School Entries, The First Layer of Safety and Security
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In recent years we have seen an increase in violent school events that can be labeled as "Active Assailant" and/or "Active Shooter" events in the United States. The FBI has provided us with tangible statistics that provide the frequency and location where these types of events occur, as well as other statistical analysis. One FBI study provides us with the frequency of these events from 2000 through 2018. The FBI shows a steady increase in recorded events. In the United States we have gone from 1 recorded event in 2000 to 27 recorded events in 2018, for a total of 277 events during this time frame. The FBI statistics tell us 20.6% (52) of these events occur within an educational environment. Knowing that 20.6% are K-12 or higher education locations, we quickly realize that our educational facilities need to ensure that their buildings, policies & procedures, staff training, etc. are reviewed, updated, tested and utilized effectively.

An initial and important part of the process to make a school safer is to conduct a site vulnerability assessment. Informally, this vulnerability assessment has been done for years with local law enforcement during annual reviews of the school safety plans, and with the school safety drill (Illinois state mandated lockdown drill). During the review with the school staff / administration, local law enforcement, local fire protection districts, and emergency management agencies, different areas needing further protection can be identified by each of these respective disciplines. Working together as a group, with each providing their insight and expertise in their respective disciplines, can allow the collaboration process to identify and strategize how best to address vulnerabilities.

One of the most important areas of a school is the main entrance. Often this main entrance is used for the arrival of students, departure of students, and is the main entry for parents, visitors, vendors, etc. throughout the school day. This brings us to the question, how do schools provide secure, safe and controlled entrances?

According to *Jane's Safe School Planning Guide for All Hazards*, "access controls for schools involves three primary concepts":
- "Proper facility design and use according to the principles of CPTED."
- "The use of visible identification badges and electronic access control systems."
- "Carefully designed and consistently applied policies and procedures."

It is also important to understand the concepts of "hardware" and "software," and how these concepts are crucial to school safety. "Hardware" are the physical layers of protection within a school environment (e.g., doors, locks, fences, etc.). "Software" are the policies, procedures, and culture of safety within our school environment (e.g., emergency operations plans, visitor management, staff / student safety planning & drills, etc.). These two concepts must overlap and complement each other, otherwise the school and occupants will be at increased risk.

Additionally, *Jane's* suggests the CPTED concepts for access control focus on three main areas:

- "Access control: the manner in which people are directed in and out of different areas."
- "Natural Surveillance: using design elements and practices to real or perceived visibility."
- "Territorial Reinforcement: the use of design elements and practices to express clear ownership of areas."

Utilizing the above listed CPTED principles, we know one of the issues is ensuring we have positive control regarding who enters our school and that they have a legitimate purpose to enter. The layered entry is a form of positive control in that a person must first pass through a layer of security to access the school building. There are different forms of layered entries, but the basic tenet is that a person must be allowed access through the front entrance. The visitor cannot go further into the building without being directed into an area that will allow the school staff to conduct further checks, implement visitor controls, and verify that they are visiting the school with a valid purpose.

Natural surveillance allows for the entrance doors to easily be monitored and controlled by school staff members. Visibility should be unobstructed to ensure that an unauthorized person is not attempting to make entry. The doors should be of solid construction materials. Often, entry doors are metal framed doors with large panels of glass. The glass should be safety-rated glass or have a safety laminate applied to reduce the chance of a person unlawfully gaining entry through these doors. Sadly, we learned during Sandy Hook that glass panel entries can be a weak point allowing forced entry into a school.

To allow for greater visibility, some schools have opted for taller workstations with an unobstructed view to the outside, parking areas, and the entrance doors. Also, multiplex video surveillance camera views are placed on a large TV / monitor in a space that is easily viewed. Having the video footage on the same computer screen that a staff member is working on is not effective because the multiplex screen would be too small and often the staff member would have other primary duties, so the surveillance video could be covered with other items they are working on.

An example of an effective layered school entrance with territorial reinforcement would have a locked set of front entry doors with video surveillance camera(s) and a remote door entry buzzer. Also, if the office is immediately adjacent to the front entry doors, the office may have a window in the breezeway between the two sets of locked doors in which to interact with the visitor before they are allowed access into the office or school. Many layered entries have a door to the office located in the breezeway that is controlled by a remote buzzer. Once the visitor enters the office, they are vetted by office staff prior to entry into the school with a visitor badge, lanyard, and / or staff escort. Some schools have opted for another controlled door from the office that leads into the school. This provides one more layer of protection and ensures that if the visitor becomes problematic, the office staff can deny them entry by keeping the door locked from the inside.

Earlier, we discussed *Jane's* three primary concepts for access control including, "carefully designed and consistently applied policies and procedures of the school system." We can design secure, yet appearance-friendly school entrances, but if we do not apply the policies and

procedures that go with the physical security features, we will continue to have issues. This is the human or "Software" factor in the equation. Also, Kenneth Trump provides us with this insight, "Train central office administrators and support staff (including secretaries and receptionists) on appropriate security policies and procedures, threat assessment and management, office safety measures, and district and site-specific emergency guidelines."

Maintaining a secure K-12 school in today's environment is paramount. Ensuring there is a layer of security and maintaining positive control of who is in your school building are both key elements of school security that can be accomplished through the use of a layered entry and access control. We must have these layers of security, but we also do not want a school that looks like a prison or Fort Knox. Focusing on the main entry, using both physical security measures and adhering to policy and procedures during the school day, will ensure that only those people that belong will be allowed entry, thus making our schools a much safer environment for both our staff and students.

"Prepare and prevent, don't repair and repent." -author unknown

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 Additional Resources:

https://truarmor.com/

https://madico.com/