Willis

A CLOSER LOOK AT SCHOOL SECURITY

Statistics prove that school is one of the safest places for a child to be. Nevertheless, security hazards do confront students and staff, and it is the school district's responsibility to provide the safest environment possible. Modern threats to school security include domestic and workplace violence, drug dealers, gangs and sexual predators, to name a few.

School districts generally take school site security seriously by developing and implementing site-based security programs. Unfortunately, school security sometimes suffers because these programs were either never fully implemented or they have been allowed to erode.

Every district and school site should regularly scrutinize their security programs and make adjustments or enhancements as needed. Following are typical areas where some schools may have let their guard down.

VISITOR POLICY

Most schools have a visitor policy requiring visitors to check in at the office before entering school property. Usually, there is a sign-in log and some sort of badge system. While these steps are critical, they are only the first steps. Other actions, outlined below, that are sometimes overlooked can result in a more comprehensive and effective campus visitor program.

SIGNAGE

The design of some schools makes it difficult for persons unfamiliar with the property to intuitively find the office. Good signage or other types of markings can prevent visitors from wandering or getting lost and being challenged by school personnel as to why they are on the premises.

To further eliminate confusion, signs clearly stating the school's visitor policy should also be prominently displayed around campus.

Designate a separate visitors' parking area and mark it with appropriate signage.

BADGES

Many schools use a simple paper visitor's badge that is discarded when the visitor leaves the premises. Although better than no system at all, most security experts recommend a system that requires both entry and exit sign-in using badges with numbers that can be recorded next to the visitor's name.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Make sure student contact information is up to date. No child should ever be allowed to leave the premises with someone who has not been authorized by the parent or guardian. Domestic and custody situations change, so regularly checking for accuracy is critical.

Staff should be trained to challenge visitors not displaying the proper credentials and should not assume that the person has a legitimate reason to be on campus. If personnel are uncomfortable confronting the visitor, or if the visitor's response is unsatisfactory, staff can contact security personnel.
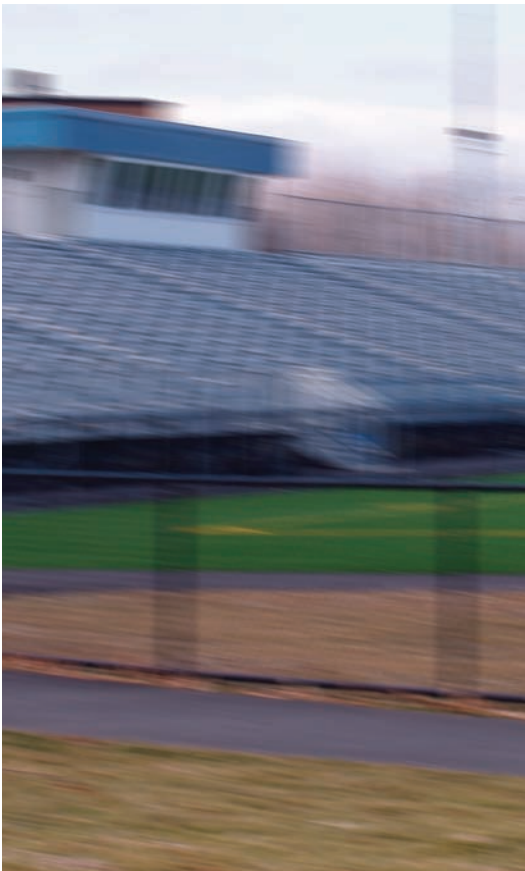
SITE HARDENING

Site hardening is the process of designing and equipping buildings, athletic fields, parking lots and other school venues to minimize opportunities for criminal activity or violence.

FENCING

Ideally, every school campus should be fenced. Access to school grounds should be controlled through one or two gates that are easily observable. Make sure fencing is in good shape and there are no gaps or holes that could afford access. Also, make sure that all gates are locked at night and when the school is unoccupied. Regularly remove or cut back vegetation around the perimeter of the campus to help reduce hiding places and blind spots.

KEY CONTROL

Keys should be issued only to persons with a legitimate need for them. Records of keyholders should be updated regularly. If a key cannot be accounted for, those lock(s) should be reconfigured and new keys distributed. If a person leaves the employment of the school, they should surrender all keys immediately.

DOORS

Exterior doors should never be propped open for ventilation or to help with traffic flow. Access to the school should be controlled through a limited number of observable doors. Exit doors should be designed to be opened from the inside only and should be self-closing. Never chain exit doors shut.

Classroom doors should always be locked when the room is not in use. Locker and weight rooms and janitorial closets should also be kept locked. Regular checks should be made to ensure that staff members are following procedures.

If a non-school function is being held at the school, make sure the areas not being used are secured from unauthorized visitors.

NIGHT LIGHTING

When school is not in session, unauthorized persons on campus must be easily detectable. Good night lighting can both deter intruders and help police and neighbors recognize their presence. Make sure night lighting is operable and adequate for regular observation.

Some schools use a "dark campus" program in lieu of night lighting. This program is most effective when schools are surrounded by homes and businesses. The schools are kept completely dark at night, and neighbors are informed of the fact. If any light is seen in the school at night, it is reason for concern. Local police should be consulted before initiating a dark campus program.

Keeping schools secure is an ongoing process. Do not fall into the "it can't happen here" mentality, because recent history shows, tragically, that it can. By following a few guidelines and procedures, schools can be safer places for students to learn and teachers to teach.