

## Security on a Budget

*A good place to start is the front door of any campus facility*

By [Patrick V. Fiel Sr.](#) | Jul 01, 2014

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There's an old axiom that a good salesman could sell virtually anything to anybody—even if the item isn't always the best fit for a need. Unfortunately, school administrators can be victims of a good, but deceptive sales pitch. Often, K-12 school districts purchase expensive security components designed to protect students, staff and property. This equipment is likely high quality and serves a legitimate purpose, but does it really meet the district's overall needs? Does it integrate with other equipment already in place? Or, could security needs be met while spending less?

Through careful planning and following a checklist, it is possible for schools to develop a quality security plan that meets campus needs without breaking the budget. Any new or upgraded security plan should begin with a risk assessment performed by experienced, independent security professionals, who will work closely with school administrators and local law enforcement to complete the process.

Assessment results serve as the initial step in developing an action plan for each campus. Assessments should begin with the surrounding neighborhood as businesses, parks and traffic patterns can impact a school. Student passages to and from school, landscaping, parking lots, athletic fields, outbuildings and communications systems should also be included in the plan. An assessor should then move on to one of the most critical points on campus—the main public entry.

### Securing the Entry

For too many K-12 campuses, the front door provides open and easy access for parents, volunteers and vendors but also for registered sex offenders, thieves, vandals and even active shooters. By controlling this entry and locking all others, school administrators can go a long way toward protecting their campus.

The goal is to provide layers of security, each contributing to keeping unwanted visitors away from students. Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) requires that the front entry is free from trees and bushes that could serve as a hiding place for people looking to piggyback into the school with other visitors or hide weapons and other contraband. Also, make sure lighting is bright enough to identify anyone trying to enter on a dark afternoon.

Here is a look at the basic equipment that can be purchased and installed at a reasonable cost to provide layers of security to protect one of a campus' most vulnerable points.

**Signage.** Have signs in the parking lot and around the perimeter making it clear—in multiple languages, if necessary—that all visitors must use the main entry to access the school building.

**Remote-controlled locks.** Keep the front door locked at all times while providing a receptionist or other front office workers the ability to remotely open the door with the push of a button.

**Video intercoms.** Consider these to be a school's video doorbell. A video intercom lets an office worker see and talk with a person who is requesting access before

unlocking the door. If the person has a legitimate reason to enter, the lock is opened; however, should there be any doubts, the door stays locked.

Signage should clearly explain the process for using the intercom.

**Security screens.** Glass doors at many schools still leave locked entries vulnerable. The shooter at Sandy Hook elementary, for example, shot his way through a glass panel next to the locked front entrance doors of the school to gain entry. Stainless steel mesh security screens can make any glass in doors or windows virtually impervious to gunshots or knives.

**Entry vestibule.** Once inside the main entry, visitors still should not be cleared to enter campus areas such as classrooms, cafeterias, libraries and auditoriums. A vestibule should open into the office for the next step in the entry process. In many schools this may require the building of a wall and an extra locked door.

**Visitor management.** For years, schools have simply asked visitors to sign in upon entering the campus, and too many schools are still using this method. Instead, once a person arrives in the office, he or she should be asked to present a government-issued ID to swipe through a visitor management system. In seconds, the system should check the card's information against federal and state databases for registered sex offenders. The system also can check locally entered data to identify non-custodial parents or former disgruntled school employees.

When a visitor is approved, the system prints a temporary photo ID badge to be worn throughout the campus visit. At this point, a visitor can be cleared to enter the rest of the campus with the remote unlocking of the vestibule door.

There are also a couple of add-on pieces of equipment that can further enhance security at the entry:

**Panic button.** A discreet button under a receptionist's desk, tied to a school's access, intercom or intrusion system, can immediately notify first responders of an emergency situation on campus.

**Video surveillance.** Cameras mounted just inside the entry can help guard against piggybacking at the front door. Another camera placed in the office will provide another view of visitors as they check in at the front desk.

### Keeping the Rest of the Campus Secure

Most of the solutions for protecting the entry will have applications throughout the school.

- All other exterior doors should be kept locked. Assign only one as the entry for faculty and staff. A keypad or a cardkey system will allow them access while also providing an audit trail of who has entered.
- Make sure all classrooms are lockable from the inside, and keep them locked when children are present. Add a \$10 peephole so the teacher can see who wants entry without having to open the door.
- Lock the loading docks where supplies are delivered throughout the day. By adding a second video intercom, office personnel can allow known vendors access for deliveries.
- Cameras placed in key hallways, the cafeteria and around all exterior entries provide valuable, real-time, forensic information. This allows emergency responders to view the situation live to take appropriate action.
- Consider doing background checks of your volunteers and vendors. There are a number of services that now make this an affordable option while adding yet one more layer of protection to campus security. (Did you know that there are over 700,000 registered sex offenders in the United States?)

### Policies and Procedures

Don't spend the money to secure a campus without the proper policies and procedures to make sure the equipment is being properly used. Train several people on the use of the video intercom system. Although its operation is simple, you want to

make sure the operator asks the right questions of would-be visitors before allowing them access.

Instruct all faculty and staff members to challenge anyone in the school building that is not wearing a permanent or temporary badge. Impress upon all staff members—even students—the dangers of propping open a door. It's an open invitation for would-be criminals.

Also, budget funding to maintain the various systems and keep them running as intended.

When it comes to protecting students, you want to put as many layers as possible between the public and all classrooms. Concentrate on what has been proven to work while being aware of slick sales pitches. Salespeople can make any product sound like a vital piece of any security plan when, in fact, it may not be appropriate or is more than what is necessary. It all starts with securing and limiting front entry options and then tightening down on the front door.

The solutions outlined here are generally affordable for most schools and districts, and are valid for virtually all schools no matter age, design or type of construction.

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#### **About the Author**

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