



K-12 EDUCATION

K-12 SCHOOL SECURITY: 12 FINDINGS FROM THE FIELD

INTRODUCTION

Over the last decade, issues related to school safety have become a central focus for district administrators. Historically, school safety involved issues related to bullying, vandalism, student fights, and weather-related emergencies. With the rise in the number of school shootings, district administrators are redefining school safety to include an increased focus on school security.

In support of K-12 districts who are engaging in meaningful conversations surrounding school security, Hanover Research conducted 14 in-depth interviews with urban, suburban, and rural district administrators in April 2018.

The following **12 FINDINGS FROM THE FIELD** note the key trends and observations from these K-12 leaders and insights on how their districts are adapting to heightened security needs and stakeholder concerns. Limited secondary details have been added and cited.

12 FINDINGS FROM THE FIELD

I. EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

- ▶ **Finding #1:** School Safety is a Cross-Functional Responsibility
- ▶ **Finding #2:** Training is the Most Critical Element to Safety Plans
- ▶ **Finding #3:** Adaptive Protocols Drive Dynamic Responsiveness
- ▶ **Finding #4:** Focus on Both Threat Prevention and Detection

II. BUILDING SECURITY

- ▶ **Finding #5:** Vulnerability Assessments Create the Roadmap
- ▶ **Finding #6:** Secured Entry Access for Buildings and Classrooms
- ▶ **Finding #7:** Use of Multi-Step Visitor Management Systems to Scan and Track School Visitors
- ▶ **Finding #8:** Investments in Next Gen Emergency Communication Tools
- ▶ **Finding #9:** Police Partnerships Create a Culture of Safety
- ▶ **Finding #10:** Prevalence of Armed Security Officers in Secondary Schools

III. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- ▶ **Finding #11:** Parents Push for More Security
- ▶ **Finding #12:** Communication and Feedback Mechanisms Reduce Anxiety

I. EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

Findings from the Field

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EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

SCHOOL SAFETY IS A CROSS-FUNCTIONAL RESPONSIBILITY

In developing district security plans, K-12 school leaders stress that school safety is a cross-functional responsibility and every individual's participation drives the success of overall safety protocols.

As these cross-functional teams collaborate to develop safety plans, K-12 leaders identified several common characteristics for district safety plans.

Safety plans should be:

- ▶ Clearly written, understandable, and easy to follow.
- ▶ Simple and straightforward to execute.
- ▶ Flexible to adapt to evolving security concerns.

CROSS-FUNCTIONAL SCHOOL SAFETY TEAM



“ If you make [the safety plan] too difficult, schools will have difficulty implementing and not be successful. ”

Red Clay Consolidated School District, South Suburb

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EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

TRAINING IS THE MOST CRITICAL ELEMENT TO SAFETY PLANS

K-12 leaders cite a variety of ways to deliver safety training to faculty and staff, and flag that, while districts may spend millions of dollars on expensive security devices, training is still the most important aspect of a district's safety plan. To encourage buy-in from every staff member, districts focus their training on explaining the reasoning and rationale behind safety protocols and offering opportunities across the school year to promote safety awareness. Common practices for staff training include:

- ▶ Allocate crisis training hours during professional development days throughout the school year.
- ▶ Partner with local law enforcement to train administrators in incident command systems and conduct tabletop sessions to discuss security best practices for a variety of scenarios.
- ▶ Set up informal, ongoing training to remind every building employee about everyday practices that increase safety.

TABLETOP PLANNING SESSIONS

“ We have tabletop planning sessions with our local law enforcement where administrators will sit in a room and go through different scenarios. I think that type of communication is really valuable. ”

Duane Van Hemert,
Director of Facilities,
Iowa City Community Schools

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EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

ADAPTIVE PROTOCOLS DRIVE DYNAMIC RESPONSIVENESS

All interviewed districts conduct state-mandated fire drills, weather drills, and a minimal number of lockdown drills. However, a number of school leaders are pursuing additional safety protocols such as the “I Love You Guys” Foundation’s Standard Response Protocol and the ALICE intruder response protocol. The drills for both approaches emphasize quick and flexible thinking instead of rote memorization of specific procedures. Faculty are encouraged to look at their classrooms to identify hiding places and escape routes, and to think in terms of decision trees during drills to determine whether it’s better to evacuate or to lock down.

“The truth was, people needed to [do one of only four things:] evacuate the building, lock someone out of the building, prepare for an active shooter (...) or shelter in place. We reduced a whole big list of things for people to do to a much smaller number.”

**David Christopher, Assistant Superintendent
for K-12 Education, North Allegheny School District**

Source: Active Shooter Civilian Response Training for all Organizations.” Alice Training Institute. <https://www.alicetraining.com/>
The Standard Response Protocol - K12.” I Love U Guys Foundation. <http://iloveguys.org/srp.html>

“I LOVE U GUYS” FOUNDATION’S STANDARD RESPONSE PROTOCOL

Overview: Maps out responses to any given situation with four specific actions:

- ▶ **Lockout** is followed by the Directive: “Get Inside. Lock Outside Doors” and is the protocol used to safeguard students and staff within the building.
- ▶ **Lockdown** is followed by “Locks, Lights, Out of Sight” and is the protocol used to secure individual rooms and keep students quiet and in place.
- ▶ **Evacuate** is followed by a location, and is used to move students and staff from one location to a different location in or out of the building.
- ▶ **Shelter** is always followed by a type and a method and is the protocol for group—and self-protection.

ALICE INTRUDER RESPONSE PROTOCOL

Overview: Designed to respond to an armed intruder using specific commands:

- ▶ **A = Alert:** Notification of an incident
- ▶ **L = Lockdown:** Barricade to create a safe space
- ▶ **I = Inform:** Communicate details in real time
- ▶ **C = Counter:** Create noise, distance, distraction
- ▶ **E = Evacuate:** Remove from the danger zone

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EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

FOCUS ON BOTH THREAT PREVENTION AND DETECTION

Interviewees indicated that collaboration with the whole community can help prevent threats by fostering a safe and secure environment and identify threats with hotlines, tiplines, and social media monitoring.

From a preventative standpoint, K-12 leaders seek to create trust and empathy with students and try to track their progress with ongoing annual climate surveys.

From a detection standpoint, K-12 leaders cited tiplines as safe, easy-to-use mechanisms to surface potential threats to law enforcement. Several districts monitor social media activity on students' one-to-one devices through third-party threat assessment providers. While privacy concerns exist, K-12 leaders hope to spot potential issues early for intervention.

THREAT PREVENTION

Build trust and create emotionally safe and secure environments

TRUSTED ADULT RELATIONSHIPS

Promote a culture of trusted relationships between students and adults.

SCHOOL CLIMATE

Survey students, teachers, and parents annually to assess school climate and identify areas of need.

COUNSELING SUPPORT

Support student emotional well-being with counseling and support services.

THREAT ASSESSMENT

Evaluate student behavior to determine risk through training and technology

HOTLINES & TIPLINES

Foster anonymous and confidential information on potential threats. Common platforms include:

- ▶ Okay 2 Say
- ▶ Safe 2 Tell
- ▶ We Tip Anonymous Hotline
- ▶ Text-a-Tip
- ▶ The Safe School Helpline

SOCIAL MEDIA MONITORING

Scan social media for potentially threatening messages and documents. Common platforms include:

- ▶ Gaggle
- ▶ Social Sentinel

“Students [need to] have someone they can turn to if they're feeling bad or if they see someone else who is doing something that is concerning, disturbing, or threatening. (...) You can put all the buzzers and bells and alarms and cameras, but none of that's going to [work] if you have a student in the building who's troubled, who's considering an act of violence.”

**Director of Safety and Security,
Urban School District, Midwest**

II. BUILDING SECURITY

Findings from the Field

- ▶ **Finding #5:** Vulnerability Assessments Create the Roadmap
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BUILDING SECURITY

VULNERABILITY ASSESSMENTS CREATE THE ROADMAP

Interviewees suggest districts should evaluate their school safety and security policies and procedures through needs, risks, or vulnerability assessments that are most commonly performed through third-party security consultants, and occasionally by local police or state departments of criminal justice services. Vulnerability assessments help schools take steps to prevent, mitigate, and lessen potential impact of risks by developing customized district and school emergency management plans.

“You have to start with a needs assessment, [otherwise] you can (...) start throwing solutions at things with no clear understanding what your challenges are.”

David Christopher, Assistant Superintendent for K-12 Education, North Allegheny School District

VULNERABILITY ASSESSMENT PROCESS



6 BUILDING SECURITY

SECURED ENTRY ACCESS FOR BUILDINGS AND CLASSROOMS

Many of the interviewees noted a focus on managing access and entry points into the school. One of the main challenges with managing entrance points is compliance as each entry management system requires changes in process and behavior to work effectively. Many schools use controlled entrances, keeping all but the main entrance locked during the majority of the school day, but compliance challenges can persist if doors are often left propped open. Additionally, some K-12 leaders are focusing on internal classroom door security and reconsidering both the locked door protocols and the door hardware in place.

“The safety of our schools is our first priority... that means creating barriers to entrance, [and] having protocols in place so we know who’s in our schools.”

Liz Margolis, Executive Director of Student and School Safety, Ann Arbor Public Schools

EXTERIOR DOOR MANAGEMENT



- ▶ **Electronic Door Access:** Several districts emphasize the benefits of electronic door access, which can help monitor and control points and times of access, and ensure staff compliance with carrying ID.
- ▶ **Door Propping Alerts:** Several districts express interest in a system to alert schools when a door has been propped open.

INTERIOR DOOR MANAGEMENT



- ▶ **Outward Swinging Doors:** More difficult to kick in.
- ▶ **Locked Classroom Door Protocols:** Keeping classroom doors locked on a regular basis.
- ▶ **Heightened Door Locking Systems:** Can include upgraded handsets that lock the room from the inside or expandable bar systems that render most commercial doors impossible to open.

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BUILDING SECURITY

USE OF MULTI-STEP VISITOR MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS TO SCAN AND TRACK SCHOOL VISITORS

Monitoring and tracking visitors to the school is increasingly important to K-12 districts. Many K-12 leaders have implemented visitor management systems to scan individuals before they enter and track them during their visit.

Raptor Technologies is the most commonly cited visitor management system given its ability to scan a visitor's government ID against several major databases, including the national sex offender database. The system can also alert law enforcement by email or text if a potentially problematic visitor arrives.

“Everyone comes though one door (...) has to show identification, and then they get scanned in. The concept of a visitor management system is a good [addition to our safety protocols].”

Steve Chatterton, Director of School Safety and Security, Greece Central School District

BEST PRACTICES: VISITOR MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS



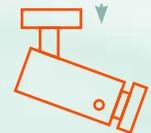
► **BUZZ IN:**
Most districts have adopted a camera / voice-activated buzzer system, allowing for schools to screen visitors before they enter.

► **SECURE-CHECK IN:**
Visitors have their IDs scanned at a security checkpoint. Districts are increasingly moving toward secure vestibules, or areas removed from the rest of the school.



► **BADGES:**
Visitors must wear badges with their photo while on the premises, and check out when leaving. One district notes the additional usage of brightly colored vests.

► **CAMERAS:**
Nearly all districts use camera systems to track visitors, staff, and students, but they do require maintenance and upkeep.



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BUILDING SECURITY

INVESTMENTS IN NEXT GEN EMERGENCY COMMUNICATION TOOLS

Schools indicated using a variety of communication tools to flag a security threat and share information with law enforcement, staff, and the community. When deciding on new security equipment, districts consult their peers and local law enforcement about the latest technology.

Interviewees suggest security hardware and equipment should be:

- ▶ Easy to use.
- ▶ Integrated with other school systems.
- ▶ Able to be serviced and updated.
- ▶ From a reputable and reliable vendor.

“A student described it as security theater. It’s a lot of stuff being sold that doesn’t even speak to the problem at hand.”

**Director of Safety and Security,
Urban School District, Midwest**

PANIC ALARMS/LIGHTS

- ▶ Uses physical, in-classroom buttons and portable devices to communicate a threat to law enforcement, the alarm company, and the school community. Some services can automatically lock fire doors and flash warning lights and alarms.
- ▶ Platforms Include: Allertus

DISTRICT-WIDE RADIO SYSTEM

- ▶ Networks school security and administrators with police, fire, and EMS via two-way radios to initiate or receive communications.
- ▶ Platforms Include: School SAFE Communications

CRISIS RESPONSE MOBILE APP

- ▶ Phone-based mobile app lets users send alert of a threat to law enforcement, the alarm company, and the networked community.
- ▶ Platforms Include: Rave Mobile Safety

SCHOOL MESSENGER SYSTEM

- ▶ Sends emergency alerts via voice, text, email, and social media to parents and the school community.
- ▶ Platforms Include: School Messenger

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BUILDING SECURITY

POLICE PARTNERSHIPS CREATE A CULTURE OF SAFETY

K-12 leaders cite various engagements with law enforcement, from campus police departments to school resource officers. Close integration with police during everyday and non-emergency settings helps build relationships and a culture of safety between law enforcement, students, and staff.

Many districts meet with police departments monthly to update new safety strategies and training. Some model incidents from other schools and discuss ways they could prepare and anticipate a similar situation.

“It would be nothing for me or one of my principals to call any of our regional chiefs of police about an incident or a concern we had. We have all of their numbers and we have good relationships with them.”

**David Christopher, Assistant Superintendent
for K-12 Education, North Allegheny School District**



CAMPUS POLICE DEPARTMENTS

Urban school districts may have their own district or campus police departments composed of retired police officers.



SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICERS (SROS)

Many districts use SROs while middle and high school students and staff are on campus, and then use a third-party security patrol service overnight and on weekends.



SCHOOL POLICE PARTNERSHIP MEETINGS

Districts and schools meet monthly with local police departments to discuss training strategies and the latest in school safety and security.

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BUILDING SECURITY

PREVALENCE OF ARMED SECURITY OFFICERS IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

With the exception of Midwestern districts, most districts have SROs and find their presence critical to school safety. Some districts without SROs are considering instituting them in the coming year.

While part of an SRO's role involves enforcing physical safety, many SROs are also active in building relationships with students and unpacking the social challenges they face.

“Immediately after Parkland, they wanted an armed guard at every door in every building, and it's just not feasible to hire that many people and staff to that level.”

West Rural (Fringe)

“Our school guard has stated that they are not in favor of armed teachers.”

**Assistant Superintendent of Operations,
Urban School District, South**

“My feeling on unarmed guards in schools is that they've just identified the first victim for a shooter that comes in.”

West Rural (Fringe)

III. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Findings from the Field

- ▶ **Finding #11:** Parents Push for More Security
- ▶ **Finding #12:** Communication and Feedback Mechanisms Reduce Anxiety

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COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

PARENTS PUSH FOR MORE SECURITY

Several interviewees noted that the active shooter incidents in the 2017-2018 school year have heightened parental concern and a sense of alarm, and have led school district communities to engage in debates about institutionalizing schools by installing metal detectors, bulletproof glass, and fencing.

Rural school districts see this increased concern as a long-awaited allowance by parents to upgrade their security measures.

Suburban and urban districts stress the need to keep the community up-to-date on any safety protocols implemented.

RURAL

“ We tried to implement the door buzz-in about a year ago and everybody complained about it. After the Parkland shooting we got buy-in and people were glad that we were doing it. ”

West Town (Distant)

URBAN/SUBURBAN

“ The things that get all the press, fortunately, are not that frequent. (...) We try to alleviate parents' or community fears by telling them some of the things that we're doing to change our procedures. ”

Assistant Director of Health, Safety, and Risk Management, South City (Midsize)

12 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

COMMUNICATION AND FEEDBACK MECHANISMS REDUCE ANXIETY

Many leaders believe that creating clear communication and feedback channels for parents, students, and staff can help alleviate anxiety over safety concerns.

School districts regularly hold public board meetings and forums, release newsletters, and update social media about school safety and security, all while limiting the access and emergency plan details that they share with the public. Proactive districts get ahead of parent questions with regular communication explaining in general terms what school buildings are doing to stay up to date.

School districts rely on school administration to design building security and for staff to provide feedback on how to improve emergency protocols after drills.

“It’s very good to have the community engaged (...) But when it comes right down to the details of [building access], (...) putting too much information out there is a bad thing.”

**Shannon Sullivan, Director of Facilities,
Granby Public Schools**

PARENT AND STUDENT COMMUNICATION AND FEEDBACK MECHANISMS

- ▶ Public board meetings
- ▶ Newsletters
- ▶ Social media
- ▶ Climate surveys
- ▶ Direct email feedback
- ▶ Personal outreach

STAFF COMMUNICATION AND FEEDBACK MECHANISMS

- ▶ Direct email feedback
- ▶ Personal outreach
- ▶ Climate surveys

CONCLUSION

These findings from the field demonstrate a range of strategies that school district leaders are considering as school security is an increasing concern across the country. Currently, there is a dearth of research that examines school security strategies and interventions. Given the urgency for this type of research, policy makers, education researchers, and practitioners must study school security challenges and interventions. Hanover Research encourages additional research that examines the effectiveness of school security practices and interventions.

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RECOMMENDED SOURCES

[“http://www.nea.org/home/16364.htm”](http://www.nea.org/home/16364.htm) NEA School Safety

[“https://www.pta.org/home/family-resources/safety/School-Safety”](https://www.pta.org/home/family-resources/safety/School-Safety) National PTA

[“https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources/school-safety-and-crisis”](https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources/school-safety-and-crisis) National Association of School Psychologists

[“https://www.naesp.org/school-safety-resources”](https://www.naesp.org/school-safety-resources) National Association of Elementary School Principals

[“http://www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/01/05/74/10574.pdf”](http://www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/01/05/74/10574.pdf) Education Commission of the States

[“http://www.aasa.org/SafetyResources.aspx”](http://www.aasa.org/SafetyResources.aspx) AASA

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