



## SCHOOL SECURITY IN THE REAL WORLD

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The security chief at the Washington, D.C., public school system is demonstrating how security can protect people, reduce crime and incidents, and turn the schools into safe urban harbors.

In June of 1997, Patrick Fiel made a career change that must have baffled his colleagues. He swapped his job - for which he had trained throughout his career - for a position that nobody had ever quite been able to handle.

A 22-year veteran of the Military Police Corps, Fiel had advanced to senior enlisted advisor of security at the United States Military Academy at West Point, N.Y.

Fiel's security experience in an educational setting led the superintendent of the Washington, D.C., Public Schools - a former Army General - to think Fiel might be able to develop a security program to protect D.C.'s troubled and vulnerable schools. The job offer: Do you want to come to the nation's capital and give it a try?

At a stage of life when many people would rather bask in the hard-won respect and seniority of an established and successful career, Fiel left West Point and moved his office to an aging paneled security office hidden in a one-story brick food services building in North East Washington, D.C., assuming the responsibilities of chief of security for the D.C. school system.

It wasn't a reluctant move; he relished the opportunity. "This is the real world," he likes to say.

Learning a new chain of command Unlike the formal chain of command in the military, the D.C. school system disperses authority among a host of people, including the school superintendent, Board of Education, the Control Board, the City Council, and the U.S. Congress.

Shortly after Fiel's arrival, the City Council called him in to discuss his plans. "Security in the system was dysfunctional," Fiel says. "The district had just installed metal detectors in some secondary schools. Other than that, there was no technology. There were problems with the security personnel. There were no statistics to track incidents. There was some anecdotal information, but nothing concrete. Many of the buildings had gone without remodeling for more than 60 years.

"When I appeared before the City Council, all I really had to offer were my credentials. I asked for 90 days to study the district's problems and to propose solutions."

Perhaps it was Fiel's enthusiasm for the challenges at hand that swayed the City Council to agree.

Over the next 90 days, the D.C. public school system got a dose of Patrick Fiel's sense of the job. Far from the stereotypical authoritarian military personality, Fiel engages people with a realistic optimism and an everyday conversational style. "Security had been in a closet in D.C.," Fiel says. "No one had ever challenged the organization to do what it ought to do."

Fiel set about challenging the system. His goal was to overhaul the system's security in a way that would protect its 70,000 students; 8,000 teachers, administrators, and employees; and 150 school buildings, while preserving as much as possible the freedom of movement necessary to effective education.

Fiel first set his theme: School security is everyone's responsibility, from administrators to students to the community at large.

He moved quickly to set up an incident reporting system to collect statistics. He also requested detailed floor plans for each school - none existed when he came on board. Then Fiel changed and re-keyed locks and got his department a master key - no one had ever thought about a master key before.

He also reorganized the security department and reviewed the district's use of technology, with an eye toward how technology could help.

Ninety days later Fiel reported back to the superintendent and the City Council about what he had done and what he planned to do. Today, three-and-a-half years later, he continues to report to the City Council and his other supervisors, none of whom appear inclined to quarrel with his methods or results.

Defining the risks "First, we began tracking incidents," says Fiel. "We set a policy that mandated that principals must report incidents in their schools. To make sure they did, we also set a policy that no one would be penalized for reporting."

The problems were not the fault of the principals, Fiel reasoned. The problems stemmed from a lack of effective security.

Under Fiel's plan, an incident took the form of anything that affected a student's education: a trip-and-fall, a fight, a robbery, a break-in - it might be a crime, but it might also be just an incident.

Fiel wanted his first year, the 1996-97 school year, to serve as a statistical base. In that year, principals reported 4,068 incidents. "I thought that was too low," Fiel says. "So we didn't use that figure as a base."

Instead, Fiel asked the principals of the district's 150 schools to be more diligent in reporting. The second year, they reported 6,431 incidents, a more credible number. "We challenged ourselves to reduce that number," he says.

To achieve a reduction in the third year, Fiel reorganized the security department and installed a closed circuit television pilot program (see related story on technology, page 20) in the eight high schools reporting the most incidents.

The results proved encouraging, if not astounding. Reported incidents in the third year fell by about 30 percent to 4,454 across the district. In the eight schools with the CCTV system, incidents dropped a whopping 90 percent.

Fiel concluded, reasonably, that his reorganization of the department had reduced incidents in most schools, and that the addition of CCTV had done the rest at the eight high-incident high schools.

Reorganizing the security department Reorganization is probably not the right word for what Fiel did to his department. It was more like a complete transformation. One of his first official moves was to assess manpower and to increase security personnel from 223 to 315, adding an additional 92 officers.

A year or so before Fiel's arrival, the D.C. public schools became the first public school system to turn to a private security service: MVM Inc. of Washington, D.C. "That was a great idea," Fiel says. "Employees within a school system accumulate leave, and everyone tends to take leave at the same time. This is a serious issue for inner city school security. It can leave the security organization without coverage.

"I felt the contract with MVM was important to the success of our security program. I met with Dario Marquez Jr., the president and CEO, and the MVM staff early on, and we discussed how to improve our working partnership to make our security program exemplary."

Today, Fiel's department has grown to 16 system employees and 345 contract security officers.

Under the new organization, School Resource Officers are assigned to each school to assist administrators with security; to control access points; to patrol the building and grounds; and to monitor gathering places like the cafeteria, corridors, stairwells, rest rooms and entrances. These officers report all safety- and security-related incidents and take necessary action.

Security supervisors manage Resource Officers within clusters of schools, coordinating and implementing elements of the security program. Supervisors visit their assigned schools daily.

Security investigators take a closer look at reported incidents, whether criminal or non-criminal. They also visit local schools regularly, conduct security surveys, develop security concepts, and implement plans to address issues at individual schools.

Facility security officers monitor security alarms, respond to emergency incidents, and patrol facilities and properties after-hours. These officers take preliminary reports on criminal incidents occurring during off-hours.

Fiel also works with two special units. The School Anti-Violence Effort (SAVE) was established before he arrived and met with his approval. This unit conducts locker, building, and ground searches; assists with metal detector scanning at entrances; and provides rapid response to critical incidents. In addition, Fiel manages a Youth Gang Intervention Unit to respond to escalating concerns about gang activity and violence in and around schools.

Editing the security concept The new security organization allows Fiel to respond rapidly to everyday security problems as well as to events that alter the security equation. Following the Columbine tragedy of April 1999, for example, D.C. public schools experienced a dramatic increase in bomb threats - 90 threats by the end of the school year.

Fiel had established a procedure to deal with bomb threats. The affected schools evacuated. If the threat specified no school in particular, all schools evacuated. Fire and police department personnel arrived to sweep the school or schools and then to investigate. After Columbine, the increase in threats threatened to shut down the school system, even though no bombs were ever found - all the threats turned out to be pranks.

Fiel's focus shifted to stopping the pranks, with a systemwide telephone number tracing system, which proved effective. Before the 1998-99 school year ended, the police had made 10 arrests related to the bomb threat problem. In the following school year, the number of bomb threats fell to 43.

That same school year, there was another, perhaps more troubling, incident. One of the policies Fiel had set upon his arrival was that elementary school doors would be locked when the final arrival bell rang in the mornings. The front door would remain open for visitors, but a security officer would monitor entry.

Despite the policy, two men entered an elementary school one day. The security officers dealt effectively with the incident. As it turned out, the two men were victims of a shooting and had entered the school believing it would offer aid and safe harbor.

Fiel, however, wanted to know how two strangers got into the school in the first place.

Because the responsibilities of the security officer stationed at the front door included more than watching the door, the officer occasionally left his post to patrol the halls or clear out a stairwell or restroom. It was a chink in the system.

Fiel altered policy immediately and had the front doors locked. He also called ADT Security Services Inc., Alexandria, Va., and asked about technology that might allow the officer attending the front door the flexibility to patrol the school.

"We did a pilot program in the Birney Elementary school," says Bill Feucht, marketing manager for ADT's federal systems division. "We installed a Video Intercom system manufactured by Siedle (Furtwangen, Germany). The system placed a camera at the front door and a monitor in the administrative offices. When the officer is away from the front door, the administrative staff can see, talk to, and decide whether or not to admit a visitor, without leaving the office."

After the installation, Fiel called a meeting with the Washington, D.C. Metro Police, the superintendent, and ADT to discuss whether the system met the objectives.

It didn't. "Many D.C. schools were built in the 40s and 50s," Feucht says. "All of the doors and all of the door hardware were old. Some doors didn't close or lock properly. In addition, people would occasionally prop doors open - not for a bad purpose, but to move something. The existing alarm system simply couldn't deal with those problems."

Fiel asked ADT for a solution. ADT recommended a Focus 200 multiplex alarm system. "We put door contacts on about 30 doors and wired them to the system's panel," Feucht says. "The system will enunciate on a keypad at the security station, and a security officer will know when a door has opened. The system also has an electronic key switch that allows doors to open for a few minutes without setting off an alarm. This is useful, for example, during recess in an elementary school or during times when the cafeteria door must open for deliveries."

Fiel used the Birney installation to test the concept. When it worked, he went to the superintendent and asked for money to equip all 103 elementary schools with Siedle Video Intercoms and ADT Focus 200 alarm systems. The proposal earned approvals from all sides. Fiel made his case with historical statistics compared to results of the pilot program. Returning to the statistics collected during the base year of Fiel's program, he showed that nearly 3,000 false alarms per year had been the norm. He also showed how the video intercom and new alarm system reduced false alarms in the Birney school. Fewer false alarms reduce police costs, and in Washington, D.C., the police and schools receive funding from the same source: the City Council.

Fiel received funding to roll the program out into 36 elementary schools with no alarms and 67 with alarm systems in need of upgrade. ADT is currently making these installations and upgrades. When this work is done, the program will go into the middle and high schools.

"The key to getting approvals like this is pilot programs," Fiel says.

Final Exam In The Real World Another key to security in D.C. Public School System is politics. Fiel cannot simply order what he wants done. In every case, he must persuade numerous groups of people to buy into his ideas. To that end, his daily schedule includes many hours of discussing problems, explaining ideas, and promoting solutions, not just with his superiors, but with administrators, faculty, students, community groups, parents, and even gangs.

Gangs?

"I have to deal with the real problems that our students deal with," Fiel says. "People ask me how we can get rid of gangs. I can't do that. But I can work with gangs to keep gang problems out of the schools.

In fact, Fiel and the school system's Youth Gang Intervention Unit regularly find themselves mediating gang disputes. "Suppose there is an incident between two gangs on a Sunday night," Fiel says. "We're going to open the schools for the week in just a couple of hours. To keep that problem from spilling over into school, our gang unit uses its contacts to set a meeting with the gangs in that community. These meetings can occur at 2 a.m. The goal is to mediate the dispute and to find a solution that will keep the problem away from schools."

In a way, Fiel's security program aims to achieve that same goal overall: keeping the problems tearing apart the real world of Washington, D.C., away from the city's public schools - to give students the chance to learn about other kinds of real worlds.

In the three-and-a-half years since Patrick Fiel became chief of security for the Washington, D.C., public school system, the superintendent and the City Council have approved increases in the budget for technology by a factor of five.

The money has gone for equipment such as the video intercoms; new alarm systems; a digital inkless fingerprint and archive system (Digital Biometrics Inc., Minnetonka, Minn.); metal detectors (Garrett Metal Detectors, Garland, Texas); x-ray screening machines (Rapiscan Security Products Inc., Hawthorne, Calif.); and digital closed circuit television (Progressive Systems, Birmingham, Ala.).

Early reductions of incidents in high schools equipped with CCTV have led Fiel to move aggressively to install CCTV throughout the system. Twenty-seven middle and high schools now have CCTV systems. Eleven of those - the newest installations - use digital storage and retrieval systems supplied by Progressive Systems.

Progressive's CCTV systems require no VCRs, videotape, or multiplexers. Video runs from cameras onto LAN or WAN servers, which can also connect to the Internet and offer browser access to authorized individuals.

The Progressive system records and stores near-real-time video, adjustable from several frames per second up to 15. The standard system automatically stores images for 14 days, and then archives the video on tape or disk, as easy-to-access digital data.

It's very easy to find.

Not long ago, an attorney visited Fiel to discuss a lawsuit based on an incident the attorney claimed to have information about.

"What school?" asked Fiel.

The attorney responded with the name of the school, a date, time, and location.

Fiel clicked an icon on the 20-inch computer monitor on his desk. Instantly, the floor-plan of the school in question appeared. Fiel pointed out that a red arrow on the floor-plan, in the vicinity of the alleged incident, denoted the presence of a camera. He clicked on the arrow, and video of current activities at that location appeared on the screen.

Next, Fiel clicked an archive button and called up a list of dates. He selected the date in question, and a list of times appeared. He selected the appropriate time and clicked. Within a couple of seconds, archived video appeared on the screen, showing normal, everyday activities.

"Nothing seems to have happened," Fiel said, looking at the attorney.

"I think you're right," said the attorney, who took his leave.

On the other hand, the Progressive system has recorded a number of real incidents.

After a fire broke out in a special education school last year, Fiel reviewed the video in the area of the fire. He discovered three students entering a room, while two others kept guard outside. The system recorded the students running away as well as the hallway filling with smoke from the fire they had set. "In that case, the video system made an arrest possible within 30 minutes of viewing," Fiel says.

According to Fiel, principals in every school equipped with the Progressive system have similar technology on their desks.

When thieves manage to elude cameras, Fiel installs temporary covert cameras. In one case, an elementary school was suffering regular, expensive losses of computer equipment. Fiel and a group of officers installed a covert camera and waited outside, watching and recording on a portable monitor and VCR. They saw a thief enter the computer room and emerge carrying a staggering load of computers, printers, and disk drives. The security team strolled to the exit toward which the thief was heading and arrested him as he came out the door.

The metal detectors and x-ray machines used in all school system high schools and some middle schools have also proven effective. The security officers who monitor these systems seize approximately 400 assorted weapons a year. Over the past three years, the program has virtually removed all guns from D.C.'s public schools. Some weapons are discovered by the machines and security officers, but the lion's share are found outside the schools, hidden in the landscaping surrounding the buildings. Students stash weapons there, intending to retrieve them after school.

To reduce the number of weapons brought to school, Fiel has begun to eliminate this landscaping cover, but he anticipates limited success in this. "When we interview students about why they bring weapons to school, they tell us they don't need weapons in school. But they believe they do need weapons on the way to and from school."

In considering this problem, Fiel has begun to develop a solution he calls "safe passage." The idea would place cameras and security officers along designated main walking routes to and from schools. Parents and students would receive information mapping the routes, and Fiel's security officers would attempt to guarantee safe passage along them.

Will this work? "It's a new idea," Fiel admits. "But I think it's worth trying. For us to do our jobs, we have to deal with the problems our students have."

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