

School Security



Planning for Security



In 2000, New York passed school violence prevention legislation that includes a requirement that districts establish district-wide and building-level school safety teams that must develop comprehensive written safety plans. Effective violence prevention integrates many issues including the physical environment, intervention programs, fair and clear codes of conduct, after school programs, and crises intervention plans. Physical environment considerations are important tools that supplement a comprehensive violence prevention program.

To address environmental security in your school, a complete security assessment survey is needed. The survey should cover building design, safety policies and emergency procedures. A good assessment should be done in cooperation with law enforcement, school security staff, physical facilities personnel, fire and other emergency service personnel, staff, students and other school community members. Look at access to the school and other physical environment conditions, where and when incidents have occurred, communication procedures and procedures to follow when security is breached.

If your district is building or renovating a school facility, make sure your local union is involved in the design process and gives input on how the design can help improve supervision and safety. State and local police and fire departments should also lend their expertise in the design phase.

Access Control/Physical Design

Entrances and Exits

- Maintain one entrance for everyone entering the building. Keep all other doors locked from the outside (doors must be able to be easily opened from the inside for emergency exiting).
- Doors that are not locked need close monitoring. Have a system where doors are checked throughout the day to make sure they are closed and locked.
- Institute a visitor sign-in.
- Districts should require student and staff IDs to be carried and/or worn during the school day and at school-related activities, particularly for middle and high school levels.
- Consider instituting a closed campus. Closed campuses require students to stay on the school campus during their entire school day, with conditions for individual exceptions.
- If staff can access other doors, the district needs a reliable method for door control. Schools could choose keys, magnetic swipe cards, and/or keypads. Involve local law enforcement when considering any of these methods to be sure whatever is chosen will work.



Building Maintenance

- Buildings should be neat and in good repair. This includes appropriate colors and adequate lighting. A building that looks as if no one cares will only encourage poor behavior and negative feelings about school.

Internal Traffic Control

- Locate hallways and areas requiring supervision where there is a good view of circulation and contact with students and staff.
- Place more adult supervision in areas of greatest activity or highest risk.
- Staff visibility is important.
- Minimize the need for students to be in hallways.
- Keep classroom door windows free of materials so that someone could see a problem from the hall.
- Schools must also be able to open selected areas in the evening while limiting access to other areas.



Electronic Surveillance/Metal Detectors



If your district or school is considering electronic surveillance or metal detectors, it's important that they meet a school's needs and have community support. If possible, visit a school that is using surveillance to see and understand what's involved. Surveillance methods such as cameras can raise several legal issues. To avoid violating students' rights, consider limiting surveillance to hallways, classrooms and exits. Also review policies about who has rights to surveillance videos to avoid disturbing clips being posted on public sites like YouTube.

More schools are using metal detectors. Before your school decides to get one, consider the following:

- All entrances must be restricted so weapons can't be brought in through other doors or windows. Windows must stay locked or be wired to an alarm if they are opened.
- There must be someone stationed at a walk-through detector at all times. Ideally there are two people during peak periods so someone can check bags and/or use a hand-held detector.
- Consider staggered arrival times so that there isn't a delay in starting the school day because of a traffic jam from funneling into the school building through the metal detector.
- Hand-held detectors (or "wands") may be preferred to search individuals who are suspected of carrying a weapon.
- Metal detectors are appropriate if they meet a school's need, and are supported by the community.

Because of the cost of electronic surveillance and metal detectors, assess what kinds of problems need to be solved before you invest in any equipment. All equipment must be well maintained.



Outside the School

Buses

- If possible, separate bus drop-off and parent drop-off areas.
- Develop a school bus rider attendance checklist for each bus and use it daily.
- Enforce bus conduct rules consistently and fairly.
- Support drivers and aides who report problems and inform them of follow-up actions.



School Grounds

- Patrol school grounds especially where students gather, e.g., parking lots and schoolyards.
- If there are problems in parking lots, install cameras and/or panic alarms.
- Use landscaping to break up line of sight into school grounds. Decorative fencing helps define where students enter campus.
- Grounds should be attractive and well maintained.



Exterior Building

- Shrubs and plants in front of windows should be kept low or removed.
- Use anti-graffiti sealer on exterior walls.

Lighting

- Good lighting is needed around schools and in parking lots. Lights should come on before dark.

Communications

Intercom System

- A state-of-the-art intercom system allows every area of the school to quickly alert the main office of any situation.
- Administration and security should also be able to contact classrooms. A desktop fingertip operation allows an administrator to call a classroom without having to leave the desk.

Being able to communicate problems and get assistance is vital for every school staff member. There are several types of devices that should be available if a serious situation develops. Consult law enforcement for their input on what device is best suited for particular situations.

Walkie-talkie

- All school administrators and crises team members should have a two-way walkie-talkie system. Walkie-talkies may also be appropriate for staff with outside yard duty, bus duty, etc.
- Test the equipment at the school for at least three days before purchasing.
- Do daily radio checks.
- Follow manufacturer's instructions on recharging.

Bullhorn

- Get one or more bullhorns to communicate in case bell systems or electricity fails.

Mobile Phone

- If a major crisis happens, parents and the media will jam regular phones lines trying to get information. Administration must be able to call out and keep contact with the central office and police.

Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED)

CPTED is a concept that more schools are using to help prevent violence on school grounds. CPTED emphasizes understanding and changing the physical environment of a building or neighborhood, including the positions of buildings and other structures, interior and exterior design details such as color, lighting, entrances and exits, and landscaping. Its goal is to design a physical environment that positively influences human behavior. CPTED uses the following strategies:

Natural Surveillance:

- Place physical features, activities, and people in ways that maximize the ability to see what's going on to discourage crime.
- Barriers, such as bushes, sheds, or shadows, make it difficult to observe activity.

Natural Access Control:

- Properly located entrances, exits, fencing, landscaping, and lighting can direct both foot and automobile traffic in ways that discourage crime.

Territorial Reinforcement:

- Create or extend a sphere of influence through a physical design, so the users of the area develop a sense of ownership over it.
- Fences, pavement treatments, art, signs, good maintenance, and landscaping are some physical ways to express ownership.
- Identifying intruders is much easier in a well-defined space.

Although the impact the environment has on security can be significant, members of the school community must be careful not to view environmental security, including the presence of security personnel, as the answer to violence prevention. Staff in each NYSUT Regional Office can assist you with resources in outlining a comprehensive school violence prevention program.



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