

Let's not have a repeat of the recent school shooting at Robb Elementary School

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By Patrick V. Fiel Sr.

The senseless attack at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas, killed 19 students and 2 staff members, making it the third-deadliest American school shooting. School administrators, public officials, and law enforcement need to act immediately to prevent this from happening again in our schools.

According to data gathered by Education Week, there have been 27 school shootings so far this school year, resulting in 27 deaths and 56 injuries. School incidents are happening on campuses both small and large. They have occurred in cities, suburbs, and rural areas. Unfortunately, no school is immune.

School administrators must work with a security expert and law enforcement to complete a thorough risk assessment of their schools and campuses. The comprehensive risk assessment process is designed to reduce incidents and pinpoint critical areas of vulnerability. The results of these assessments will be the initial phase to develop a course of action, a strategic plan, and a budget to secure each school and their campuses.

All schools should have an assigned police officer (often called a School Resource Officer). If unavailable, consider hiring off-duty police officers and/or contract security officers that are certified and trained.

All schools should have emergency/crisis plans and lockdown procedures in place, train staff, hold safety/security drills with emergency responders, and practice responses to different emergency situations, e.g., Active Shooter.

Schools should implement a closed-campus policy. The main campus entrance should be controlled using security window film or door security screens and electronic access through a video intercom system. This allows access to those who belong on campus—like students, teachers, staff, parents, volunteers, and contractors—while keeping out the unwanted visitors and others who have bad intentions.

All entry, exit, and classroom doors should be locked throughout the day. If doors are opened, they must be physically monitored by staff, teacher, or security personnel. At no time should doors be propped open and unattended.

It is imperative to test your communication and fire systems frequently: PA system, phones, radios, duress buttons, fire alarms, and other devices.

Security screening systems can help spot guns, knives and other weapons at the school entrance or other areas. A gunshot detection and localization system that is integrated into a video surveillance system is highly effective to locate the shooter and get the information out quickly. When every second counts, the best information available must be delivered instantly and intuitively for emergency responders to respond and react under the pressure of an active shooter.

Cameras in and around 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 situation.

I recommend that teachers need to continue to concentrate primarily on their job of educating students. Nonetheless, they can play a critical role in helping to identify troubled students that need counseling or professional psychological intervention. Teachers (and staff, too) should take every threat and student tip of potential violence seriously and fully check up on each claim; never assume that any talk of violence is just an idle threat.

If there is an active shooter on campus, teachers and staff need to let law enforcement officials handle the situation. They have been fully trained on how and when to use their weapons. They have other tactical advantages, as well as trained hostage negotiators available, if necessary.

As we stand today, we have some schools that have made good efforts, some that have taken a few steps in the right direction, and others that have done virtually nothing to protect our students.

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