

How the coronavirus is impacting K-12 security

A look at what schools should be doing to protect employees, students in the wake of the viral outbreak

[Patrick Fiel, Sr.](#)

Mar 10th, 2020



Every day we are seeing more victims of the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak in the United States. More businesses, schools, and sporting events will close in the upcoming days and weeks to protect their employees, staff, students, and visitors. I totally agree with their decision to close or shut down. As Benjamin Franklin once said: “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.”

As of Tuesday, the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) reports there are over 600 cases, with 25 deaths, in more than 35 states, of the novel coronavirus in the U.S.

Numerous K-12 campuses have already been impacted. For example, Fulton County schools in Atlanta decided to [cancel classes districtwide](#) on Tuesday after it was discovered that a teacher was infected by the virus.

I have always emphasized the need to plan for an emergency before disaster strikes in cases such as this and now is the time to implement such plans.

The steps schools across the nation are taking in response to the spread of coronavirus is reminiscent of what many districts had to deal with in the aftermath of 9/11. At the time, I was serving as Executive Director of Security for the Washington D.C. school system and our security committee, along with the help of the mayor and chief of police, decided to shelter in place to protect our 76,000 students and 10,000 staff members. That day was total chaos in the city and roads were in grid lock. It took us all day and part of the evening to get our students and staff home safely. Remember when there is a crisis business is not normal. You have to go into the emergency crisis mode. The next day we decided to shut down our schools for several weeks until it was safe to return.

We were fortunate enough to have access control, alarm monitoring, a robust camera system with remote view, and security patrolling, to protect our 150 schools and campuses during the crisis. It was a daunting task, however; we were able to recover and get our schools back to normal.

When businesses and schools plan to temporarily shut down, I recommend testing the fire systems, access control, mass notification, PA system, phones, radios, duress buttons, and other devices. Cameras in and around businesses and schools have proven to be a strong deterrent and very effective in helping to ensure policies and procedures

are being followed, as well as in assessing incidents. They also provide a critical live insight for first responders during an emergency.

The main ingredients to an emergency plan are prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery. A communication plan is a critical step in keeping everyone informed, but it's paramount that you be consistent in your messaging. Work with your local law enforcement and/or security companies to provide additional security to your facilities or campuses while they are temporarily closed.

This coronavirus will eventually be controlled, and business and schools and other activities will go back to normal, but we must stay vigilant during this time.

About the Author:

Patrick V. Fiel Sr. is a national security consultant. He has over 40 years of experience in law enforcement and security, he was Executive Director of Security for the Washington, D.C., Public School System, Public Safety Advisor for ADT Security Services and has worked with thousands of businesses and schools providing security services and solutions. Patrick is retired from the U.S. Army Military Police Corps. He can be reached at (910) 789-4265 or pvfiel@gmail.com.