

Enforcing policies and procedures paramount in K-12 security

BY PATRICK FIEL, SR. ON JUN 26, 2014



Enforcing policies and procedures must go hand-in-hand with the use of security technology in K-12 schools.

Photo credit: (Photo courtesy stock.xchng/rob gonyea)

The equipment is set: door locks, a video intercom, visitor management system and surveillance cameras. Used properly, these solutions provide a formidable barrier at any K-12 campus entry. But an active gunman or common thief can defeat it if the school hasn't created and enforced staff policies and procedures.

Each school will have variations on its policies and procedures based on the unique needs and requirements of the campus. However, there are some basic guideline to consider. Here's a look at them based on each layer of the overall security solution – the first two being the frontline of entry control.

Lock the Doors

Sadly, there are still many schools in the U.S. where anyone can walk in through the front door without being challenged. That's no longer acceptable. It's not enough to just lock the door at the end of the day. Keep it locked all day, every day.

Create a separate entry/exit for children and staff. While the door is open, have the school resource officer (SRO) monitor the event. If the kids aren't arriving or leaving, the door stays locked. The same holds true for any other school entry. If the door doesn't need to be open for a delivery or other valid reason, keep it locked.

Make it clear to faculty and staff that doors aren't to be propped open while they run back to the car for another armful of supplies. Be prepared to take appropriate action for repeat offenders. Instruct children to not open a door to any visitor. And ask your SRO to regularly check that each door is locked throughout the day.

Video Intercom

Consider this to be your school's "video doorbell." A video intercom is an effective, efficient and affordable way for the office staff to remain safely behind locked door while viewing and communicating with a visitor.

Make it known that the video intercom is a visitor's first stop. Signs in the parking lot and at each door should direct visitors to the front entry. There, post instructions for using the video intercom. Have the signs translated into any commonly used language in your community.

Train the office staff how to operate a video intercom — they are easy to use. Then require them to ask the visitor's name, reason for the visit and who he or she plan to visit. Don't let staff just listen and then push a button to unlock the door. Ask them to look at the monitor and make sure the person seems reputable. Also, be suspicious of multiple people lining up to enter. Criminals can also enter once the door is opened for a parent or other known visitor.

Also, make it clear that not everyone coming to the door is guaranteed entry. The staff should know that if there is any doubt about a person's intentions, the door should stay locked until the SRO can arrive and handle the situation.

Visitor Management

Visitor management systems keep track of who is on the campus. It can help you spot registered sex offenders and keep non-custodial parents from removing their children. But the system will work only if it's used and used properly.

Train staff members to ensure there's always someone available to use the system. No visitor should be allowed past the office without first having his or her ID run through the system. If a visitor doesn't have a government-issued ID, call for the SRO to investigate and determine if the person should be allowed into the school.

Video Surveillance

Video surveillance systems can provide a strong deterrence on campus. The right CCTV solutions can be a resource to school administrators in providing a safe and secure educational environment. Today's digital video systems can be accessed remotely via the Internet to provide school officials and or law enforcement with real-time view of the school or campus.

Require the SRO to frequently check out what's happening outside the school. If there is a problem brewing, it can be stopped before it becomes a major incident. This task can be made simpler by having the video feed available on each administrator's desktop computer. Also, placing a monitor in the general office area can add more pairs of eyes on the feed.

Educate the Staff

Make sure the staff understands why things have to be done in a certain way. Boil down the most important steps for each staff member and have a checklist on his or her desk. Practice every step of the visitor entry process and then practice it again on a regular basis.

Ask staff members to immediately report anything that seems unusual to an administrator or the SRO – even if that means snitching on a co-worker for sneaking a parent through the backdoor. Policies and procedures aren't intended to be punitive, but rather to support the security effort. Without them, even the best-intentioned security efforts can go awry.

About the Author: *Patrick V. Fiel, Sr. is an independent security consultant assisting Aiphone Corp., a leading manufacturer of intercommunication and video entry systems– including video intercoms – for the K-12, higher education, industrial/commercial and residential markets. Its North American headquarters is located in Bellevue, Wash. For more information, please visit <http://www.aiphone.com/home>*

