

Comprehensive School Safety and Security Assessments

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As a School Superintendent, Key Administrator, or Board Member, you are already keenly aware of the importance of making a significant effort to improve upon the Safety and Security of your entire School System. But, where do you start? What do you currently have in place (i.e.: plans, procedures, guidelines)? Are they working? Are your administrators, teachers, and your entire staff appropriately trained? What are your current and future risks, vulnerabilities and threats? How do you find out?

The place to start for any school system – large or small, rural or urban, is with a Comprehensive School Safety and Security Assessment. But, how do you determine what all should be included, and who can you find to conduct the assessment for you?

First of all, make sure the assessment is as comprehensive as possible. It should include a thorough review of the following:

- Physical Protection Systems
- Bus Transportation
- Climate/Culture Assessment at each building
- General Safety Analysis for Day to Day Operations
- After Hours Security Review
- Community Issues/Concerns
- Facility Usage Assessment in Crisis; meaning that the facility can safely meet the demands of the size and needs of the school's population in a lockdown, or shelter-in-place response.

Secondly, it is imperative that you select a person, or an organization, to conduct the assessment that is not trying to “sell” you some type of equipment. Cameras, security systems, plan writing, entrance designs, detection devices, training programs, etc., are all simply tools. None of them are total solutions.

This is not to say that organizations that offer these devices/services do not conduct comprehensive assessments. Many of them do an excellent job – but many of them don't – they offer the assessment as a venue to sell you more of their merchandise! What you need to be careful of is making sure the assessment is comprehensive, includes all the elements described above, and is not focused on justifying the purchase of whatever the assessment organization/business sells.

The real key is that the results of a Comprehensive Assessment should present you with a report that not only evaluates your vulnerabilities and threats, but prioritizes them for you as well – on a school system-wide, as well as building-by-building basis. This is where you start. This is where you focus your energies and your budget dollars. Address the most prevalent vulnerabilities first, and then move down the list.

For example, if your assessment illustrates that you have no way to precisely reunite the students with their parents after a large incident; you must design and implement a progressive dual gate reunification process.

If your after hours security review shows that a building is not adequately illuminated at night, and an existing threat has been identified at a creditable level, you may wish to have lighting installed, and, if possible, do so in conjunction with a DVR supported CCTV system.

If your general safety analysis indicates that you do not have a methodology in place to track your visitor badges that identifies who might have left your site with a school badge, then it is suggested that you devise a numerical system for each badge and have each guest leave their driver's license with the receptionist in order to enhance the chance that each guest will appropriately sign-out (and return their badge) after each visit.

If your community assessment indicates that a building has no way to monitor sexual predators or non legal guardianship parents or other visitors, consider putting a binder at the receptionist desk that is alphabetic with pictures of these potential threats. Have it orientated so guests can not see the pictures in the binder, and know that the receptionist is cross-referencing their claim of who they are.

If your climate culture assessment indicates that the student population does not see a way to adequately communicate threats that they become aware of, one needs to be made available. Or, if your students have expressed a concern over a threat heavy environment, you need to create a climate change that better fosters a conducive learning environment.

And, never forget that even the Comprehensive Assessment is a tool, not a document that has to be rigidly followed. Your Board, Administrators, and key staff members, will have to evaluate the results of the assessment, and see if the priorities match other priorities that your school system already has –as well as budget issues and budget constraints. And, remember, many corrective actions do not take an influx of budget dollars; they are based around policy and procedure alterations that can be addressed through planning and training.

In conclusion, if you have not revisited your plans in over two years, or if you have added a building or closed a building recently, or if you have seen changes in the size of the population served, it is time to focus on performing a Comprehensive

Assessment in order to prepare for the next possible emergency, regardless of the scope and scale it may be.