

## After Sandy Hook: Rising security trends and best practices

Safety has always been a concern for school officials, but in December 2012, it was made all the more prevalent when an active shooter entered Sandy Hook Elementary School and killed 26 innocent people, 20 who were children under age 8. Incidents like this one are motivating communities across the nation to take action and implement measures that can ensure classrooms stay safe.

With schools facing day-to-day security issues like propped doors, multiple visitors, high staff turnover and competing budgets, they need resources and insights from professionals who truly understand the unique challenges of the K-12 space.

Following are the top security trends and technologies rising to the top of school districts' list—and how you can leverage these findings to better support K-12 schools.



### Start with the first point of entry

Tight budget constraints in schools oftentimes force decision-makers to implement security solutions in phases, beginning with perimeter security and access management. As the first point of entry for an unwelcome intruder, it is always recommended to make the perimeter a top priority.

Top best practices for improving a school's perimeter security include:

- **Establish a single point of entry during school hours.** As students, teachers and staff enter and exit the building, schools need to be able to closely monitor who is coming and going. Generally, schools should select a front door location that is easily supervised to provide more control over who should—and shouldn't—enter the building.
- **Improve visitor entry management by creating a vestibule.** This adds an additional layer of perimeter security to automatically funnel visitors in a main office before allowing them access to other parts of the school. Vestibules should be closely monitored, particularly when students arrive in the morning. Once classes begin, the school is locked and visitors must verify their identity prior to entering the school. This is oftentimes achieved with an intercom system, camera, window film and pass-through drawers.



- **Deploy electronic access control.** Whether standalone or networked, hardwired or wireless, electronic access control helps schools monitor who has accessed a door and when, providing enhanced security. Implementing ID badges for staff and personnel is a widely adopted solution, with more than 85 percent of districts requiring all visitors to sign in and receive a badge.
- **Enhance visibility by incorporating natural surveillance.** This solution is a core component of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED), a multi-disciplinary approach to preventing crime through the thoughtful design of an environment, and can be implemented in phases to meet a school's budget. Natural surveillance helps to maximize visibility. For example, placing the school's front office right at the entrance allows staff to easily see who is at the front door. This can be further improved with an access control system that utilizes security solutions like digital video cameras and an intercom with a microphone that is linked to a buzzer in the main office.

### Best practices that have emerged since Sandy Hook

While schools continue to face violence and threats, simple measures can be taken to ensure that when a crisis hits, schools are fully prepared. Schools should avoid untested, new solutions, such as makeshift door barricades. While these new tools may be well intended, their use could put staff and students at an even greater risk. Having the right equipment or plans in place is a starting point, but can only go so far if schools aren't following best practices. Industry standards include:

- **Establish integrated emergency communications.** Many consultants agree on the importance of deploying first some form of communications system to immediately alert responders and individuals in the school during a crisis. Public address systems, messaging via networked computers, electronic signage and other devices can alert everyone to a dangerous condition and that an emergency lockdown must be performed. Implementing an interoperable communications platform allows schools to quickly communicate with first responders, alerting them of an incident, sharing necessary information and providing immediate access to the building to react quickly to an intruder.

"What I took from Sandy Hook was that the administrator was extremely on the ball and keyed the intercom's all call microphone, which broadcasted what was happening in the office," said Ernie Gauvin, Special Systems Technician with 29 years of experience at a school district in Arizona. "From what I understand, that saved lots of lives because the staff knew what was happening and they were able to respond."

- **Install institutional grade products.** When it comes to door hardware and security solutions, schools should invest in solutions that are designed for a specific purpose, use and expected lifecycle. Solutions should address everything from access control to unexpected fires.
- **Train and drill all staff on policies, procedures and technologies.** Teachers and staff members often are the initial responders to an emergency. Yet, few initial responders are trained properly so that they know how to react during a lockdown scenario. Training aspects may include:
  - Lockdown drills conducted annually
  - School maps distributed to responders
  - Inventories of classroom emergency equipment

### Prioritize classroom lockdown capabilities

While there are many more advanced technologies that can help schools respond to intruders, one proven, cost-effective solution is a classroom's lockdown capability. "You need to harden the actual classrooms," said Mitchell Kane, president of Vanderbilt Industries. "The whole migration of security... evolved to not only locking down the perimeter, but actually locking down all the rooms. It's a real challenge to balance the safety of students with the security needed to protect them without taking on the profile of a prison."

Should an active shooter or intruder enter the building, teachers should have the ability to lock the door from the inside of the classroom, preventing individuals from going into hallways or open spaces and putting themselves in harm's way. Installing locks with a classroom security function will allow an individual to immediately lock a door from the inside with a key, eliminating exposure outside the classroom.



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Experts recommend three proven lockdown technologies:

- **Manual lockdown.** This method uses keys and classroom security functions to lock down a space. While this is an economical option, it relies on an individual having the right key at the right place.
- **Remote lockdown.** Enabling classroom lockdown by remote fob within proximity of a door, remote lockdown can be a cost-effective alternative to a networked system.
- **Centralized lockdown.** This networked system, when integrated with access control software, can enable an immediate school or campus-wide lockdown. With the click of a button, all doors can instantly lock to avoid anyone from exiting the building, and provides a real-time solution when an unwelcome visitor enters the school.

“Implementing a lockdown on all the interior doors, where in the past it would have been a monumental task, now becomes a fairly straightforward and easy to rollout effort based on the software integration that we have with these devices,” Kane said.

Gauvin recommends adding a second layer of security to access control systems by requiring PINs along with badges for all after-hours access. This ensures security if access cards are lost or stolen. For the sake of convenience, only the card should grant access during normal school hours.



### Use design to lay the foundation of school safety

Sandy Hook was neither the first nor the last active shooter scenario in a school, but it is often referenced as a turning point in security technology and protocols. With incidents like these, schools recognize more than ever the importance of implementing security best practices and technologies that can keep teachers and students safe. As more schools nationwide are prioritizing school safety in their planning and budgeting each year, architects can play a key role by designing to these new best practices and specifying the right products from the start.

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