

EDUCATION

School Security Starts with Relationships

Security integrators should have varied collaborative efforts with both end-user staff and consultants to help reduce the risk of violent incidents

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Schools are generally a safe place for students and staff; however, according to a recent survey released by the American Psychological Association, school incidents are on the rise and nearly half of teachers and a third of administrators are planning to quit or transfer jobs due to concerns about school climate and safety.

As evidenced by yesterday's Texas elementary school mass murder, school incidents are happening on campuses both small and large. They have occurred in cities, suburbs, and rural areas. Unfortunately, no school is immune.

You have heard the old saying, “it takes a village to raise a child.” Given the current environment, it is critical that security integrators collaborate with security consultants to reduce risk in today’s schools. Involving a security integrator and security consultant in the assessment and planning process will enable schools to consider all possible vulnerabilities and solutions and enable the security integrator to become a trusted advisor to the schools.

Start the Process

Security integrators and consultants can start by working with school administrators, staff, and local emergency responders to complete a thorough risk assessment and all-hazards assessment of schools and campuses.

The comprehensive risk assessment process is designed to reduce incidents and pinpoint critical areas of vulnerability. The all-hazards assessment should encompass all conditions – environmental or man-made – that have the potential to cause injury, illness or death, or damage to or loss of equipment, infrastructure services or property.

Initial recommendations could include an anonymous survey of the staff and teachers to provide schools and the integration/consulting team with the necessary information from the front lines to promote a safe and orderly school environment conducive to learning.

The survey measures multiple factors including, but not limited to school climate, security, working conditions, teacher/staff perceptions and teacher/student relationships. The results of these assessments are the initial phase to develop a course of action, a strategic plan, and a budget.

The Technology

The only way to abate incidents coming in a school is by using today's modern security technology. Schools that work closely with a security integrator and consultant will be best prepared to timely address vulnerabilities and implement best solutions.

Any plan will undoubtedly include security technology, but no single security implementation will protect a school. True protection comes from many layers of security protocols and processes. School communications and fire systems must be frequently tested, including the public address (PA) system, phones, radios, duress buttons, fire alarms, and other related devices.

Video surveillance cameras can create an added layer of security and have proven to be a strong deterrent and highly effective in helping to ensure policies and procedures are being followed, as well as in assessing incidents. They also provide critical live insight for emergency responders.

In addition to the tried-and-thru technologies, integrators and consultants must stay informed of the newest security technologies that could benefit the schools in reducing their risks.

A few schools have metal detectors, but the majority do not have a weapon screening system. State-of-the-art security weapon screening systems are touchless, intelligent, and non-invasive, and they can help spot guns, knives, and other weapons at the school entry or other locations. Similar security screening should also be used during sporting and large events.

Gunshot detection systems are also now more readily available for schools. Among the different systems, some use sensor networks to identify the exact location of the shooter inside or outside and can then interface with the existing video system to send and deliver an image/video/audio of the shooter(s) to school officials and first responders within seconds – giving school administrators time to initiate a lockdown and implement active shooter protocols.

Be a Trusted Advisor

In addition to security technology, all schools should have emergency/crisis plans and lockdown procedures in place. Integrators can help them create guides and even sessions for staff and student training, the conducting of safety/security drills with emergency responders, and the practicing of responses to different emergency situations, such as active shooter scenarios.

The integrator can also be a trusted advisor by monitoring for any funding and grants that may be available from state or federal government agencies for

schools. Once applied for and obtained, these funds can be used to upgrade existing systems or implement recent technologies.

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