – according to DHS, these are essential to the operation of many modern security devices in addition to providing the ability to alert external responders of an emergency. Schools should have an independent system, such as radios or cellular phones, to alert responders;
- Redundancy – A second telephone service should be maintained to allow communications in case of an incident. A base radio communications system with antenna should be installed in the stairwell, and portable sets should be distributed to each floor as a preferred alternative;
- Radio telemetry system – this system should provide antennas throughout the school facility if required for emergency communications through a wireless transmission of data;
- Alarm and information systems – these should not be collected and mounted in a single conduit, or even collocated;

¹⁰³ Schneider, *School Security Technologies*, p. 9

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 9

¹⁰⁵ See FEMA, 2012, Ch. 3, p. 48 - 49

- Empty conduits (usually only a consideration during new construction) and power outlets – these should be provided for possible future installation of security control equipment;
- Mass notification systems – these are critical for advising faculty, students, and visitors of impending danger, and ideally can provide notifications to the entire school or send message to specific locations;
- Classroom communication systems – these can provide a rapid means for staff or students to alert the administration that a serious incident is taking place, and can consist of a push-to-talk button installed on a wall, an identifiable telephone system, or other means;
- Schools might also consider tying alarm systems into police dispatch centers to facilitate quick/rapid response to alarm conditions.¹⁰⁶

Communications and Alarm Systems: Other Considerations

Like other security technologies, there exist a wide array of options for school administrators looking to install new or improve upon their current communications and alarm systems. Installation of Integrated Security Management Systems (ISMS), as described in the ‘Surveillance Equipment: Other Considerations’ section above, encompasses this area of security. The National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities provides a detailed discussion on many issues related to choice, purchase, and maintenance of communications and alarm systems in their publication on security technologies from 2010, which school officials may find useful. The following questions, from the DHS Primer’s “Building Vulnerability Assessment Checklist,” may also be useful in considering such issues:¹⁰⁷

- Are all classrooms, including portable classrooms, on the public address system?
- Do intercoms, phones, or radios allow for two-way verbal communication between all classrooms and the school’s administrative or security offices?
- Does a mass notification system reach all building occupants (public address, pager, cell phone, computer override, etc.)?
- Does the mass notification system provide warning and alert information, along with actions to take before and after an incident?
- Do shelter spaces have the necessary provisions to ensure cell phone or radio communication by EMS personnel?
- In high-risk areas, is communications system wiring distributed in secure chases and risers, or otherwise secure areas, to prevent tampering?
- Does the school have the necessary transmitters, receivers, and repeaters to ensure radio communication by EMS personnel everywhere in the building?

It is also worth mentioning that, in many recent cases, the use of personal cellphones has been an important factor in emergency situations like those with an active shooter. In the midst of an emergency, a personal cellphone may be the only means of communication with outside responders or a school’s security office. The Sandy Hook Advisory Commission suggested “requiring school facilities to evaluate cell phone coverage throughout the facilities and grounds and make reasonable efforts to address deficiencies” that might render cellphones useless in such a situation.¹⁰⁸ While this may only

¹⁰⁶ See Texas State University, Ch. 45, p. 1-2

¹⁰⁷ Selected or adapted from FEMA, 2012, Section F, p. 15, 30, 34, 42 (“Building Vulnerability Assessment Checklist”)

¹⁰⁸ Sandy Hook Advisory Commission, p. 12

apply to staff cellphones – given school policies regarding student cellphone use during school hours – it nevertheless may be worthy of further consideration.

For further details and questions similar to those above, please refer to section 4 of appendix F in the DHS primer. For other information, the following may be useful:

- School Management and Planning: [Critical Communications](#)

Additional Consideration: New School Construction

While our main goal in this document is to provide existing schools with broadly applicable solutions to make their facilities more secure and their students and staff safer, it also can be of use to those planning and constructing new school facilities. It is almost always easier, more effective, and more efficient to incorporate security-enhancing best practices into a new facility than to attempt to retrofit an existing facility. For example, a new facility can incorporate electronic alarm and door locking systems that allow an administrator to remotely lock down all classrooms and doors in response to an approaching threat with the push of a button; installing such a system in an older school may be impractical or prohibitively expensive.

Our team of experts confirmed this view during their assessments of schools across the United States. Our experts noted that in many older schools or smaller schools with especially limited resources, a facility’s architectural design, site layout, and other physical features created inherent vulnerabilities that required significant resources and effort to remediate. On the other hand, our experts examined a brand new middle school that, due to the security-enhancing features “built-in” to the facility, was significantly ahead of other schools in providing a base level of protection to students and staff.

The considerations that should go into construction of a new facility are numerous and will not be discussed in depth beyond what is covered elsewhere in this document. These considerations span from the macro (e.g., where in a city or town to place a school to reduce risk) to the micro (e.g., the type of electrical system inside of a school that can enhance security features). We strongly recommend that those involved in the planning and construction process involve security experts, law enforcement, and other school security stakeholders before ‘breaking ground’ on a new facility.

For more information on these types of considerations in the construction of new schools, readers may refer to the following:

- FEMA: *Primer to design Safe School Projects in Case of Terrorist Attacks and School Shootings* - Chapter 2
- FEMA Online Course E155 – “Building Design for Homeland Security” - <http://www.fema.gov/mitigation/fema-e155-building-design-homeland-security-course>

Prevention and Mitigation: Daily Policies and Procedures

Another important aspect of prevention and mitigation are the policies and procedures that both complement existing physical security measures and compensate for areas in which they are lacking or for various reasons, inappropriate or impractical to install. Two areas that include these policies and procedures are directly related to access control – namely, those encompassing visitor sign-in and badging and key control. Others, such as bus loading/unloading procedures and general supervision and monitoring procedures, compensate for security vulnerabilities for which purely physical means are minimally applicable or insufficient, without adding a human element of security. Finally, other miscellaneous recommendations based on our experts' assessments of schools are offered. These procedural aspects of prevention and mitigation are also of note because they generally are an inexpensive way of positively affecting overall levels of security as they primarily involve altering human action rather than the installation of more expensive physical systems.

Visitor Management: Overview and Common Vulnerabilities

Many schools have established visitor sign-in and badge policies and procedures already in place at their facilities. However, too often exceptions to these rules are the rules themselves with many visitors bypassing or ignoring visitor sign-in and badge procedures and school staff and administrators inconsistently enforcing them, if at all. While in most cases the failure to enforce these rules does not lead to harm, there are still several unnecessary vulnerabilities to which a school exposes itself by not enforcing such rules.

First and foremost is the most obvious – a threatening individual could easily gain access to the school and cause harm either without being stopped or without being noticed in the first place. Additionally, a non-threatening individual such as a parent that is not clearly identified as a visitor could be mistaken as a threat by law enforcement or other armed responders in a chaotic situation. In our assessments of school facilities, it was also noted on multiple occasions that staff members did not display staff badges or enforcing of such policies was minimal, which can further create confusion – especially in an emergency situation – as to what adults are authorized to be on school property and who may be an intruder.

Visitor Management: Best Practices

There are several recommendations with regards to visitor management procedures that school officials should consider in establishing these practices at their school, including:

- Establish one main entrance and put up signage identifying it as the main entrance. Maintain visible signage on campus and on all school doors directing visitors to the main entrance door;¹⁰⁹
- Some schools also post notices advising that individuals who do not follow visitation procedures may be charged with trespassing;¹¹⁰
- Create a visitor sign-in, sign-out, and escort procedure;¹¹¹
- Visitors should be greeted at the main entrance of the school and asked for identification, such as a driver's license. This should ideally occur in a locked vestibule before the visitor is permitted further access to the school;¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ NSSSS

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

- Consider establishing some form of “credential exchange,” in which visitors exchange a driver’s license or photo ID to be safely stored until the visitor completes his/her business, in exchange for a badge or other credentials to be clearly displayed by the visitor.¹¹³ (Note that this parallels the recommendation in Interim Report by the Sandy Hook Advisory Commission that a Trusted Access Program (TAP) “be enforced at all schools [to] ... allow, through the visual display of credentials, the identification of staff, contractors, parents, and others authorized to be on school grounds.”¹¹⁴);
- Consider personally escorting all visitors throughout their business on school grounds.

Visitor Management: Other Considerations

Several other aspects of school security both support and are supported by the establishment of effective and consistently enforced visitor management. For instance, if unmonitored exterior doors are unlocked from the outside and provide easy access to the school building, even the best visitor management procedures at the main entrance are of minimal value. Additionally, if the occupants of a school, such as students and teachers, do not recognize when a visitor fails to display their credentials, then much of the point of visitor management has been lost. As such, school officials should consider these additional thoughts on visitor management:¹¹⁵

- Reduce the number of doors which may be opened from the outside (while keeping in mind the necessity of being able to open doors from the inside in the event of a fire or other emergency);
- Consider the use of a camera, intercom, and buzzer at the school main entrance, especially at elementary schools. Be sure to have the controls for these [devices] at the desk of each secretary, rather than only at that of one person, if you have main office secretaries controlling the doors. Train the secretaries on proper procedures for allowing access;
- Secure custodial entrances and delivery doors during and after school hours. Have custodial personnel keep a log of deliveries to include the name of the vendor company, name of the delivery person, license plate of the vehicle, date and time of arrival and departure, and associated information;
- Train all school staff, including support personnel, to greet and challenge strangers. Staff should be trained to at least report strangers to the office if they do not feel safe in approaching someone they believe to be an intruder;
- Train students not to open doors to strangers, other students, or even adults they may know;
- Educate parents about access control strategies and the importance of them following the rules;
- Consider using a badge on a colored, break-away lanyard to be displayed around the neck of a visitor, rather than a sticker (which can fall off, be inconsistently applied, or damage clothing);
- Look into software that can scan photo ID and check visitor information on matches in sex offender registries, restraining orders, known threats in the community, expelled students, etc. before issuing credentials.

For more information on the subject of visitor management, which school officials may find valuable for further consultation, please refer to:

- School Planning and Management: [Effectively Managing Visitors](#)
- School Planning and Management: [R U up 2 Speed?](#)
- National School Safety and Security Services: [School Access and Visitor Control](#)

Key Control: Overview and Common Vulnerabilities

For various reasons, conventional keys are still frequently used by many schools in terms of access control. Adherence to habit, limited financial cost, or technological familiarity may all contribute to this. However, in many cases schools will “readily admit that dozens of keys or more are floating around, lost, stolen or unaccounted for.”¹¹⁶ If this is the case, other physical and procedural security measures – like good doors and locks – are minimally effective in keeping unwanted visitors out if individuals can simply unlock a locked door with an obtained key. The National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities lists the following as indicators that conventional keys and locks are no longer adequate:¹¹⁷

- Burglaries in which thieves accessed locked rooms and there were no signs of forced entry;
- Lost keys or a history of distributing keys that were not stamped “Do not duplicate.” Stamping should discourage duplication, although it is no guarantee that it will not occur;
- Lockdown plans that are heavily dependent on the extensive use of keys. If only some staff members carry the keys, or if the act of locking the doors would put teachers in the line of fire, or if teachers are likely to be physiologically stressed during the crisis, then an alternative plan is worth considering.

Vulnerabilities due to keys can be primarily addressed in two ways. One way is by addressing policies and procedures related to distribution and tracking of keys. The other is by transitioning to other forms of access control aside from traditional keys that utilize technology to improve ease of use, issuance/de-issuance of access, tracking, and other issues.

Key Control: Best Practices

Schools must make an informed judgment as to whether current policies and procedures regarding keys and access control are effective. Indeed, according to NCEF, “in many cases, a conventional lock-and-key system is still the best option. If it works, don’t fix it.”¹¹⁸ If a school does decide to rely on more traditional lock-and-key systems, school officials may want to consider the following recommendations:¹¹⁹

- Have a formal plan that establishes systematic control of locks and keys, the components of which include:
 - Knowing the identity of authorized key holders, which keys they have access to, and why they are needed;
 - Taking a physical inventory of every access point and every piece of door hardware in every building;
 - Identifying the keys that fit each of the locks, who has the keys, what keys they have and what doors they access;
 - Labeling every door with an ID number, and labeling and recording the corresponding key;

¹¹⁶ Schneider, *School Security Technologies*, p. 2

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ See: Pires

- Properly balance security and public access needs, by understanding how the facility works on a day-to-day basis so that routines and operations are disrupted as little as possible when a key control and management plan is implemented;
- Plan for future needs by accounting for future growth;
- Store and track your keys appropriately. Consider, for example, utilizing online monitoring, updating and reporting capabilities that can allow campus security to view who has keys out, who previously had keys out and when, and that can send e-mail alerts to security when keys are not returned as scheduled.

Key Control: Other Considerations

For reasons briefly discussed above and for others, many schools are moving towards incorporating newer, electronic keying systems that minimize many of the complications and vulnerabilities associated with traditional key systems. There are various resources that school officials may want to consult in examining the technological options that exist and their various benefits as well as disadvantages:

- Designed Security, Inc.: [Physical Access Control Cheat](#)
- National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities: [School Security Technologies](#)
- Campus Security Magazine: [Photo Gallery of Access Control Options](#)

Bus Procedures and Physical Loading/Unloading Zone: Overview and Common Vulnerabilities

Buses pose a unique challenge to school security for several reasons. For one, what occurs on the inside of a bus is often subject to minimal amounts of supervision; in many cases, the bus driver is the only adult on board along with dozens of children, and must primarily pay attention to the road in addition to any supervisory duties. This can make it difficult to actively monitor who is on the bus, what they are doing, and what items (such as weapons) they are carrying until they step off of the bus and onto school grounds. This risk is compounded by the reality that in most cases, there is little that can be done to screen items brought onto a bus by a student when they load the bus as opposed to the more extensive screening that is possible, for example, at the front door of a building. Therefore, threats can come from those on the buses themselves.

Additionally, buses can be the target of threats at a school. Because of the large number of individuals on a bus and the minimal opportunity for rapid exit from the vehicle, undertaking rapid egress for many individuals from the bus in the case of an emergency can prove very difficult. Furthermore, buses' size and the reality that they are often parked very close together or "stacked" one behind another may complicate or prevent egress in an emergency situation (see Figure 23). It may be furthermore difficult to communicate to those on a bus (including the driver) that an emergency is taking place. Finally, buses can indirectly prevent detection of a threat or by blocking sight lines and reducing natural surveillance, thereby creating an opportunity for a threatening individual to approach the school without being detected. They also can complicate response procedures if they block arrival of law enforcement or other emergency response vehicles.



Figure 23: Buses stacked closely, preventing or slowing emergency egress. Sight lines to surrounding areas heavily obscured.

Vulnerabilities of the sort described above were one of the most common findings in security assessments of schools conducted in preparation of this report. Minimizing the risk posed to and by buses involves both physical and procedural measures. This section is meant to integrate both the physical and procedural means that schools can take to reduce these vulnerabilities.

Bus Procedures: Best Practices

In designing daily bus procedures, school officials must understandably balance sometimes competing priorities. For example, while on one hand buses can be vulnerable to threats like an active shooter and may also increase a school's vulnerability to such threats, they also can be dangerous to pedestrians such as students walking in the area around them. As such, many standard bus arrival/departure and unloading/loading procedures advise that buses arrive and park in a single-file configuration with right wheel to the curb not dissimilar to that portrayed in Figure 23. The rationale behind such a procedure is that, as pictured, students do not have to walk either in front of or behind buses as they unload or load. Furthermore, if stacked single file as such, buses do not need to drive in reverse at any point to exit, therefore reducing risk to students or others that may be behind buses. Nevertheless, doing so can increase the risk to an active shooter as described above.

Bus procedure related security can also be enhanced through the actions of bus drivers and other adults who can recognize threats and issue alerts/take appropriate action.

In minimizing risk to an active shooter event through bus procedures, school officials should consider the following:

- Staggering buses to allow for emergency egress;
- Positioning buses in a single row or lane, with adequate space in between buses, to prevent one bus from blocking in another in the case that emergency egress proves necessary;
- Positioning security personnel in strategic areas, such as the lead and trail of bus lanes, to monitor avenues of approach from external areas as well as immediate student activity during unloading and loading times;
- Increasing general supervision of students and bus loading/unloading zone by teachers and staff;
- Utilizing surveillance cameras where/when human monitoring is impractical or impossible to monitor bus loading/unloading zones;
- Providing emergency training to bus drivers, integrated bus arrival/departure into emergency plans and exercises, and conducting emergency egress drills for bus drivers;
- Installing surveillance equipment inside of buses enhance deterrence and detection of bus-based threats. (see Figures 24 and 25)



Figure 24: Surveillance camera in the back of the bus.



Figure 25: Surveillance cameras at the front of the bus.

School officials should consider these and other priorities in crafting procedures for bus loading and unloading. Officials may need to employ a level of creativity, and as always, should tailor procedures to a school's specific needs and vulnerabilities while consulting with relevant experts and stakeholders.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) also provides a "School Bus Driver In-Service Safety Series" that includes lesson modules for bus drivers on a number of topics both directly and indirectly related to preparing for potential emergencies like active shooter, including:¹²⁰

- Driver attitude;
- Emergency evacuation [i.e., removing students from a bus in which a danger exists];
- Emergency egress [i.e., removing a busload of students from a dangerous situation];
- Loading and unloading;
- Student management;
- Students with special needs;
- Vehicle training.

Bus Procedures: Other Considerations

School buses, and the children who ride them, are not only at risk during the loading and unloading phase of the school day in designated bus zones [although the congestion and crowd build up that they can cause during these times is a reason that they receive particular attention]. Unavoidably, school buses are bound to carry large numbers of students – often with minimal adult supervision, control, or protection – beyond the highly controlled property of a school into the broader world in which the variables, scenarios, and risks for which there is a need to account are endless. In addition to traversing various roads, buses frequently stop in areas of differing safety to pick up and drop off students, increasing exposure to risks while stationary. Unfortunately, this was demonstrated in terrifying and high profile fashion as recently as February of 2013, when a deranged Alabama man boarded a school bus, shot and killed the driver, kidnapped a young student, and held him hostage for multiple days in an underground bunker.

¹²⁰ NHTSA, "School Bus Driver In-Service Safety Series"

The Florida Association for Pupil Transportation, a group that “provides vision, leadership, and services to the student transportation community to improve safety, efficiency and service to Florida’s public school children,” has created a presentation entitled “Active Shooter Response Training on the School Bus: Survival Mindset and Courses of Action.” The presentation includes guidance for bus drivers on dealing with emergency situations in which there is the threat of an active shooter or such a threat appears imminent, including:¹²¹

- Be observant of the environment you travel by each day, and fall back on [training];
- If you see something that is not right at the bus stop as you pull up, (e.g., individual with a gun) don’t stop, continue to drive by the stop and call dispatch with observations;
- If something occurs on the bus, leave radio microphone in open position to allow for dispatchers to listen to events;
- As a last resort (for instance, if the weapon has been used/shots have been fired), attempt to take out the threat.

While it is important to recognize the threats that can face students who travel to and from school by bus, it is also important to recognize that the risk posed by such threats are small when taken in a larger context. As such, it would be highly questionable to discourage parents from continuing to send their children to school via school bus due to the risks outlined above. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), school buses are the safest mode of transportation for getting children back and forth to school, including being driven by parents or adults.¹²² This is mentioned merely to reiterate the point that school security should be always viewed in the larger context of student safety; protecting against active shooter is only one of many educational and safety priorities that schools focus on for children, and only a comprehensive approach based on unique needs and capabilities should be undertaken.

Bus Loading and Unloading Zones (Physical Site): Best Practices

A number of goals should define placement and use of bus loading and unloading zones in order to maximize security. Like parking zones, bus loading/unloading zones should be designated based on their conduciveness to monitoring, room for maneuverability, and effect on natural surveillance of broader school grounds. Bus zones should facilitate and be tailored to procedural best practices as described above. The following physical site best practices regarding bus loading/unloading zones should be followed:¹²³

- Locate bus loading area so that it is visible to administration or adjacent areas of surveillance;
- Avoid crosswalks at entry to and exit from bus zones;
- Segregate the bus loading and unloading area from the main entry and other vehicular traffic;
- Provide separate driveways and parking lots for buses and cars;
- Design zones so that buses do not have to park in double rows or back up to turn or park.

¹²¹ See: FAPT

¹²² NHTSA, “My choice...their ride”

¹²³ Based on or selected from Texas State University, Chapter 7

Bus Loading and Unloading Zones (Physical Site): Other Considerations¹²⁴

- Do buses drop off and pick up students in a designated, marked loading/unloading zone near a designated and supervised school entrance, in full view of designated school staff or security?
- Do bus zones require that buses have to back up to turn or park, or do they have to be parked in double rows?
- Are bus loading/unloading zones and adjoined areas adequate to avoid overcrowding while students wait for, load, and unload buses?
- Are parent drop-off and pick-up zones clearly designated and separated from bus traffic?

General Supervision and Monitoring: Overview and Common Vulnerabilities

According to Safe Havens International, “there are very few things that can have such a dramatic impact on school safety as you will see with good student supervision.”¹²⁵ The Kentucky Center for School Safety’s publication, “Common Issues Found in Safe School Assessments”, states:

Most school staffs do an admirable job of supervising students while the students are in the classrooms, but they often are not as diligent with supervision when their students are in the various, but necessary, non-classroom modes during the school day. During assessments, we find frequently that there is not enough “active” supervision during routine transitioning periods, such as morning arrivals, after-school dismissals, breaks, class changes, recesses, etc. Ironically, most schools’ administrators have developed detailed supervision plans for the vast majority of, if not all, non-classroom scenarios; however, many times those plans are either not enforced by the administration (which invariably leads to most staff members gradually abandoning their routine supervisory duties), or the staff members supervising are not vigilant in their roles as supervisors. Vigilant supervision is “active” supervision, which entails visibly moving among and interacting with the students being supervised.¹²⁶

In assessments that were done in preparation of this report, similar findings were common. Supervision is a crucial piece of school security that affects multiple areas already discussed in this document. Adequate and active supervision deters inappropriate and potentially dangerous behavior; it has the potential to reduce bullying and create a more positive school culture and climate; it increases the chances that, if a threat or potential threat does appear to arise, an adult will recognize, report, and respond to it in a timely manner.

General Supervision and Monitoring: Best Practices

KYCSSL recommends that school administrators:

Emphasize often the importance of adequately and effectively supervising students in transition by “requiring” and “assigning” staff to specific areas to supervise, rather than only encouraging them to perform this duty. This responsibility, we believe, is much too critical to the school’s

¹²⁴ Based on or selected from FEMA, 2012, Section F, p. 10 (Building Vulnerability Assessment Checklist)

¹²⁵ Safe Havens, “Why is student supervision so important?”

¹²⁶ Gateskill

overall level of safety to be left to the arbitrary judgment and mood of individual faculty members.¹²⁷

Safe Havens additionally posits:

One technique that is particularly easy to apply and at the same time, quite effective is to emphasize proper positioning of staff in relation to children they are supervising. For example, if an adult is walking a group of students from one location to the other and they take a position at the front of a line of students, they are not in a good position to observe the children. While this position may at times be appropriate with very young children, it is often not the best position for observing students.

Similarly, if teachers in a school who are assigned to monitor hallways at key times, they can often take a position at an intersection of multiple hallways to enable them to observe multiple areas of the building at one time.¹²⁸

General Supervision and Monitoring: Other Considerations

As discussed in other sections of this document, students' actions and interactions are no longer limited to readily observable areas like hallways, playgrounds, and classrooms. Technology and social media have revolutionized the way that even very young students interact. While there are many benefits to the use of such technologies, unfortunately they have also provided avenues to risky and overall negative behaviors, such as cyberbullying and, in the extreme case, making threats of violence. Therefore, schools should recognize that even the best physical supervision is only part of an effective supervision strategy. There must be an awareness of what occurs via Internet or other technologies, such as text message. Schools are encouraged to work closely with parents on this issue to ensure that safe and positive communication through these mediums occurs both on and off of school property.

There are many resources that school officials may consult in designing policies and procedures related to supervising technology use by students, including:

- New York State Center for School Safety: [Cyberbullying Fact Sheet](#)
- New York State Center for School Safety: [Off School Grounds Cyberbullying Fact Sheet](#)
- New York State Center for School Safety: [Social Networking Fact Sheet](#)
- Kentucky Center for School Safety: [Cyber-Bullying – “The Silent Tormentor”](#)
- Stopbullying.gov: [Cyberbullying Page](#)

Other Daily Policies and Procedures: Overview and Common Vulnerabilities

Crises at schools – especially violent events like those involving an active shooter – happen quickly and have the opportunity to catch many in a school setting by surprise. There are multiple small steps that schools can take to minimize the impact of surprise and better mitigate risk.

Other Daily Policies and Procedures: Recommendations

¹²⁷ Gateskill

¹²⁸ Safe Havens, “School Safety Expert advice on Simple Techniques to Improve Supervision of Children – Positioning”

- Consider locking all classroom doors during daily instruction;
- Consider affixing a 'Crisis Response Checklist' or similar abridged resource of essential crisis response steps to every classroom exit doorway; (see Figure 26)
- Consider placing a rubber triangular chock block or door wedge near each entry door to serve as an additional reliable door security device.



Figure 26: Crisis Response Checklist affixed to door.

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LAYER TWO – PREPAREDNESS



Figure 27: Preparedness Cycle. Source: FEMA - “The Preparedness Cycle”, from Comprehensive Preparedness Guide (CPG) 101, Section 1, Page 5

Overview

Prevention and mitigation greatly minimize a school’s vulnerability to violent attack, but they can never eliminate it completely. Therefore, the discussion in Layer Two focuses on the concept of preparedness. It deals with preparing administrators, teachers, staff, students, emergency responders, and other stakeholders to be ready to deal with the unfortunate but all too real possibility that preventive measures will fail to prevent an attack from materializing. The reality that some threats border on the unpredictable only intensifies this need. Preparedness need not cost much money; it does, however, take time and devotion. But if a violent situation does arise, no other investment has a greater influence over the outcome than whether the people at the school have been properly prepared and trained to assume the essential roles and responsibilities and make the essential decisions in a crisis. According to the Department of Education, the basic idea behind preparedness is that:

Good planning will facilitate a rapid, coordinated, effective response when a crisis occurs. Being well prepared involves an investment of time and resources – but the potential to reduce injury and save lives is well worth the effort.¹²⁹

Preparedness, however, goes beyond planning. Schools absolutely should develop and continually reevaluate plans, but must also ensure that beyond those plans, individuals responding to a crisis have proper tools and training to carry them out. Schools should ensure that different groups – including adults, students of varying ages, and students with special needs, are prepared in a way fitting to their particular roles in an emergency situation and their varying capabilities and needs.

¹²⁹ DOE, 2003, Ch. 3, p. 1

Establishing an Emergency Response Team

Before detailed planning and other preparation takes place, an initial step for schools is to establish what is frequently termed a “crisis response team”¹³⁰ or an “emergency response team.”¹³¹ According to the Department of Education’s Crisis Planning Guide:

One of the key functions of this team is to identify the types of crises that may occur in the district and schools and define what events would activate the plan. The team may consider many factors such as the school’s ability to handle a situation with internal resources and its experience in responding to past events.¹³²

These teams are often formed on both a district-wide and school-specific level. Ideally, district teams develop district-wide emergency management plans and subsequently support individual school teams in developing school-specific plans that work in concert with the district plans but account for factors and needs unique to that particular school.¹³³ It is recommended that the district crisis response team be assembled with a variety of professionals with expertise in emergency management, community partners, and school-based staff, for example:¹³⁴

- Police, including the School Resource Officer(s), fire, and emergency services personnel;
- Public and mental health professionals;
- Facilities and cafeteria managers;
- Nurses;
- Disability specialists;
- Counselors;
- Teachers;
- Administrators;
- A representative of the bus drivers.

The district crisis response team is responsible for:¹³⁵

- Initiating, building, and maintaining relationships with community partners;
- Conducting safety and security needs assessments;
- Establishing and updating the emergency management plan;
- Assisting in the establishment of individual school-based crisis response teams, to include community partners and school-based personnel such as facilities managers, cafeteria managers, nurses, disability specialists, counselors, teachers, and administrators; and
- Developing training activities and conducting emergency exercises to support and improve the plan.

¹³⁰ DOE, 2007, Issue 8, p.4

¹³¹ KYCSS, p. 61

¹³² DOE, 2003, Ch. 1, p. 5

¹³³ DOE, 2007, Issue 2, p. 1

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ DOE, 2007, Issue 1, p.1

The individual school crisis response team “should reflect the diversity of the school community and should capitalize on the unique training and expertise offered by staff in various positions in the school.”¹³⁶ Selected members of this team may include:¹³⁷

- Principal;
- Counselor;
- Nurse;
- Head custodian or campus foreman;
- Office secretary;
- Chemistry teacher [due to control of access to dangerous chemicals];
- School security Officer;
- Law enforcement personnel [including School Resource Officer as applicable];
- School psychologist;
- Social worker;
- Special education teacher;
- Transportation coordinator;
- Staff located in strategic positions in the building (i.e., near exits or fire extinguishers);
- Person tasked with receiving incoming school telephone calls.

The purpose of establishing the team includes:¹³⁸

- Develop the school’s Emergency Management Response Plan based upon documented school-specific risks, assets, and needs. This plan should use an all-hazards approach and be aligned with the District Plan;
- Conduct or coordinate orientation training for staff and recommend additional training [to include ongoing training, drills, and exercises as recommended in this document. This may be best accomplished during staff in-service days or during pre-school year orientation periods.]
- Conduct or coordinate awareness programs for students;
- Evaluate the school’s preparedness for implementing specific emergency response protocols based upon the given situation;
- Report progress to the school’s site based council, parents and superintendent;
- Assist with the completion of debriefs following exercises and/or an event.

It is important to note that crisis/emergency response teams as described above are entirely distinct from the roles school administrators and staff assume under the Incident Command System (ICS), discussed in greater detail below, that delineates operational authority in the case of an actual emergency and supports the response infrastructure in an active emergency situation. Emergency response teams are an essential part of the *preparedness* process but it is possible that certain members of this team will not have an active role in the live *response* to an emergency like an active shooter, which should follow the chain of command established under the ICS. In many schools some of the same key personnel will be part of the crisis response team and have a role under the ICS in an actual event.

¹³⁶ KYCSS, p. 34

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

Planning

Establishing or updating plans to deal with an emergency like an active shooter event is the foundation of the preparedness process. Plans must be both shaped by and familiar to relevant stakeholders, including those both within and outside of the school. The Department of Education writes that while “crisis planning may seem overwhelming” and “takes time and effort”, it is “manageable.”¹³⁹ We would stress to the reader that the task should not be ultimately considered overwhelming since being prepared in a time of crisis is the best investment towards making a school safer. DOE provides the following principles that may be useful to remember in the planning and broader preparedness processes:¹⁴⁰

- Effective crisis planning begins with leadership at the top – including state political leaders, but extending to local political leaders, district officials, and individual school leaders;
- Crisis plans should not be developed in a vacuum – they are a natural extension of ongoing school and community efforts to create safe learning environments;
- School and districts should open the channels of communication well before a crisis. Emergency responders should be familiar with your school, and relationships with city emergency managers, public works officials, health and mental health professionals, and even local media are all important;
- Crisis plans should be developed in partnership with other community groups, including law enforcement, fire safety officials, emergency medical services, as well as health and mental health professionals;
- A common vocabulary is necessary – it is critical that school staff and emergency responders know each other’s terminology. [Importantly, “plain language” during radio transmissions, rather than coded language, is much preferred. During the “fog of battle”, coded language is usually forgotten];
- Schools should tailor district crisis plans to meet individual school needs;
- Plan for the diverse needs of children and staff;
- Include all types of schools where appropriate;
- Provide teachers and staff with ready access to the plan so they can understand its components and act on them;
- Training and practice are essential for the successful implementation of crisis plans in an emergency as almost all such events call for human judgment to assess the situation and take the appropriate action or choose the right option.

The Department of Education outlines the following as important action steps that schools should take in the preparedness process:¹⁴¹

- Identify and involve stakeholders, including but not limited to: families, emergency responders, and city and county planners;
- Consider existing efforts, such as existing plans of district and local government and other agencies’ plans. Consider how the school’s crisis plan integrates with other agencies’ plans and identify any conflicts. Consider what information from others’ crisis plans can be used in the school’s crisis plan;

¹³⁹ DOE, 2003, Ch. 1, p. 9

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 9 – 12

¹⁴¹ Ibid., Ch. 3, p.3

- Determine what type of crises the plan will address, based on a school’s vulnerabilities, needs, and assets;
- Define roles and responsibilities – that is, create an organizational system that defines what should happen, when, and at whose direction;
- Develop methods for communicating with the staff, students, families, and the media.
- Identify and obtain necessary equipment and supplies;
- Prepare for immediate response in determining what action steps need to be taken for a variety of differing scenarios;
- Create maps and facilities information, especially those that will be valuable to emergency responders in a crisis;
- Develop accountability and student release procedures;
- Practice every plan multiple times;
- Identify gaps in the plans through these exercises;
- Amend plans to address identified gaps;
- Address liability issues.

The following discussion elaborates on the importance of each of these action steps in the preparedness process, identifies commonly identified weaknesses in that process where applicable, and provides recommendations regarding each action step that school officials should consider in preparing their school for a crisis situation involving an active shooter.

Identifying and Involving Stakeholders

Webster’s Dictionary defines “stakeholder” simply as “one who is involved in or affected by a course of action.” This broad definition parallels the broad spectrum of individuals and organizations that should be included in a school’s preparation for a crisis event such as that involving an active shooter. It is important to recognize that a school’s occupants are not the only ones involved or affected by such an event; emergency responders, law enforcement, family members, and the community at large are all involved and affected. As such, schools “should not attempt to create their plans in isolation. This will only lead to misunderstanding, lack of trust and less than a desirable response should one be needed.”¹⁴²

The Department of Education stresses the need to “ask stakeholders to provide feedback on sections of the plan that pertain to them.”¹⁴³ Key stakeholders are likely to include, but are not necessarily limited to:¹⁴⁴

- Families of students;
- Administrators, teachers, and staff;
- Law enforcement (local, regional, and/or state);
- Public health professionals;
- Mental health professionals;
- Local government officials (e.g., representative from the Mayor’s office);
- Fire Safety officials;

¹⁴² KYCSS, p. 9

¹⁴³ DOE, 2003, Ch. 3, p. 3

¹⁴⁴ DOE, 2003, Ch. 3, p. 3; KYCSS, p. 9

- Emergency Medical Services.

Conversations with these various stakeholders can take different forms. For instance, families might be consulted and asked to comment on procedures for communicating with them during a crisis.¹⁴⁵ In the case of emergency responders, it is important to learn how these organizations function and how schools and these organizations will work with each other during a crisis, and it can be valuable to learn the vocabulary, command structure, and culture of these outside organizations.¹⁴⁶ Even students can be actively consulted in the preparedness process and encouraged to take a stake in their own security; FEMA offers an “Involving Students in Prevention Checklist” which can be found on their website under “Prevention and Preparedness Resources” here:

<http://training.fema.gov/EMIWeb/emischool/EL361Toolkit/PreventionResources.htm>

Considering Existing Efforts

It is essential that, as part of the preparatory/planning phase, planning teams consider what planning activities and preparedness efforts have already been conducted by individual schools and school districts, as well as those on the local, regional, state, and federal/national level. This is important for two reasons. First, doing so will make planning not only easier but also more effective by building upon the wealth of experience and guidance that already exists on the subject. In other words, as the Department of Education advises, “do not reinvent the wheel.”¹⁴⁷

Second, consideration of existing efforts is perhaps even more essential in ensuring that whatever plans are developed are aligned with local, state, and federal emergency response protocols, in particular the U.S. Department of Homeland Security’s National Incident Management System (NIMS). The NIMS is the national, unified response plan used by first responders to prepare, coordinate, and execute responses to all types of emergencies. Complying with NIMS allows federal, state, local, and private agencies to jointly manage incidents and ensures a smooth and effective response to all emergencies.¹⁴⁸ School officials should consult the following online resources in this effort:

- NIMS – <http://www.fema.gov/emergency/nims/index.shtm>
- Department of Homeland Security State Homeland Security Contacts - <http://www.dhs.gov/state-homeland-security-contacts>
- Federal Emergency Management Agency – <http://www.fema.gov>
- FEMA Regional and State Emergency Management Agencies - <http://www.fema.gov/regional-operations>

Identifying Risks and Hazards to Address in the Plan

To strengthen the planning process, the Department of Education recommends that teams “identify and prioritize risks and hazards to the school community and take into consideration the possible effects of natural, biological, or manmade disasters on the school and local community.”¹⁴⁹ This highlights the

¹⁴⁵ DOE, 2003, Ch. 3, p.3

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., Ch. 1, p. 10

¹⁴⁸ DOE, 2007, Issue 1, p. 2

¹⁴⁹ DOE, 2007, Issue 1, p. 2

importance of conceptualizing some of the real and specific hazards, such as the one posed by an active shooter, in the preparedness process. At the same time, there is a consensus across multiple agencies, including the Department of Education and the Federal Emergency Management Agency, that schools and other facilities should take what is termed an “all-hazards” approach to emergency management planning. The FEMA Comprehensive Preparedness Guide (CPG) 101 describes the rationale behind such an approach as:

While the causes of emergencies can vary greatly, many of the effects do not. Planners can address common operational functions in their basic plans instead of having unique plans for every type of hazard or threat. For example, floods, wildfires, HAZMAT releases, and radiological dispersal devices may lead a jurisdiction to issue an evacuation order and open shelters. Even though each hazard’s characteristics (e.g., speed of onset, size of the affected area) are different, the general tasks for conducting an evacuation and shelter operations are the same. Planning for all threats and hazards ensures that, when addressing emergency functions, planners identify common tasks and those responsible for accomplishing the tasks.¹⁵⁰

Therefore, it is important that, while considering specifically the threat that an active shooter potentially poses to a school and its population, an all-hazards approach is still maintained. Not only will this ensure that schools are prepared for a variety of potential emergencies that are not only possible but in many cases even more likely to occur than an active shooter scenario, but also will arguably increase preparedness for an active shooter scenario itself as well. That is because even within one specific category of event, such as active shooter, there are a range of potential developments – some predictable and others less so – that may necessitate differing forms of response. Emergency management plans should not be so narrow so as to preclude the essential quality of adaptability that may be necessary both within individual emergency situations and across categories as well.

When identifying hazards, school officials should be aware of liability issues. According to the Department of Education:

Consideration of liability issues is necessary before crisis planning can be complete and may protect you and your staff from a lawsuit. Situations where there is a foreseeable danger can hold liability if the school does not make every reasonable effort to intervene or remediate the situation. A careful assessment of the hazards faced by the school is critical.¹⁵¹

It is not within the scope of this document to discuss in detail the legal ramifications of emergency management planning. Many states require schools to undertake certain emergency preparedness activities and planning. Schools and school districts should always comply with any local, state, or federal laws when embarking on the planning process. It is highly recommended that schools consult with appropriate legal counsel in addressing such needs.

Defining Roles and Responsibilities – Incorporating the Incident Command System (ICS)

Schools must be prepared to respond to an active shooter in conjunction with local, state, and federal law enforcement and other emergency response agencies. As partners with these agencies, the school’s

¹⁵⁰ CPG, Ch. 1, p. 2

¹⁵¹ DOE, 2003, Ch. 3, p. 11

responders must use the same terminologies and approach in a coordinated fashion. Schools must have a system in place that is capable of determining (1) what should happen, (2) when, and (3) at whose direction.

The Incident Command System, or ICS, is a standardized, on-scene, all-hazard incident management approach. ICS allows school personnel and community responders to adopt an integrated organizational structure that matches the complexities and demands of various incidents without being hindered by jurisdictional boundaries. The ICS structure is flexible. It can grow or shrink to meet different needs. This flexibility makes it a very cost-effective and efficient management approach for both small and large situations.¹⁵²

The ICS is the response infrastructure designated under the NIMS to facilitate effective and efficient incident management. The ICS utilizes five functional areas (Command, Operations, Planning, Logistics, and Finance-Administration) for managing all incidents, integrating facilities and resource management, establishing equipment standards, and creating a common incident management organization as illustrated below:

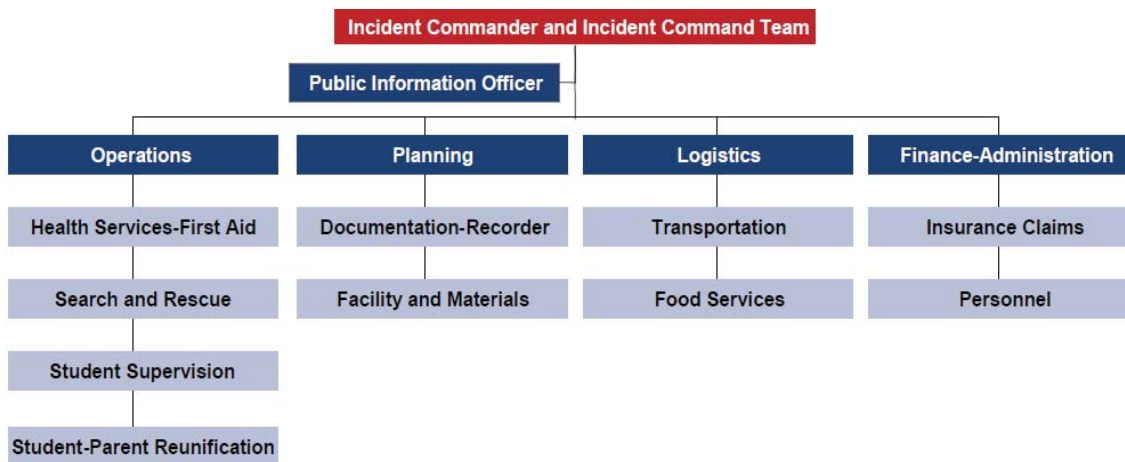


Figure 28: Sample School or School District Incident Command System (Source: DOE, 2007, Issue 1, p. 3)

Establishing ICS at your school involves:¹⁵³

- Identifying key team roles and functions;
- Assessing staff skills;
- Pre-designating staff for each ICS area;
- Coordinating with community partners to identify roles and responsibilities;
- Assigning key individual roles and functions; and
- Creating lines of succession (backup) for all key positions.

School officials should be familiar with and trained in Incident Command Systems, both generally and specific to schools. In particular school officials should be familiar with:

¹⁵² FEMA, Intro to ICS for Schools

¹⁵³ DOE, 2007, Issue 1, p. 3

- How ICS principles can be applied in a school-based incident;
- ICS organizational principles and elements;
- ICS positions and responsibilities;
- ICS facilities and functions;
- ICS planning; and
- How to be prepared to interface with community response personnel under the ICS.

Staff can become trained in ICS, free of charge, through online courses made available by the Department of Homeland Security. Requiring staff to become trained in NIMS and ICS was also a recent recommendation in the interim report of findings of the Sandy Hook Advisory Commission.¹⁵⁴

Recommended courses include:

- IS-100.b (ICS 100): Introduction to Incident Command System;
- ICS 200.b (ICS 200): ICS for Single Resources and Initial Action Incidents;
- IS 700: National Incident Management System (NIMS), An Introduction;
- IS-800.b: National Response Framework, An Introduction;
- IS-100.SCA: Introduction to the Incident Command System for Schools;
- IS: 907: Active Shooter: What You Can Do;
- IS-362.A: Multi-Hazard Emergency Planning for Schools;
- IS-100.HE: Introduction to Incident Command System for Higher Education.

The following are special considerations in applying ICS to your school:¹⁵⁵

- There is no correlation between the ICS chain of command and the school administrative structure;
- The structure is unique in order to avoid confusion over whom you should take direction from;
- Everyone's titles are different from their daily school titles;
- A single Incident Command Post should be established for all incidents, even for a small incident;
- School incidents may require additional facilities beyond those that are standard ICS facilities.

To help evaluate whether your school is ready to implement ICS, the following should be considered:¹⁵⁶

- Are your school's emergency operations plans, policies, and procedures consistent with ICS principles?
- Do you have the needed communications and other equipment, vests, badges, or other supplies to implement ICS?
- Can responders from different agencies (e.g. fire, police, public works) communicate with school personnel during an emergency?
- Have you identified qualified personnel to assume ICS command and general staff positions?
- Do you have sufficient back up personnel for all key ICS positions?

¹⁵⁴ Sandy Hook Advisory Commission, p. 14

¹⁵⁵ FEMA, Intro to ICS for Schools

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

- Have you identified potential locations for ICS facilities (e.g., Incident Command Post, Staging Area, Base, Camp, Helispots, etc.)?
- Do you practice applying ICS during drills and planned events?
- Within the past year, have you conducted an exercise practicing Unified Command with different agencies?
- Are after-action reviews conducted to identify lessons learned following exercises, drills, planned events, or incidents?

Developing a Communications Plan

According to the Department of Education, open lines of communication among crisis response team members, community partners, staff, students, district personnel, parents, and the media before, during, and after an incident is a critical component of emergency management.¹⁵⁷ Therefore, an effective emergency management plan should incorporate a detailed communications plan for the district and each school. The communications plan must:

- Create, in advance, policies and plans for communicating emergency information with the public;
- Develop procedures for maintaining communication among administrators, staff, and students, as well as between community partners, parents, and the media;
- Establish alternative communication devices and methods not connected to the main power source in case of power outages, downed phone lines, or an overwhelming number of cellular calls; and
- Identify a public information officer (PIO) who will serve as or prepare the primary spokesperson to the media and the public during a crisis.

In addition, FEMA’s Comprehensive Preparedness Guide advises that planners ensure the following qualities in communications systems, plans, and procedures:¹⁵⁸

- Interoperability;
- Accessibility;
- Redundancy.

The failure of a school’s communication system or a lack of adequate planning in this area can undermine even very well prepared schools in the event of an emergency like an active shooter. It is easy to conjure up many scenarios involving communications failures. For example, schools may be unable to communicate with students and staff via a PA system in the event of a power outage; a school’s Incident Commander may find that a two-way radio is incompatible with arriving law enforcement officers; multiple responding agencies may use different terminology which could lead to miscommunications and confusion. Quite simply, if communications equipment fails, if protocols for how and when to communicate are inadequate, or if there is a lack of shared terminology among school officials and outside responders, then an otherwise expertly crafted emergency response plan may quickly disintegrate in real time.

¹⁵⁷ DOE, 2007, Issue 1, p. 4

¹⁵⁸ CPG, Ch. 2, p. 2

According to an issue brief supported by the United States Department of Justice, entitled “Communications in the Incident Command System,” two principles of NIMS ICS are of particular note in regards to communication: (1) common terminology and (2) integrated communications.¹⁵⁹

With regards to the importance of a common terminology, the brief states:

The importance of common terminology is clear in interagency communications: responders cannot coordinate and cooperate if they are unable to understand one another when they try to communicate. The need for common terminology, i.e., “plain language” precedes incident response, however. Pre-incident planning and coordination require a common language to articulate needs, describe processes, establish policies, craft joint SOPs [standard operating procedures], and ultimately command resources during interagency operations. Interagency communications SOPs require a common dialect for describing the “who, when, why, where, what, and how” of operations.¹⁶⁰

Furthermore, in relation to integrated communications, the brief states:

Under ICS, communications and incident action plans have to be integrated to capture management goals and operational objectives. Integration of supporting services and technologies is critical to effective incident response. Since responder safety and effectiveness are closely related to how well communications supports them, the capabilities and capacity of systems to support operations is taken into account continuously during incident action planning.¹⁶¹

One recommendation is that emergency response team members and/or school officials take advantage of a free, online course provided by FEMA under the listing “IS-704: NIMS Communications and Information Management”, which can be found at:

<http://training.fema.gov/EMIWeb/IS/courseOverview.aspx?code=is-704>.

There are other resources that school emergency response teams may find valuable in considering the components of a communications plan as part of their emergency response plan:

- National Incident Management System (NIMS): *Communications and Information Management Standards* - http://www.fema.gov/library/file?type=publishedFile&file=nims_guide_0004_comm_and_info_management_standards_1_10_08.pdf&fileid=f4cc5390-d0e2-11dc-b3ee-001185636a87
- U.S. Department of Education, Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools (REMS) Technical Assistance Center: “Communication and Collaboration During Natural Disasters: The Lessons Learned from Past Experience” - http://training.fema.gov/EMIWeb/emischool/EL361Toolkit/assets/LL_CommunicationCollaboration.pdf
- United States Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS): Issue Brief – *Communications in the Incident Command System* -

¹⁵⁹ Hawkins, p. 4

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

- <http://www.search.org/files/pdf/IB2-CommICS.pdf>
- Texas School Safety Center: “Sample Communications Plan” - <http://www.txssc.txstate.edu/media/HLS/downloads/EOP/2010-Sample-Annex-B-Communications.doc>
- Kentucky Center for School Safety, *Emergency Management Resource Guide*, p.39 – 47 - <http://www.kycss.org/emp/Home/EmerRevCol.pdf>
- School Planning and Management: “Communication Systems” - http://www.peterli.com/spm/resources/articles/archive.php?article_id=1351
- FEMA Course – “Social Media in Emergency Management” - <http://training.fema.gov/EMIWeb/IS/courseOverview.aspx?code=IS-42>

Whatever the training, whether formal or informal, there is no substitute for ensuring that school officials and first responder representatives work together in developing the communications plan. Those involved must be familiar with their role in the plan and of the common terminology to be used. All must train and exercise on these plans together to see how well the communication plan functions when in use. This is a key best practice that any school and community serious about planning for and responding to an act of violence must undertake.

Obtaining Equipment and Supplies

Just as an effective emergency management plan accounts for what is done, when it is done, and at whose direction, so too should the plan account for the supplies that are needed to carry out the plan. The existing literature on this topic includes suggested items that vary in their applicability to preparing for an active shooter situation. For example, some sources discuss obtaining food and water as part of emergency management preparation. While food and water may be essential in a certain type of emergency situation for which a school’s all-hazards approach should account, it is unlikely to be of high importance in an active shooter emergency – which tends to begin and end quickly – and therefore will not be discussed at length here.

Nonetheless, there are several considerations in terms of equipment and supplies that are applicable in preparing for an active shooter situation. Equipment and supplies along these lines may include:

- Master keys for emergency responders to ensure complete access to the school;¹⁶²
- Phones and radios needed for communication (see above);¹⁶³
- Lists of contact information for families;¹⁶⁴
- “Go-kits” that are stocked with emergency supplies that can be easily accessed and transported in the event of an emergency. Typical go-kits are:
 - Stored in backpacks or duffle bags and placed in readily accessible and secure locations;
 - Equipped with supplies that address the needs of the specific school, its population, climate, facilities, and resources; and
 - Include a first-aid kit, emergency procedures, and student attendance rosters.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶² DOE, 2003, Ch. 3, p. 7

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ DOE, 2007, Issue 1, p. 5

The Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department (LASD) also has written tips on building and maintaining a "Crisis Response Box," which may be useful if the need arises to "quickly locate and provide relevant information to the right people so they may begin responding."¹⁶⁶ According to LASD, the Crisis Response Box has one simple goal:

School administrators will immediately have the information essential for effective management of a major critical incident. A crisis is not the time to collect information – it is the time to act upon information. Precious minutes need not be lost gathering life-saving intelligence. Knowing what information to collect ahead of time, how to organize it and how to use it during a crisis are all addressed through assembling the contents of the box.¹⁶⁷

The contents of this Crisis Response Box are recommended to include:¹⁶⁸

- Aerial photos of campus;
- Map of school and surrounding area;
- Campus layout;
- Blueprint of school buildings;
- Teacher/employee roster;
- Keys;
- Fire alarm turn-off procedures;
- Sprinkler system turn-off procedures;
- Utility shut-off valves;
- Gas line and utility line layout;
- Cable television satellite feed shut-off;
- Student photos;
- ICS key responders' phone numbers;
- Designated command post and staging areas;
- Student attendance roster;
- Emergency resource list;
- List of evacuation sites;
- Student disposition forms and emergency data cards;
- Inventory of staff resources;
- List of students with special needs;
- First aid supplies location;
- Emergency first aid supplies;
- Location of various video monitors.

The importance of each of these components may be useful to emergency management teams and/or school officials, and can be found here:

<http://www.state.nj.us/education/schools/security/task/planning/ActiveShooterSafetyConsiderations.pdf>

¹⁶⁶ Williams, p. 19

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 20 - 27

Other experts, including our own, recommend installing a secure box, attached to the exterior of a school, that law enforcement or other emergency responders can readily access when arriving at the school in the case of an active shooter (or other) emergency. This box may include essential items such as master keys, which may be of particular importance to arriving law enforcement that may be faced with a school in lockdown and may not have breach equipment readily accessible. It may also include useful maps, school layouts, and blueprints. Schools should consult with local stakeholders, law enforcement, and other emergency responders in considering such a tool.

FEMA also offers a “Recommended Emergency Supplies for the Whole School Checklist,” which emergency response teams and/or school officials may find useful in examining this issue further, which can be found here:

<http://training.fema.gov/EMIWeb/emischool/EL361Toolkit/assets/SchoolEmergencySupplies.doc>

Preparing for Response

In the case of an emergency such as an active shooter situation, it is essential that students, teachers, and staff take the appropriate actions so as to maximize their safety. The purpose of response plans is not to anticipate every possible scenario and nuance and create robots following a series of pre-determined steps. Rather, it is to familiarize those charged with student safety with the overall plan, their role within that plan, and guiding principles to work within and ultimately give them the confidence to initiate actions and make decisions under duress with or without direction. The Kentucky Center for School Safety’s (KYCSS) Emergency Management Resource Guide points out six Universal Emergency Procedures – defined as “sets of standard, clear directives that may be implemented across a variety of emergency situations.”¹⁶⁹ According to KYCSS, “when an emergency begins, the principal, as Incident Commander [or the otherwise specified/acting Incident Commander], will decide which Universal Emergency Procedures to implement, based on the situation.”¹⁷⁰ Of the six universal procedures, three are primarily of note in dealing with an active shooter situation: (1) lockdown, (2) reverse evacuation, and (3) evacuation.

- *Lockdowns* are designed for “situations where there is information that a person has a firearm or other weapon on school property and there is any indication that they may be about to use the weapon.” Because emergency lockdown protocols are typically more extreme and disruptive due to the high degree of danger for these types of threats, this can lead school officials to be reluctant to implement them. Many schools utilize both preventive and emergency lockdown options so school employees will have appropriate options for both dire life-threatening emergencies as well as for more common situations which require a higher degree of alertness and building security (e.g. police notification of a bank robbery in the vicinity of the school with suspect fleeing the scene might trigger a precautionary lockdown even though there is no threat directed at the school or known to be on school grounds or even in the area).¹⁷¹
- *Reverse evacuation* protocols “are used when there is a need to move students rapidly and in an organized fashion back *into* a facility because it is dangerous for them to remain outside,” due to

¹⁶⁹ KYCSS, p. 81

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Safe Havens, “Emergency Lockdown”

various natural and manmade threats including aggressive and/or armed persons outside of the school.¹⁷²

- *Evacuation* protocols require all students and staff to leave the building, due to conditions making it safer outside the school than it is inside the school.¹⁷³

It is crucial to remember when preparing response plans and training under those plans not to pre-designate that only one type of response will be activated upon a certain type of event occurring. An active shooter incident is a good example – decision making in an actual response may require the different protocols for lockdown, evacuation, or reverse evacuation be implemented throughout the lifecycle of the event. For example, students and staff outside of the school may be ordered to reverse evacuate and then lockdown. Or students inside the school might be ordered to lockdown but students located on an athletic field some distance from the school might evacuate and go to a pre-determined emergency assembly area. When preparing and practicing plans, school officials need to prepare for and practice this flexibility.

Lockdown

The Kentucky Center for School Safety provides the following as components of a lockdown procedure:¹⁷⁴

- Students are to be cleared from the halls immediately and to report to nearest available classroom;
- Assist those needing special assistance;
- Close and lock all windows and doors and do not leave for any reason;
- Cover all room and door windows so as to reduce ability to see within room from outside;
- Stay away from all doors and windows and move students to interior walls, drop low to ground and otherwise stay out of line of sight of any doors or windows if possible;
- Shut off lights;
- BE QUIET!
- Wait for further instruction by those designated under the plan or law enforcement responders.

An article in Campus Safety Magazine, entitled “Your Key to Effective Lockdowns”, also includes best practices with regards to lockdowns, several of which are provided here:¹⁷⁵

- **Remember that no lockdown protocol is perfect.** There is a tendency for many people to “what if” lockdown protocols to the point of gridlock. Lockdown protocols can become too cumbersome and confusing for effective application under stress to be viable if they attempt to address the wide range of scenarios dreamed up by some committee members.
- **Account for the effects of stress on staff.** Lockdown protocols, training and drills should be created with the understanding that staff and students may have to implement them under extreme pressure. Seemingly simple things, like inserting a key into a lock or reading a poorly formatted emergency chart, can prove difficult under extreme stress.

¹⁷² Save Havens, “Reverse Evacuation

¹⁷³ DOE, 2003, Ch. 3, p. 7; DOE, 2007, Issue 1, p. 4

¹⁷⁴ KYCSS, p. 81

¹⁷⁵ Dorn

- **Incorporate self-directed decision-making.** If staff members are trained to be solely reliant upon a command from a central authority, a tragedy could occur if a dangerous individual started an assault in a location where staff members become aware of the threat before the central authority is notified.

Schools may also want to consider securing doors with rubber chock blocks or door wedges (see Daily Policies and Procedures section in Layer One for more on this topic), which provide an inexpensive and simple addition to door security during lockdown.

Reverse Evacuation

“The reverse evacuation protocol is not only critical, it is perhaps even more important than the lockdown protocol. This is because any school that does not have a reverse evacuation protocol and the ability to execute it effectively, may be unable to implement a lockdown, shelter in place for hazardous materials or severe weather sheltering protocol when and if students and staff are outside of the school.”¹⁷⁶ The Kentucky Center for School Safety lists the following as components of a reverse evacuation:¹⁷⁷

- Move students and staff inside as quickly as possible;
- Assist those needing special assistance;
- Report to classroom;
- Check for injuries;
- Take attendance; report according to Student Accounting and Release procedures;
- Wait for further instructions.

Evacuation

The Kentucky Center for School Safety lists the following as components of an evacuation plan:¹⁷⁸

- Take the closest and safest way out as posted (use secondary route if primary route is blocked or hazardous);
- Take roll book for student accounting;
- Assist those needing special assistance;
- Do not stop for student/staff belongings;
- Go to designated assembly area;
- Check for injuries;
- Take attendance;
- Wait for further instructions.

The Department of Education’s Crisis Planning Guide includes several salient points about evacuation planning, including:¹⁷⁹

- The evacuation plan should include backup buildings to serve as emergency shelters, such as nearby community centers, religious institutions, businesses, or other schools;

¹⁷⁶ Safe Havens, “Reverse Evacuation – A Life or Death Protocol”

¹⁷⁷ KYCSS, p. 81

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ DOE, 2003, Ch. 3, p. 8

- Agreements for using backup spaces should be negotiated or reconfirmed prior the beginning of each school year;
- Evacuation plans should include contingencies for weather conditions such as rain, snow, and extreme cold and heat;
- Students with disabilities may have more restricted mobility than other students; plans should include transportation options for these students.

It is recommended that members of the emergency response team and/or relevant school officials consult additional resources that may assist in the creation of lockdown, reverse evacuation, and evacuation procedures, several of which are listed below.

- OSHA: Evacuation Plans and Procedures eTool - <http://www.osha.gov/SLTC/etools/evacuation/evac.html>
- State of Pennsylvania: Sample Checklist for Lockdown – http://www.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/document/432961/06380_sample_checklist_for_lockdown_pdf
- Michigan State Police: Lockdown Templates - http://www.michigan.gov/documents/msp/5-lockdown_template-all_182843_7.doc
- Government of Ontario: Guidelines for Developing and Maintaining Lockdown Procedures for Elementary and Secondary Schools in Ontario - <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/policyfunding/memos/june2009/LockdownGuidelinesEn.pdf>

If possible, school emergency response plans should identify both on-site and off-site assembly areas where students and staff can be moved safely away from danger when necessary. If the on-site school location is unsafe, then it may be necessary to move teachers and students to an off-site assembly area.

When choosing assembly areas off-site from schools, our experts recommend that school officials consider the following:

- Does the size of the location allow enough room for all students?
- Can the location be used as a secondary bus loading area?
- Is the location within walking distance of the school?
- Is the route to the assembly area free from obstacles, hazards (fences, high traffic roads, etc.)?
- Can the area be contained from media and other groups seeking to interact with teachers and staff?
- Does the location provide shelter from the elements (does it provide indoor and outdoor shelter)?
- Has the owner of the location provided their consent to the area being used as an assembly point during an emergency?
- Can this location be used as part of established accountability, release, and parent-student reunification procedures?
- In the event that students and staff end up at multiple on-site or off-site locations during an emergency, are plans and equipment in place to ensure communication between staff at these locations?

The above components of each emergency protocol are listed here only as an example and is not guaranteed to be appropriate either as part of a school's procedure or as a comprehensive procedure that will work for all schools. As with all parts of the preparedness process, it is strongly recommended

that the emergency response team consult with stakeholders, such as local law enforcement, emergency responders, and school district officials, to tailor emergency procedures to specific schools' needs and to ensure integration with district, regional, state, and federal plans and regulations.

Maps and Facilities Information

According to the Department of Education:

[Prior to and during] a crisis, emergency responders need to know the location of everything in a school. Create site maps that include information about classrooms, hallways, and stairwells, the location of utility shut-offs, and potential staging sites. Emergency responders need copies of this information in advance. [Prior to and] during a crisis designate locations— staging sites—for emergency responders to organize, for medical personnel to treat the injured, for the public information officer to brief the media, and for families to be reunited with their children. Student reunification sites should be as far away from the media staging area as possible. Law enforcement will help determine the plans needed to facilitate access of emergency responders and to restrict access of well-wishers and the curious.¹⁸⁰

The Kentucky Center for School Safety also recommends developing a “toolbox” that includes essential facilities information for use during an emergency. Some components may include:¹⁸¹

- Map of building(s) with location of exits, phones, first aid kits, and assembly areas;
- Blueprints of school building(s), including utilities;
- Videotape/DVD of inside and outside of the building and grounds;
- Map of local streets with evacuation route.

Once again, it is important to consult with stakeholders, especially local law enforcement and emergency responders, to determine what these groups will need in the case of an emergency such as an active shooter.

Accountability, Student Release, and Student-Parent Reunification Procedures

According to the Department of Education:

As soon as a crisis is recognized, account for all students, staff, and visitors. Emergency responders treat a situation very differently when people are missing. For example, when a bomb threat occurs, the stakes are substantially higher if firefighters do not know whether students are in the school when they are trying to locate and disarm a bomb ... [Additionally], in many crises, families have flocked to schools wanting to collect their children immediately. A method should be in place for tracking student release and ensuring that students are only release to authorized individuals.¹⁸²

¹⁸⁰ DOE, 2003, Ch. 3, p. 10

¹⁸¹ KYCSS, p. 78

¹⁸² DOE, 2003, Ch. 3, p. 10

Therefore, developing adequate and appropriate accountability and release procedures are essential in both (1) ensuring that the response is tailored to the nature of an emergency and the extent to which students, teachers, and staff may still be in danger and, (2) minimizing panic and the potential for parents to interfere with emergency operations when attempting to locate their child.

To account for students in the case of emergency, it is essential that rosters of faculty, staff, and students be on hand. It is important that those accounting for students and staff have updated roll books or attendance sheets in their possession during an emergency so as to avoid unnecessary confusion in the case of a student or staff member that is absent. As described above in the “Obtaining Equipment and Supplies” section, these lists might be incorporated into or stored in an emergency “go-kit” to ensure they are at hand in a crisis situation.

After accounting for students and staff, it is essential that schools have student release / parent-student reunification procedures in place in advance. Note that Parent-Student reunification is a component of ICS under the operations area.

FEMA provides guidance on parent-student reunification procedures. First, schools must establish a safe area for parents to pick up their children, which must be away from both the crisis and the students assembly area.¹⁸³ In a typical release, these steps will be followed:¹⁸⁴

- Parents will report to the assigned area and give the name of their child/children;
- Picture I.D. will normally be required by the person in charge to ensure the person requesting the child/children matches the name on the emergency release card;
- A runner will go to the student assembly area and get the child/children requested by the parent or adult. The runner will escort the student back to the pick-up area;
- Parents will be asked to sign a form indicating they picked up the child/children. The date and time will also be indicated on the pick-up form;
- If the child is in the first aid area the parent will be escorted to that area for reunification with their child/children;
- Counselors, when available, will be located close to the first aid area in the event they are needed.

It is recommended that emergency management teams and/or other officials review the remainder of the document, which also includes guidance on maintaining the procedures, traffic control, and other tips, which can be found here:

<http://training.fema.gov/EMIWeb/emischool/EL361Toolkit/assets/Parent-StudentReunificationProcedures.pdf>

FEMA also offers “General Suggestions for Parent-Student Reunification Plans for Schools,” which can be found here:

<http://training.fema.gov/EMIWeb/emischool/EL361Toolkit/assets/Parent-StudentReunificationPlans.pdf>

¹⁸³ Washington Military Department, p. 1

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

Practice and Exercises

The purpose of practices and exercises is not to create robots who follow a series of pre-determined steps but rather to practice the roles identified in the plans within different scenarios that:

- Emulate actual situations or conditions;
- Identify any gaps or weaknesses in the plans; and
- Give students and administrators the confidence to initiate actions and make decisions under duress with or without direction.

According to FEMA, an exercise is:

An instrument to train for, assess, practice, and improve performance in prevention, protection, response, and recovery capabilities in a risk-free environment. Exercises can be used for: testing and validating policies, plans, procedures, training, equipment, and interagency agreements; clarifying and training personnel in roles and responsibilities; improving interagency coordination and communications; identifying gaps in resources; improving individual performance; and identifying opportunities for development.¹⁸⁵

As the purpose and definition above illustrates, the value of practice through exercises is twofold: it prepares students, teachers, staff, responders, and others to confidently translate words into action in the case of an emergency; it also helps planners understand both the strengths and the gaps in existing plans so as to enable a continual improvement process with existing plans. Crucially, exercises provide the opportunity for those at the school to practice with external law enforcement and other emergency responders and to practice ICS implementation.

As the Department of Homeland Security puts it, “well-designed and well-executed exercises are the most effective means of.”¹⁸⁶

- Assessing and validating policies, plans, procedures, training, equipment, assumptions, and interagency agreements;
- Clarifying roles and responsibilities;
- Improving interagency coordination and communications;
- Identifying gaps in resources;
- Measuring performance; and
- Identifying opportunities for improvement.

Schools may utilize a wide range of drills and exercises to prepare for a crisis situation like that involving an active shooter. Drills and exercises can range from the informal and limited, involving a small group of select stakeholders discussing a particular aspect of emergency preparedness, to highly realistic and expansive in nature, involving many or all of the role players that would be involved in a real emergency reacting fully to a simulated emergency in real time.

¹⁸⁵ HSEEP I, Appendix B, p. 9

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 1

FEMA recommends taking a “building block approach” to conducting exercises, in which “exercises should be planned in a cycle that increases in complexity. Each successive exercise should build on the scale and experience of the previous one.”¹⁸⁷ (see Figure 29) According to the New York Center for School Safety, “this type of exercise progressively becomes more difficult and allows for deficiencies in plans to be addressed while allowing personnel time to build their confidence, skill level and familiarity with emergency operations plans.”¹⁸⁸



Figure 29: Source: FEMA Emergency Management Institute, IS-120.a - An Introduction to Exercises

Exercises can be either “discussion-based,” centering on participant discussion, or “operations-based,” focusing on action-oriented activities such as deployment of resources and personnel. According to FEMA, discussion-based exercises:

- Provide a forum for discussing or developing plans, agreements, training, and procedures;
- Are generally less complicated than operations-based types;
- Typically focus on strategic, policy-oriented issues;
- Include seminars, workshops, tabletops, and games;
- Do not involve deployment of resources.

On the other hand, operations-based exercises:

- Involve deployment of resources and personnel;

¹⁸⁷ FEMA, Intro to Exercises

¹⁸⁸ NYCSS

- Are more complex than discussion-based types;
- Require execution of plans, policies, agreements, and procedures;
- Clarify roles and responsibilities;
- Improve individual and team performances;
- Include drills and both functional and full-scale exercises.

FEMA describes seven accepted types of exercises that make up the building block progression. The four discussion-based exercises are:

- **Seminar** – an informal discussion-based exercise led by a presenter or facilitator, used to teach or orientate participants;
- **Workshop** – a formal discussion-based exercise led by a facilitator or presenter, used to build or achieve a product;
- **Tabletop Exercise (TTX)** – an exercise involving senior staff, elected or appointed officials, or other key personnel in an informal group discussion centered on a hypothetical scenario;
- **Game** – a simulation of operations using rules, data, and procedures designed to depict an actual or assumed real-life situation.

The three operations-based exercises are:

- **Drill** – a supervised activity that tests a specific operation or function of a single agency;
- **Functional Exercise** – a single or multi-agency activity designed to evaluate capabilities and multiple functions. In the past these have been occasionally referred to as Command Post Exercises (CPXs);
- **Full Scale Exercises** – a high-stress multi-agency, multi-jurisdictional activity involving actual deployment of resources in a coordinated response, as if a real incident had occurred.

Exercises should be conducted with enough frequency to maintain preparedness among an ever-changing student and staff population and to continually facilitate improvement of procedures. Schools should also comply with any federal, state, and local laws or regulations that govern the type and frequency of conducting emergency exercises.

Evaluation

Planning and conducting exercises is only part of the preparedness process in this arena. A remaining part involves evaluating exercises and implementing improvement planning based on that evaluation. According to the Department of Homeland Security:

Exercise evaluation maintains a fundamental link to improvement planning because it assesses an entity's performance in an exercise and identifies strengths and areas for improvement. Following exercise conduct, improvement planning leverages the outputs of the evaluation process by developing Improvement Plans (IPs), which assign responsibility for correcting deficiencies or shortcomings observed during a given exercise. Through this process, evaluation identifies improvement opportunities, and improvement planning provides a disciplined process for implementing corrective actions.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁹ HSEEP III, p. 1

DHS outlines the following eight steps that make up evaluation and improvement planning, which are discussed in further detail in Chapters 2 and 3 of the Homeland Security Exercise and Evaluation Program (HSEEP)'s Exercise Evaluation and Improvement Planning guide.¹⁹⁰

1. Plan and organize the evaluation;
2. Observe the exercise and collect data;
3. Analyze data;
4. Develop the draft After Action Report/Improvement Plan (AAR/IP);
5. Conduct an After Action Conference;
6. Identify corrective actions to be implemented;
7. Finalize AAR/IP;
8. Track implementation

There is a wealth of information that emergency management teams and/or school officials may want to consult in planning, evaluating, and enacting improvements in emergency procedure exercises:

- FEMA offers several online independent-study courses related to exercise design, planning, evaluation, and improvement planning, which may be accessed via [FEMA's Emergency Management Institute Homepage](#), including:
 - IS 120.A: An Introduction to Exercises
 - IS 130: Exercise Evaluation and Improvement Planning
 - IS 139: Exercise Design
- FEMA's section on "[Conducting Exercises & Drills](#)" via the [Multihazard Emergency Planning for Schools Toolkit](#) is also an excellent resource on the topic and includes:
 - Checklists on emergency drill planning and evaluation;
 - Predetermined tabletop scenarios addressing various emergency situation;
 - Guides for developing After Action Reports following exercises.
- The [Department of Homeland Security Exercises and Evaluation Program \(HSEEP\)](#) is a capabilities and performance-based exercise program that provides a standardized methodology and terminology for exercise design, development, conduct, evaluation, and improvement planning. The HSEEP is a repository of resources on exercise design, planning, and evaluation, including:
 - Guidance documents on exercise program management, planning, conduct, evaluation, and improvement planning;
 - Exercise tools and technology;
 - Exercise technical assistance.

Additional Preparedness and Training

Implementing ICS, conducting extensive planning, and engaging in various forms of exercise can go a long way in preparing a school for the unthinkable. However, a school and its inhabitants can never be

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 6, 18

“too prepared” for an event that has the potential to become a tragedy. It is therefore valuable to look at certain key groups – such as staff, students, and special needs staff and students – that can benefit from tailored training and preparedness based on their unique age, experience, and functional needs.

Ensuring Staff Preparedness

As the adults in a school and those immediately responsible for the well-being of students, it is essential that staff are adequately prepared to take appropriate action in the event of a crisis situation, such as that involving an active shooter. Staff cannot afford to wait for law enforcement, armed security, or other responders to take responsibility for their safety and that of their students; immediate action is required. The Department of Education says that:

Experts have noted that when a crisis occurs, individuals involved tend to go on autopilot. Therefore, when a crisis occurs, staff immediately need to know how to react. They need to know, for example, the signals for crisis, the protocol for lockdown and evacuation, how to dismiss students, and what to do if staff or students need help. They should know these things ahead of time. There will not be a time during the crisis to think about what to do next.¹⁹¹

There are several forms of training, exercises, and drills that serve to enhance staff preparedness in this regard. School officials should consider the following in reaching that goal.¹⁹²

- Providing regular, comprehensive training for teachers and staff, to include crisis response training, reviews of crisis plans and procedures, and periodic reminders of signals and codes;
- Visiting evacuation sites with staff and stakeholders, including showing not only where evacuation sites are but also where specific areas, such as student reunification, media, and triage areas will be;
- Giving all staff literature corresponding to the crisis plan. This should include a copy of the crisis plan, but may also include helpful pamphlets reminding them of key principles. Each classroom should also be provided with these materials along with other relevant supplies and equipment.
- Requiring a specific number of crisis drills every year, and work with state and district laws for possible options;
- Conducting tabletop exercises and scenario-based drills regularly, which can range from actual drills and training to informal, group brainstorming activities held with other stakeholders.

Active shooter events typically begin and end rapidly, are unexpected, and can cause mass confusion; therefore, schools may consider adding additional components to increase readiness for active shooter events. The Department of Homeland Security guide for responding to an active shooter situation lists several components of training exercises to train individuals on responding to an active shooter situation. DHS’s “Active Shooter: How to Respond” guide recommends consulting local law enforcement in including the following components into a training program specifically for active shooters:¹⁹³

- Recognizing the sound of gunshots;
- Reacting quickly when gunshots are heard and/or when a shooting is witnessed:

¹⁹¹ DOE, 2003, Ch. 6, p. 35

¹⁹² Ibid., p. 35 - 36

¹⁹³ DHS, 2008, p. 6

- Evacuating the area;
- Hiding out;
- Acting against the shooter as a last resort;
- Calling 911 (or communicating with main or security office, in the case of a school);
- Reacting when law enforcement arrives;
- Adopting the survival mindset during times of crisis.

It also may be valuable to consider expanding the level of staff preparedness at a school, by position-specific training and exercises for different types of employees. For example, a secretary may be provided expanded training on how to keep a threatening caller on the phone as long as possible and alerting other staff and law enforcement based on the call. A school district in Virginia designed a readiness quiz for substitute teachers to gauge their preparedness for an emergency. Groups of staff subject to specialized training may include:

- Front-office personnel;
- Custodial personnel;
- Food service personnel;
- Administrative personnel;
- Teachers;
- Substitute teachers;
- School nurses or other health personnel;
- Bus drivers and transportation personnel.

Ensuring Student Preparedness

Just as staff need to immediately know how to react in the event of an active shooter, students must also be prepared to act appropriately in such an event. Student preparedness can complement staff preparedness and minimize the chance of miscommunication or unnecessary confusion in an emergency situation. Furthermore, in the unfortunate event that a staff member who is responsible for a group of children is hurt or separated from such students, students should be empowered to take action to ensure their own safety. It is essential that students take part in exercises and drills to practice various types of emergency procedures. It is furthermore valuable to train students – in an age appropriate manner – about the importance of emergency procedures as well as the conditions under which they should be initiated.

The Texas School Safety Center offers several school drill lesson plans, including on lockdown drills, to train students on these matters.¹⁹⁴ Schools may find these helpful in adapting them for their own students based on their unique needs and capabilities. For example, lesson plans include:¹⁹⁵

- Discussion of the reasons that a particular emergency procedure may need to be enacted;
- Discussion of the importance and objectives of a particular procedure;
- Discussion of the characteristics and steps of an effective emergency procedure;
- Discussion of how students would feel in and react to a certain scenario that may require emergency procedures;
- Guided practice of emergency procedure;

¹⁹⁴ See TXSSC

¹⁹⁵ Selected or adapted from TXSSC

- Encouraging students to provide assessment, feedback, or suggestions for improvement.

Above, in the “Staff Preparedness” section, we discussed guidance provided by the Department of Homeland Security in a document entitled, “Active Shooter: How to Respond.” Components of this guidance include training on recognizing the sound of gunshots, as well as considerations of not only when to evacuate or hide from a shooter but as a last resort, acting with force against the shooter. Whether or not those components are appropriate for students may be a matter of discretion for school officials, parents, and other stakeholders in the community, and likely would include age considerations.

Finally, as discussed briefly above, schools have the option of including students in various phases of the preparedness process. The Department of Education’s Crisis Planning guide notes that students can be involved in tabletop exercises along with staff and other stakeholders.¹⁹⁶ Not only can this better prepare students themselves for an emergency like an active shooter, but doing so can help adult stakeholders identify additional areas that need to be addressed in the preparedness phase in relation to student needs. The school can also provide opportunities for student leadership related to safety and security issues and even encourage and support student clubs focused on programs and safety. The Texas Center for School Safety also offers a summer “[Youth Preparedness Camp](#)” that focuses on teen Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) training, youth emergency preparedness, leadership, and action planning, which serves as one example of the types of opportunities that schools may identify to involve students in the preparedness process.

FEMA also has a website designed for children to encourage preparedness for emergencies and disasters, which can be found at: <http://www.ready.gov/kids>.

Ensuring Special Needs Preparedness¹⁹⁷

According to the Department of Education:

Be sure to give special consideration to the unique needs of staff and students with disabilities when developing the crisis plan. Evacuation and relocation procedures will need to address mental, physical, motor, developmental, and sensory limitations. For example, individuals who use wheelchairs or other auxiliary aids will not be able to traverse the front steps of a building without substantial assistance.

DOE suggests that the following issues should be addressed with regards to special needs:

- In some cases, individuals with disabilities may have limited mobility. In an evacuation there may not be enough time to move mobility-impaired students and staff to traditional shelters. It is important to identify alternative, accessible, safe shelter locations and to communicate these locations to emergency responders;

¹⁹⁶ DOE, 2003, Ch. 6, p. 36

¹⁹⁷ See DOE, 2003, Ch. 6, p. 30 – 31

- Individuals with hearing disabilities may not be able to communicate verbally, to read lips, or to hear fire alarms or other emergency signals. Consider providing basic sign language training to designated school staff;
- Visual impairments might impede reading signs or traversing unfamiliar or altered terrain— consider whether debris might obstruct the evacuation of such staff and students and necessitate alternative shelter locations;
- Debris may obstruct the evacuation of individuals with mobility impairments. Be sure to assign sufficient staff to assist these individuals during a crisis or consider identifying alternative shelter locations;
- Are staff trained to assist students with developmental disabilities? These students may become upset if routine patterns of activity are disrupted;
- Do any students or staff have special needs for medicines, power supplies, or medical devices that are not likely to be available in emergency shelters? Consider what alternative arrangements can be made to provide these necessities.

Armed and Unarmed Security Personnel

Since the tragic events of December 2012 at Sandy Hook Elementary in Newtown, Connecticut, a national discussion has emerged on the concept of introducing armed personnel or arming current personnel at schools to combat an active shooter threat.

Our goal in the ensuing discussion is neither to advocate for nor against all or any of the possibilities in a specific case; rather, it is to provide a cogent analysis of some of the potential benefits as well as the accompanying risks to introducing armed personnel of various forms into schools. The ultimate decision regarding whether to introduce any form of armed security at a school must always be made by local stakeholders on the ground; nevertheless, it is the belief of the National School Shield Task Force that many schools across the country stand to benefit from the presence of armed security and, in the quest to make our schools safer, should leave no option off the table. The National School Shield Task Force understands and shares the concerns of those who want to ensure that armed security, if introduced at a school, is done so in a safe and responsible manner. That is why the National School Shield Initiative has developed, in conjunction with some of the country’s foremost experts on security and weapons handling, a model training program both for School Resource Officers (SROs) and also for other armed school personnel.

Any of the below described possibilities may or may not be appropriate for a given school. That decision can only be made by the relevant school officials, local law enforcement, legal counsel, and other stakeholders based on a particular school’s resources, risks, needs, and legal requirements.

If a school decides to employ the services of one or multiple forms of security personnel, it is recommended that schools perform a pre-employment background check on all of these individuals, whether armed and unarmed. The following list includes the types of information the school should consult as part of a pre-employment background check within the laws governing access and use for making informed hiring decisions:

- Former employment data;
- DMV records;
- Residential address history verification;
- Credit check;

- Criminal records check;
- Education verification;
- Civil history;
- National wants and warrants;
- Social security verification;
- Drug testing;
- Finger print screening.

It is also recommended that schools conduct a periodic background check on all security personnel upon hiring and at least once every three years. If a more in-depth pre-employment background screening is desired, it is recommended that the school contact a local private investigator.

There are four primary possibilities in terms of arming personnel in schools, each of which will be discussed in more detail below.

School Resource Officer (SRO)

A School Resource Officer (SRO) is a uniformed, armed and sworn law enforcement officer, usually drawn from local police or sheriff's departments, assigned to school duties. According to the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS), SROs "provide school security, serve as instructors of law-related education classes and act as crime prevention specialists, crime investigators, mentors, and role models."¹⁹⁸ Many schools throughout the country already have SROs on their grounds. For example, according to a statewide survey conducted by DCJS in the state of Virginia in 2006, 95% of high schools surveyed (284/300) and 74% of middle schools (227/308) were served by an SRO at least part time and in most cases full time.¹⁹⁹ The Sandy Hook Advisory Commission's Interim Report also recommended that schools, as part of threat and risk assessment, undertake "definitive analysis" as whether to have a School Resource Officer on their campus.²⁰⁰

There are multiple benefits to having an SRO serve a particular school. For one, as a sworn law enforcement officer, schools can expect that SROs will have a strong base level of training for and professionalism in their duties, especially those related to carrying a weapon. Additionally, as a member of a local law enforcement agency, it may be easier to integrate an SRO's duties during an emergency with those of arriving law enforcement and emergency responders – a key issue that has been discussed at length in Layer Two and Three of this document. The SRO must be involved in all scenarios involving police response to their assigned school. Furthermore, they should be intimately involved in the development and training of all school-based response scenarios. Ideally, these training opportunities should occur on weekends, in-service training days, or pre-school orientation periods.

Furthermore, SROs offer a number of additional services – such as those of a mentor – that may be beneficial to a school that are not directly related to protecting against an active shooter scenario. Parents, students, teachers, staff, and other stakeholders are often comfortable with and frequently in favor of having this form of armed personnel on school grounds.

¹⁹⁸ Schuiteman, p. 1

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 4

²⁰⁰ Sandy Hook Advisory Commission, p. 11

Although the fact that they are sworn law enforcement officers reasonably inspires confidence in their abilities, there are still additional aspects of training that an SRO should undergo. As Mr. Mo Canady, the Executive Director of the National Association of School Resource Officers, explains:

School-based policing requires specialized training not covered in most law enforcement academies. Because school resource officers are much more than armed guards, they need training in teaching, counseling and the special skills required to act as a law enforcement officer in a school setting. In addition, we recommend that all school resource officers receive special training to assure that their responses to an active shooter will be safe and effective.²⁰¹

An SRO's various duties can serve as both a benefit and a potential downside to their role as a security presence in schools. In many cases, including our own assessments, it was found that SROs bring many positives to a school environment through their relationships with students and staff and the various services, including those security-related, that they provide. But because an SRO's duties often extend to areas beyond the school campus, they may not always be readily available to confront an immediate threat like an active shooter. As law enforcement officers, many SROs spend a significant portion of their time investigating crimes or attending court sessions, in addition to fulfilling duties at other schools when necessary and other law enforcement duties.²⁰² Emphasis must be given to the importance of an SRO serving in the school(s) to which they are assigned, and not performing ancillary duties, which remove them frequently from the school environment.

Private Contracted Security

The second possibility is introducing privately contracted security personnel, typically in the form of uniformed security personnel employed by a private security company. Private security forces, particularly if armed, are subject to various laws and regulations. If the guards are to be armed, relevant firearm regulations will require careful evaluation. The orders given to security guards should reflect the policies of the school and should be concise and consistent. They should be as specific as possible regarding duties, responsibilities, and limits of authority.

An armed security guard is trained in the use of firearms, and is licensed to carry firearms during their shifts. They have the authority to utilize deadly force if necessary. Because of this, the school will want to carefully consider the message of having an armed guard on the premises. The school should also be aware that if someone is injured or killed, they can be held liable. Due to the licensing and training requirements, armed guards cost more than unarmed security guards.

That said, an armed officer is often a strong deterrent to most perpetrators, and armed security guards frequently have military and/or law enforcement backgrounds, giving them a high degree of additional specialized training and experience. Schools will ultimately determine whether contract guards should be armed or unarmed based on their local threat and risks associated with arming the security force. If a school elects to have on-site security guards for their campus, the process of choosing a company should be based on more than price alone. Schools should require that the personnel used at their facility be fully and properly trained, frequently retrained, licensed, and subject to pre-employment and

²⁰¹ NASRO

²⁰² Schuiteman, p. 1-2

in-service background checks in line with those detailed in the introductory section of this discussion. Highly specific, clear, and rigorously enforced policies and procedures regarding armed individuals and their weapons must be in place at all times.

Schools also must be sure to adhere to any federal, state, or local laws and regulations that may apply to introducing privately contracted security personnel – particularly if they are armed – into a school setting.

One potential benefit of private armed security as opposed to or in addition to having an SRO(s) is that an SRO's duties often extend beyond providing on-site security of the type that would readily be available to confront an active shooter at any moment. As law enforcement officers, many SROs spend a significant portion of their time investigating crimes or attending court sessions, in addition to fulfilling duties at other schools when necessary.²⁰³ Because armed contracted security personnel do not fulfill those additional duties, the chance is maximized that an armed individual will be on-site at all times to deter and respond to an active shooter threat.

Armed Citizen Volunteers

The third possibility is introducing armed citizen volunteers, such as retired or off duty police officers or military veterans, to provide an additional layer of deterrence and security.

The potential benefits to armed citizen volunteers are similar to those described above for SROs and contracted security (i.e., as an armed protective presence whose primary duty is providing protection to the school). An armed citizen volunteer has the potential to provide a visible deterrent to a potential active shooter and, in the worst-case scenario, take action against an active threat.

In addition to these benefits, an armed volunteer – as a volunteer – is potentially a less expensive option to schools and school districts with limited resources.

However, because such an individual is neither an SRO nor a professional security contractor, an additional burden may be placed on a school or school district in ensuring that such an individual is highly trained to operate with a weapon in a school environment. It is absolutely imperative that schools consult with subject matter experts, local law enforcement, and other stakeholders in ensuring that any individual carrying a weapon on school property undergo a physical exam and preferably psychological testing, as well as extensive initial and in-service training throughout their service. They should also be subject to pre-service and periodic in-service background checks in line with those detailed in the introductory section of this discussion.

Schools must also seriously consider how such individuals will be integrated into emergency preparedness and response as described in Layer Two and Three of this document. Any armed volunteer should clearly understand their role, where it begins, and where it ends in an emergency situation, and should have ample practice in a variety of scenarios through drills and exercises. There is also the very serious risk that, in the case of an emergency like an active shooter situation, arriving law enforcement officers or SWAT teams could perceive an armed volunteer as a threat. Therefore, it is essential that the

²⁰³ Schuiteman, p. 1-2

armed volunteer be clearly identified; that he or she has trained with local law enforcement for the response scenario, and that the protocols for response are agreed upon.

In addition to these considerations, schools must ensure that they are in compliance with any federal, state, and local laws and regulations that may apply to having an armed individual on school grounds. They should seriously consider the legal and physical risk of having a weapon on school grounds and that even the most highly-trained individuals are capable of negligent behavior with their weapons – though proper initial and in-service training significantly reduces that risk. A multitude of other choices – including but not limited to weapon choice, weapon security, weapon retention, ammunition choice, weapon ownership, and weapon storage – must be addressed by the school and qualified security and weapons experts. Highly specific, clear, and rigorously enforced policies and procedures regarding armed individuals and their weapons must be in place at all times.

Arming Principals, Teachers, or other School Staff

The fourth option involves arming personnel already at the school for whom security is not their primary duty – for example, teachers, principals, or custodial staff.

The potential benefits to arming staff members are similar to those described above. An armed staff member has the potential to provide a visible deterrent to a potential active shooter and, in the worst-case scenario, take action against an active threat. In addition to these benefits, an armed staff member already on payroll is a potentially less expensive option to schools and school districts with limited resources.

However, such an individual is neither an SRO nor a professional security contractor, and unlike even an armed citizen volunteer, provides security as a secondary responsibility (e.g., if they are a principal or teacher). Therefore, an additional burden may be placed on a school or school district in ensuring that such an individual is highly trained to operate with a weapon in a school environment. It is absolutely imperative that schools consult with subject matter experts, local law enforcement, and other stakeholders in ensuring that any individual carrying a weapon on school property have extensive initial and in-service training throughout their service.

Schools must also seriously consider how such individuals will be integrated into emergency preparedness and response as described in Layer Two and Three of this document. Any armed staff member should clearly understand their role, where it begins, and where it ends in an emergency situation, and should have ample practice in a variety of scenarios through drills and exercises. There is also the very serious risk that, in the case of an emergency like an active shooter situation, arriving law enforcement officers or SWAT teams could perceive an armed staff member as the threat. Therefore, it is essential that the armed volunteer be clearly identified; that he or she has trained with local law enforcement for the response scenario, and that the protocols for response are agreed upon.

In addition to these considerations, schools must ensure that they are in compliance with any federal, state, and local laws and regulations that may apply to having an armed individual on school grounds. They should seriously consider the legal and physical risk of having a weapon on school grounds and that even the most highly-trained individuals are capable of negligent behavior with their weapons – though proper initial and in-service training significantly reduces that risk. A multitude of other issues – including but not limited to weapon choice, weapon security, weapon retention, ammunition choice,

weapon ownership, and weapon storage – must be addressed by the school and qualified security and weapons experts. Highly specific, clear, and rigorously enforced policies and procedures regarding armed staff and their weapons must be in place at all times. Schools should require that the personnel used at their facility be fully and properly trained, licensed, and subject background checks in line with those outlined in the introductory section above.

Unarmed Security Personnel

Some schools and other institutions also benefit from the services of unarmed security personnel. While unarmed security personnel will not play the same role as an armed individual in combating an active shooter with a firearm of their own, they can play a role in deterring, detecting, and responding to a potential assailant. For example, in Virginia schools in 2006, an estimated 1,100 unarmed School Security Officers (SSOs) assumed such a role.²⁰⁴

The first area of benefit potentially provided by unarmed security personnel is in providing deterrence. Unarmed security guards can often provide a strong deterrent without becoming a possible cause or source of violence. They are also less expensive, and may incur fewer insurance and liability issues. Properly screened and trained unarmed guards can be sufficient in making students, staff, and parents feel at ease and deter many possible threats.

Unarmed security personnel can also provide an extra set of “eyes and ears” to assist in immediately detecting a threat and initiating emergency response procedures. While an unarmed guard will not necessarily respond in a direct manner to an active shooter like an armed individual might, detecting such a threat and sounding the alarm even seconds earlier has the potential to save many lives.

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LAYER THREE – RESPONSE

Overview

This section provides guidance and best practices to schools for responding to an active shooter incident. Active shooter incidents tend to be fluid and can be chaotic and confusing to those experiencing them. The appropriate response to such an incident changes as event-specific information regarding the shooter, victims, hostages, bomb threats, and other information is received. Although an immediate response from law enforcement or on-site security is typically required to stop the active shooter, there are steps that teachers, staff, and students can take to protect themselves and each other before law enforcement arrives on campus. Those at a school must react quickly and decisively to activate emergency response plans and follow the steps in which they are outlined. These plans (the development of which are discussed above in Layer Two) outline a process for managing the incident and maintaining a safe environment for staff and students until the threat is neutralized, and/or all students and staff can be moved to a safe location.

Emergency Response Plan Activation

Notification

Unless the active shooter initially confronts a trained, armed individual, such as a School Resource Officer (SRO) or other security personnel, a teacher, student, or school administrator may be the first to encounter or notice the active shooter. This person must immediately begin the notification process to ensure rapid response by both occupants of the school and emergency responders, including law enforcement. Notification has three parts for an active shooter threat:

- Notifying law enforcement;
- Internal notification to activate the school’s emergency action plan; and
- If violence is imminent, verbal notification of students in immediate area to take cover.

Whoever first becomes aware of the threat should call 911 and notify the appropriate individuals as established in the school’s emergency action plan as soon as possible. Since neutralizing the active shooter threat will nearly always require help from law enforcement or security personnel, it is critical to notify them of the situation as soon as it is possible and safe to do so. Key information to provide to law enforcement, security staff, or the 911 operator includes:²⁰⁵

- Location of the active shooter(s);
- Number of shooters, if more than one;
- Physical description of shooter(s);
- Number and type of weapons held by the shooter(s);
- Number of potential victims at the location.

²⁰⁵ DHS, 2008, p. 5

Staff and teachers will be asked to provide as many details as possible without endangering their lives or others to gather the information.

Along with dialing 9-1-1, the school's emergency response plan instructs staff or teachers to notify leadership and others on school grounds of the threat. If the teacher or staff member is notifying the school via a public address system or intercom, it is ideal that this communication is delivered in a clear, specific, and non-threatening manner that does not escalate the situation. Some schools use signals or code words to instruct teachers and staff to take action to avoid unnecessarily alarming students or creating panic. Schools should ensure that all staff, teachers, visitors (including substitute teachers) are familiar with the signals or codes before an incident occurs. However, if these codes or signals are not known, if training of all relevant parties and visitors is impractical, or codes are observed as frequently being forgotten under pressure in exercises, it is perfectly permissible – even encouraged – to use clear, simple language. In fact, many experts argue that clear, simple commands are always preferable to codes in emergency situations.²⁰⁶

The established notification protocols in the school emergency response plan, which should have been previously tested, and upon which relevant staff should have been trained, must be used to communicate the danger. The occupants of a school should not blindly assume that the notification will come from a central administrative or security office in a timely manner, if it comes at all. Relevant administrative or security staff may be unable to act due to being incapacitated by the shooter, or the shooter's first encounter may be with someone unfamiliar with the notification protocol (e.g., student, substitute teacher, visitor, etc.). This requires that anyone notified of the threat take action to notify the occupants of the school when it is possible and safe to do so.

Notification protocols cannot be strict, chain-of-command structures that prevent notification in the absence of key personnel (e.g., principal, vice principal, etc.). Authority and responsibility to 'sound the alarm' must be fluid, flexible, and immediate. For example, an FBI law enforcement bulletin, "Those Terrible First Few Minutes – Revisiting Active Shooter Protocols for Schools" advocates lockdown as the default protocol when gunshots are heard but there is no communication from the central administrative office due to incapacity or other unknown reasons.²⁰⁷ If not notified of how to respond by central administration, staff must use their best judgment and the protocols in their Emergency Response Plan to determine on a case-by-case basis the action that is situation-appropriate based on the incident.

The need for immediate notification and action is of utmost importance. A school where lockdown (as discussed in the following section) is ordered clearly and quickly benefits from the protective features of lockdown immediately. If the lockdown response does not happen quickly, the active shooter can gain an advantage, which imperils the school's occupants. Every second counts.

Lockdown

A key component in defending against an active shooter is having an effective and practiced lockdown plan. Lockdown is a protective action taken when faced with threats of violence in which it would be unsafe to evacuate or otherwise avoid a threat from outside or inside the school.

²⁰⁶ Safe Havens, "Codes Can Kill"

²⁰⁷ Buerger

The FBI explains that most active shooter protocols contain the same advice for schools following notification of an active shooter threat:

Implement lockdown procedures, minimize the target profile, and wait for the police to neutralize the situation. Teachers and students should hide quietly, lock or barricade doors, and turn off lights and electrical equipment [including silencing cellphones] that would attract the shooter's attention. If possible they should provide detailed information via 911 contact to guide authorities, and then, remain quiet until a recognized voice [such as a school administrator or law enforcement official] advises that it is safe to move.²⁰⁸

The same article provides the rationale for lockdown as follows:

Once a school is in lockdown, "hide and hope" defensive actions minimize the chances of being a target and maximizes police latitude in clearing the building. Concealment and cover reduce potential casualties. The chaos of moving, screaming bodies provides a target-rich environment for a shooter [and an extremely difficult environment in which law enforcement or armed security responders can engage and neutralize an active threat without risking harm to others.]

Lockdown procedures [are designed to impede and limit access for] the [assailant(s) and force them] to search for softer targets [or alternate routes] within a large physical plant. That interval coincides with police response time, delays the perpetrator's engagement with any targets, and keeps the person in open space. When discovered, the shooter is isolated against the background, a single target for law enforcement officers. If [the perpetrator] seeks concealment from the police, they abandon the search for victims, increasing the overall safety of the school community.²⁰⁹

When implementing the instruction to lockdown in a classroom or other secure area, the following are some of the best practices to follow:²¹⁰

- Clear students from the halls immediately and report to nearest available classroom or if in a classroom remain there;
- Lock all doors with any available objects;
- Turn off lights;
- Turn off computer monitors;
- Close blinds;
- Block windows;
- Move away from windows;
- Get on the ground and out of sight;
- Take cover under desks, chairs, tables, filing cabinets, etc.;
- Keep calm and quiet;
- Silence cell phones;

²⁰⁸ Buerger

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ Based in part on: KYCSS, p. 81

- Do not open the door for anyone. Responding law enforcement will have keyed access to all rooms in the school;
- Use intercom systems to notify school administration of the location of the active shooter if it is safe to do so.

The goal of this document is not to provide a firm list of criteria defining when implementing a lockdown plan is appropriate as opposed to other options such as evacuating. Lockdown is undoubtedly a common and often appropriate response, but it is not the only correct response for every individual or group of individuals in every situation involving an armed assailant. For example, during a developing active shooter event, it may be better to rapidly evacuate a small group of students to a safer location outside the building if locking down or moving to a classroom would require moving towards the sound of gunfire. Like any situation that requires response, responsible adults must use their best judgment – based on their training and practice – to ensure their own and their students’ safety.

Each school must implement the lockdown plans established and practiced under its Emergency Response Plan as appropriate for their school based on the specific nature of the active shooter threat and their physical proximity to the perceived threat, among other considerations. Different conditions may influence the decision of whether to lock down or take other action. Some examples of these potential conditions are included below for discussion and scenario-based planning purposes. The FBI identifies circumstances where the standard protocol of lockdown carries additional challenges and may require real time judgment calls:²¹¹

- When students are outside of classrooms such as at lunchtime or recess – typically in corridors and other common areas. If faced with an active shooter threat in these cases, administrators and teachers can direct students to go to their next class or nearest class room;
- When students are located in large areas within the school such as auditoriums, cafeterias, libraries or gymnasiums. Often the physical layouts of these areas do not provide the same level of cover that a locked classroom might, leading to the possibility that another emergency protocol should be followed. On the other hand, depending on the physical structure of the school, these same areas may provide the ideal lockdown environment due to a lack of windows, highly securable doors, or other factors. This only furthers the importance of being aware of the nature of your physical environment and establishing an Emergency Response Plan that considers these types of contingencies. If time allows, and it is required, it may be possible to move to smaller areas such as classrooms where it is possible to implement the lockdown procedures;
- Age of students. Reaction among students to an active shooter threat will vary greatly among high school and much younger students (e.g., Kindergarten through 3rd grade). Despite a teacher’s best efforts it may be very difficult to quiet a large group of emotionally distraught younger students or explain the logical reasons behind why they should remain quiet to remain hidden;
- In high schools, silencing cell phones is desirable but may be difficult if not impossible to implement. Cell phones provide a way to communicate information to the outside world, but one ring can alert an intruder to the presence of people inside a room where they might otherwise go undetected. This is especially so in the inevitable instance that concerned parents frantically try to contact their children in the middle of such an emergency;

²¹¹ Buerger

- Outdoors. Students outside or loading or unloading off buses might be better served by evacuating the scene and regrouping in a secondary location than trying to lock down within a classroom or other area within the school.

A final consideration involves the pulling of a fire alarm by the assailant or an accomplice during an active shooter event. This is believed to have been the plan in the aforementioned recent event at the University of Central Florida,²¹² and occurred as well during a shooting in Jonesboro, Arkansas. This has been done by the perpetrator or an accomplice in previous active shooter incidents to generate targets as they filter into hallways or evacuate the building. If this happens, schools should consider, in the absence of external evidence of fire, that the school ordered lockdown overrides the fire alarm unless there is smoke or evidence of a fire (e.g., door handles are hot to touch.) If the violent threat is not recognized until people have gathered outside, then the school needs to be prepared to go from evacuation to reverse evacuation and lockdown as discussed below.

Evacuation and Reverse Evacuation

In the majority of past active shooter incidents, schools have locked down instead of evacuating their facilities. Lockdown can result in fewer targets for the shooter, can reduce confusion for arriving law enforcement and emergency medical officers, can help contain the situation, and can minimize the chance of an accidental shooting by responding officers.²¹³ Lockdown also eliminates the chance that staff, teachers, and students are injured by hazards outside the school while evacuating (such as fences, streams, rivers on the exterior of the school, or extreme temperatures).

There are exceptions to implementing a lockdown that schools may outline in their emergency response plans. For example, schools may outline when to evacuate based on the layout of their campus or facility and the specific location of the active shooter at a given time.

The document, “Active Shooter Considerations” cautions that during a shooting spree, the best-laid plans for evacuation are also under siege:

All classrooms at Columbine, for example, had evacuation plans but with two students shooting throughout the entire school, evacuating the building was itself a dangerous venture. In the Jonesboro, Arkansas incident, two boys opened fire after students evacuated the building during a false fire alarm. Other factors may affect an Incident Command Officer to alter the usual evacuation route...thus, it is important to have at least two predetermined evacuation sites identified.²¹⁴

For times when there is an accessible, safe path for evacuation, schools should consider the following guidelines:²¹⁵

- Follow school evacuation plans;

²¹² See: Postal

²¹³ Williams, p. 17

²¹⁴ Ibid., p. 26

²¹⁵ See DHS, 2008, p.3; KYCSS, p. 81

- Take the closest and safest way out as posted (use secondary route if primary route is blocked or hazardous);
- Take roll book for student accounting if possible;
- Leave belongings behind;
- Assist those needing special assistance;
- Check for injuries;
- Do not attempt to move wounded people;
- Prevent individuals from entering an area where the active shooter may be [located];
- Keep your hands visible;
- Follow the instructions of any law enforcement officers;
- Go to designated assembly area if it is away from danger;
- Take attendance;
- Call 911 at first safe opportunity to do so.

As outlined in Layer Two, 'Preparedness', it is also important to consider the option of reverse evacuation. Reverse evacuation is used to rapidly and safely move students and staff inside a facility when it would be dangerous to remain outside.²¹⁶ Reverse evacuation is implemented when it is safer to return to or stay inside a facility or classroom than it is to go outside.

"Reverse Evacuation – A Life or Death Protocol," produced by Safe Havens International, states:

The reverse evacuation protocol is not only critical, it is perhaps even more important than the lockdown protocol. This is because any school that does not have a reverse evacuation protocol and the ability to execute it effectively may be unable to implement a lockdown, shelter in place for hazardous materials, or severe weather sheltering protocol when and if students and staff are outside of the school.²¹⁷

Schools may adapt the following guidelines for reverse evacuation:²¹⁸

- Follow school evacuation plans (for reverse evacuation);
- Move students and staff inside as quickly as possible;
- Report to classroom;
- Lock the door;
- Stay out of the active shooter's view;
- Provide protection if shots are fired in your direction (i.e. behind a desk in an office with a closed door);
- Blockade the door with heavy furniture;
- Do not trap yourself or restrict your options for movement;
- Silence your cell phone;
- Turn off any source of noise (i.e. radios, televisions);
- Assist those needing special assistance;
- Check for injuries;

²¹⁶ Safe Havens, "Reverse Evacuation"

²¹⁷ Safe Havens, "Reverse Evacuation – A Life or Death Protocol"

²¹⁸ See: DHS, 2008, p. 4; KYCSS, p. 81

- Take attendance;
- Remain quiet;
- Wait for further instructions.

When the threat has passed, wait for law enforcement to clear the area and then evacuate following law enforcement instructions, following evacuation accountability, student release, and parent-student reunification procedures.

Responding When Trapped

School's emergency action plans may advise that only as a last resort, and *only* when staff or teachers have been trapped by the active shooter and their lives are in imminent danger, should they attempt to disrupt and/or incapacitate the shooter. Actions to try to incapacitate the active shooter as a last resort can include:

- Acting as aggressively as possible against him/her;
- Throwing items and improvising weapons;
- Yelling;
- Committing to your actions;
- Attacking in a group by:²¹⁹
 - Tackling the perpetrator in the lower leg area, knocking him/her to the ground;
 - Grabbing the shooter's extremities and taking him/her to the ground, using body weight to secure him/her;
 - Using any available object to neutralize the perpetrator;
 - Attacking any area that causes immediate pain, such as the shins, genitals, throat, eye socket area, upper head area (eye sockets and above), and others that cause the most immediate release of blood;
 - Using keys, hairbrush handles, a broken vase or glass to gouge the eye area. Remember, the assailant can't shoot what they can't see;
 - If you're in a science lab and have the ability to neutralize the perpetrator with chemicals, and can do so safely, do so;
 - Removing weapon(s) from reach of perpetrator at first possible moment. DO NOT handle weapon near the trigger housing. This will prevent accidental discharge of weapon;
 - Fighting as if your life depends on it! Don't ever give up!
 - Fighting dirty! There is no unfair fighting when survival is the goal.

If staff, teachers, or students have incapacitated the active shooter (again, as a last resort and only when the shooter is down and no longer a threat) and law enforcement personnel have not arrived:²²⁰

- Call 911 and advise law enforcement personnel the active shooter is down;
- Provide your location and stay on the line;
- Secure the suspect (body weight, belts, etc.);
- Move any weapons away from the suspect. Do not run from the room. Help is on the way.

²¹⁹ Based in part on recommendations in: Ohio University

²²⁰ Ohio University

Role of Law Enforcement and Emergency Responders

Law enforcement's main priority when arriving at your school, following a report of an active shooter, is to protect life and stop the active shooter as soon as possible. Law enforcement officers will proceed directly to the area in which the last shots were heard. When arriving on the scene officers may arrive individually, in teams of two, or in teams of four or more and:²²¹

- Officers may wear regular patrol uniforms or external bulletproof vests, Kevlar helmets, gas masks, and other tactical equipment. Badges or police insignia will usually be displayed and recognizable but especially for SWAT teams may not be as apparent;
- Officers may be armed with rifles, shotguns, and handguns;
- Officers may use pepper spray or tear gas to control the situation;
- Officers may shout commands, and may push individuals to the ground for their safety.

Schools should follow their response plan protocols for identifying law enforcement personnel that arrive to confront the active shooter threat. This is to mitigate the unfortunate but real risk that the shooter has dressed or otherwise posed as a law enforcement officer or other responder as a means of subterfuge. Identifying legitimate first responders may be more easily done if directly and visibly approached by law enforcement that arrives on the scene. However, if out of direct sight of law enforcement, for example under lockdown, it is appropriate to follow established and predetermined protocols to verify their identity. Like in all other areas of response, it is possible that judgment calls will have to be made; it is always better to be "safe than sorry."

When law enforcement arrive school staff, teachers, and students should:²²²

- Remain calm and follow officer's instructions;
- Put down any items in your hands;
- Immediately raise hands and spread fingers;
- Keep hands visible at all times;
- Avoid making quick movements toward officers such as holding on to them for safety;
- Avoid pointing, screaming, and/or yelling;
- Do not stop to ask officers for help or direction when evacuating, just proceed in the direction from which the officers are entering the premises.

It is important to remember that the first law enforcement personnel to arrive on the scene will not stop to assist injured persons. Additional teams of law enforcement and emergency medical personnel will arrive following the initial officers. These rescue teams will treat and remove any injured persons as appropriate.

Additional Response Best Practices

The following are elements of the response that schools should consider implementing throughout the life cycle of the active shooter event. Remember that the first priority is to ensure the safety of the occupants of the school. These elements should not be implemented to the detriment of this first

²²¹ Based in part on: DHS, 2008, p. 5

²²² Ibid., p. 5

priority but rather by appropriately incorporating them as part of the school's Emergency Response Plan as they help in achieving this goal.

Incorporate National Incident Management (NIMS) and Incident Command System (ICS) into the response

Schools should integrate the Incident Command System (ICS) into their emergency response plans. As discussed in Layer Two, ICS is a standardized, on-scene, all-hazard incident management approach within NIMS. It is a system that allows school personnel and first responders to work together under an integrated organizational structure. The ICS structure is flexible. ICS can be adapted for the situation. It can grow or shrink to meet the different needs of the incident.

In an active shooter response, when schools activate their emergency response plans, they should immediately start to work under ICS. For example, the plan may designate an Incident Commander. If it is the Principal, he/she is responsible for managing the components of the school's overall response to the incident (e.g., notification or lockdown) until law enforcement arrives. Once first responders arrive on the scene, they may assume the Incident Commander role. The ICS structure will continue to evolve as additional responders (e.g. Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) teams, emergency medical services, state police, and others) arrive. Not adopting ICS can cause delays in establishing a command, issues with communications, and delays in critical decision-making and the availability of critical resources.

Establish an Incident Command Post

When the incident allows and school personnel are able to do so safely, they should establish an Incident Command Post (ICP). The ICP houses the on-scene incident command and management organization including the Incident Commander, managers of other ICS functions, and school staff designated to manage the incident. The ICP is usually located out of danger, at or near the school and is the headquarters for directing on-scene control of the tactical operations.

Contained within the ICP is the Incident Communications Center, which should operate from the ICP throughout the duration of the response. Additionally, the ICP should include other individuals familiar with the technological and physical layout of the school. In "Lessons Learned from School Crisis and Emergencies," the US Department of Education discusses lessons learned from an active shooter incident that turned into a hostage situation at a school. DOE advocates both incorporating ICS and the establishing an Incident Command Post as immediate steps that should be taken in response to an incident. The report provides other recommendations for schools and first responders regarding the setup of the ICP including:²²³

- The School Administrator assigned to the ICP [should] have additional support to take calls regarding such issues as evacuation progress, care of hostages when released, and communication with other education officials not at the ICP;
- Diagram the ICS structure and indicate specific names of each management function on a white board or large paper so that everyone knows the chain of command;
- Ask all ICS key personnel to wear different colored vests labeled with their agency or position or use other means to readily identify them and their roles;
- Assign a scribe to document all actions taken by the incident commander;

²²³ DOE, 2007, Issue 6, p. 9 – 10

- Monitor all forms of communication in the school. For example in a hostage or lockdown situation, there may be some concern that talking on the phone may reveal the location of people hiding; thus email or text messaging is an alternative. Assigning someone to monitor the cell phones and emails of administrators during the lockdown may help identify the location of staff or students not found during an initial sweep of the building;
- Include someone with expertise in technology and communications systems at the ICP.

In the specific incident considered by the Department of Education above, the school attorney and insurance carrier for the school were included in the ICP to both consider the legal ramifications of any response and to allow for a rapid damage assessment by the insurer of the school buildings and campus once the incident had been resolved. This latter inclusion resulted in a swift cleanup of the school so that it was ready for an open house to communicate with the local community only five days following the incident.

Coordinate, Communicate, and Share Information Among All First Responders and Agencies

Activating your Emergency Response Plan effectively and efficiently requires coordination, communication, and the sharing of information among all agencies and first responders involved in responding to the incident.

A common communications plan is essential for ensuring that responders can communicate with one another during an incident. The response to the Columbine school shooting incident was hampered by response agencies operating on radios set to different frequencies. Prior to an incident, schools must work with local responders to ensure that communication equipment, procedures, and systems can operate together during a response (in security terms, they should be “interoperable”). Working out such issues is yet another benefit of including local law enforcement and emergency responders in exercises, as emphasized throughout this document. A complementary mission of the ICP is the receiving of and re-transmission of radio communications from dissimilar radio frequencies. This flow of accurate communications is practiced during training sessions and exercises.

If your school has followed the best practices identified in Layer Two, then representatives of law enforcement, the fire department, emergency medical services (EMS), school officials, SWAT teams, as well as the public information officer, and others previously identified as part of the response team, will be able to communicate with each other during the response to the incident. This will not only allow for multi-agency operability communication but also ensures that the equipment being used works in all parts of the school building, its campus and surrounding areas in which responders must operate.

Activate a Media Communications Plan at the Onset of the Incident

The core of a media communications plan is the designation of a Public Information Officer (PIO) who serves as the liaison between the Incident Commander and the media. Having followed the best practice of designating a PIO prior to the active shooter event, this person will.²²⁴

- Prepare and disseminate information about the incident, its size, cause, and ongoing situation and what is being done to ensure the safety of the students and general public;

²²⁴ See DOE, 2007, Issue 6, p. 11

- Issue press releases that should include resources for counseling, and other resources such as food and shelter, depending on the emergency;
- Oversee the media staging area where all media is located. The media staging area should be away from the site of the incident and parent reunification area and large enough to accommodate media trucks and TV reporters;
- Address the public's need for information about the incident; the PIO should schedule regular briefings (e.g., every two hours or other regular intervals);
- Ensure the rapid release of accurate information and instructions to all media and help to reassure families that their children are safe and assist with facilitating an orderly reunification process;
- Inform parents of what documentation is required to be reunified with their children.

Parent Center/Parent Reunification Area

According to the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department, police chiefs involved in several of the recent school shootings recommend that schools and law enforcement plan for three distinct staging areas in addition to the Incident Command Post, to include:²²⁵

- A staging area for law enforcement and emergency personnel;
- A media staging area away from the school that can accommodate a larger number of media and vehicles (discussed above); and
- a parent center located away from the Incident Command Post, where parents can retrieve their children.

Keeping a separate staging area for parent reunification serves several purposes:²²⁶

- Prevents the media from converging upon parents;
- Prevents parents from converging on and thereby interfering with law enforcement and emergency personnel;
- Allows for the control of traffic, parking, and parent needs.

FEMA provides guidance on parent-student reunification procedures.²²⁷ First, schools should establish a safe area for parents to pick up their children, which must be away from both the danger and the student's assembly area. School Emergency Response Plans should designate who within the school will be responsible for the role(s) needed to properly administer the reunification process. In a typical release these steps should be followed:

- Parents report to the assigned area and give the name of their child/children;
- Picture I.D. should be required by the person in charge to ensure the person requesting the child/children matches the name on the emergency release card;
- A runner goes to the student assembly area and gets the child/children requested by the parent or adult. The runner escorts the student back to the pick-up area;

²²⁵ Williams, p. 24

²²⁶ Based in part on Williams, p. 24

²²⁷ See: Washington Military Department

- Parents should be asked to sign a form indicating they picked up the child/children. The date and time will also be indicated on the pick-up form;
- If the child is in the first aid area the parent should be escorted to that area for reunification with their child/children;
- Counselors, when available, should be located close to the first aid area in the event they are needed.

It is recommended that emergency management teams and/or other officials review the remainder of the document, which also includes guidance on maintaining the procedures, traffic control, and other tips, which can be found here:

<http://training.fema.gov/EMIWeb/emischool/EL361Toolkit/assets/Parent-StudentReunificationProcedures.pdf>

Additional Resources

- Attorney General of North Carolina, Department of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention: “A Critical Incident: What to Do in the First 20 Minutes.” (Video) (<http://srtbrc.org/downloads/>)
- U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Assistance: *Guide for Preventing and Responding to School Violence, Second Edition*. (https://www.bja.gov/Publications/IACP_School_Violence.pdf)
- Ready Houston: “Run. Hide. Fight. – Surviving an Active Shooter Event” (Video) (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5VcSwejU2D0>)
- Active Shooter How To Respond – U.S. Department of Homeland Security: *Active Shooter: How to Respond* (http://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/active_shooter_booklet.pdf)
- Federal Bureau of Investigation: Law Enforcement Bulletin, “Those Terrible First Few Minutes – Revisiting Active Shooter Protocols for Schools” (<http://www.fbi.gov/stats-services/publications/law-enforcement-bulletin/September-2010/shooting-feature>)
- Deputy John Williams, Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department: “Active Shooter Safety Considerations for Educators” (<http://www.state.nj.us/education/schools/security/task/planning/ActiveShooterSafetyConsiderations.pdf>)

Recovery

The scope and focus of this document is on the first three layers - preventing and mitigating, preparing for, and responding to an active shooter incident. We do, however, recognize the importance of the recovery phase, which includes a number of priorities such as addressing the mental health needs of staff and students, victim funerals and memorials, restoring the physical plant, returning to learning as soon as possible, and conducting a “lessons learned” analysis from the incident itself. While not within the scope of this document, there are a number of good resources available on the recovery phase including:

- Department of Education: *Practical Information on Crisis Planning: A Guide for Schools and Communities* – Chapter 5
- Department of Education: “Tips for Helping Students Recovering from Traumatic Events” - <http://www2.ed.gov/parents/academic/help/recovering/index.html>
- FEMA: Response and Recovery Resources - <http://training.fema.gov/EMIWeb/emischool/EL361Toolkit/ResponseRecoveryResources.htm>
- Department of Education, Emergency Response and Crisis Management Technical Assistance Center: *Responding to and Recovering from an Active Shooter Incident that Turns into a Hostage Situation*. Lessons Learned from School Crisis and Emergencies, Vol. 2, Issue 6, 2007. (http://rems.ed.gov/docs/LL_Vol2Issue6.pdf)

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