

Making A Campus Risk Assessment

Every so often just about everyone and everything needs a check-up. People need a regular physical from a doctor, a car requires oil changes and a school's security plan should be thoroughly reviewed by a security expert.

When it comes to protecting our children, we must always err on the side of caution and care. A regular security assessment helps to ensure that our K-12 school campuses will be as safe as we can make them. It is always preferable to spot potential problems and fix them before they result in damage or injury to property and people.

The first step in completing an accurate security risk assessment is selecting a qualified school security expert to complete the job. Schools present challenges unlike any other public or private facility, so it is important to retain someone with years of experience in helping to protect campuses.

Ideally, this expert will be able to address the different needs of administrators, faculty and staff, parents and students and local law enforcement. He or she should be not only very familiar with the latest electronic technology available to protect a school campus, but also understand the vital role that less costly solutions such as fencing, lighting and landscaping can play.

No matter what the project, it is best to start at the beginning. Check the parking lot, making sure all areas have adequate lighting and fencing to help limit access to vehicles of faculty, staff, visitors and students (at the high school level). Then move around the building perimeters making sure that landscaping does not provide easy hiding places for weapons and drugs. Your risk assessor will check the fencing and lighting to make sure the campus is effectively protected while students are in class or during nights, weekends and holidays. Then move to

main entry. The fewer entries the better, especially at the K-6 level, where the public should have only one common entrance.

Make sure that gates are locked during school hours. That not only keeps people out, but also keeps the students on campus. The main public gate can have a lock that can be opened from the main office after a staff member checks to see who wants in or out. By their nature, high schools are more open, yet there is no need for more than two public entries.

The risk assessor will want to check out the school's visitor management system. There should be some way to validate that visitors entering the campus have a good reason to be there. All adults – faculty, staff and visitors – should wear an ID badge at all times.

Access control will be a major issue for the risk assessor, who will want to make sure classroom, storage and many other doors are locked when not in use. Audio visual, computer and science labs, music rooms and athletic facilities may require card readers to provide an added layer of protection.

Cameras are critical for providing live and forensic data from the campus perimeter, parking lots, hallways, locker areas, library, cafeteria and other places around a school. In addition to making sure there are sufficient cameras to do the job, the risk assessor will also want to make sure they are correctly placed to provide the best results.

And the risk assessor will want to review a school's plans and procedures

for handling events ranging from how parents are allowed to pick up their children during class hours to how the campus is to be evacuated during an extreme emergency. How administrators respond to a wide variety of possible events can affect lives being saved.

These are just a few of the major items that will be reviewed during a thorough risk assessment. An experienced security professional will want to see much more and ask many more questions before issuing a final report.

Times and technology change. Many criminals and terrorists know that and change how they operate. It is critical that our schools keep abreast of these changes to stay ahead of those who would steal valuable equipment or vandalize our school – or worse yet, injure or kill our children, teachers or staff members.

A regular security risk assessment is too important for any school administrator to postpone or overlook. If your school's security has not been reviewed lately, make plans today to do so. ■

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