

The RID Framework for School Security

By looking at relationships, infrastructure, and design, we can improve school security for all stakeholders.

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Every school district is challenged by a range of school security issues: bullying, cyberbullying, physical violence, drugs, burglary, and tagging, among others.

Budgets and personnel are tight everywhere, yet we can never be too diligent, thoughtful, and deliberate in our actions to improve school security for all stakeholders. We looked at the school security needs of our local district through a program evaluation model and discovered great power and leverage for improvement in an integrated, coordinated framework centered on relationships, infrastructure, and design (RID).

Relationships build avenues of communication and trust that bring attention to security threats before they become a reality, and the security infrastructure and design can protect schools, students, and staff from internal and external threats.

A security audit in your district can help you determine the areas of strength and weakness relative to the RID framework.

Trusting Relationships

We are in the people business. When strong relationships exist among all stakeholders (students, teachers, parents, and administration), trust is high and quality communication flows in all directions. Trusting

relationships and open communication increase the awareness of potential security threats and thus the opportunity to intervene in positive, proactive ways.

Programs and initiatives that strengthen positive teacher-student relationships are at the core of building trust in the school and the school community. Several of our high school principals incorporate the Power Hour into the master schedule to boost teacher-student relationships. The Power Hour is time scheduled during each school day when students can go to their teachers for individualized coaching and mentoring; when students can participate in clubs and activities to strengthen their connection to one another and to the school at large; and when teachers, counselors, and administrators can work individually with students on issues of concern.

Our elementary schools incorporate the DARE (Drug Abuse Resistance Education) program and implement the ideals of the Habits of the Mind and the Students Against Violence Everywhere programs. Through this work, our district supports and guides our students through knowledge acquisition, role-playing, and problem-solving activities that reinforce a positive school culture, citizenship, and interpersonal skills. Teachers also participate in recess with their students,

encouraging physical activity and positive play, and strengthening teacher-student bonds.

High-quality relationships at all levels within the school and among all stakeholders strengthen the school climate, reducing the possibility of violence.

Solid Infrastructure

It's important to look at all aspects of the district's security infrastructure. During the program evaluation of our district, we noted a strong security infrastructure relative to the primary communication systems, natural surveillance systems, and door key control and inventory procedures. However, the lack of burglar alarms and immovable video cameras, as well as inconsistencies in secondary communications systems, weakened the schools' security.

We also noted the need for improvements to our visitor management program through the installation of an electronic access control system to support our computerized visitor identification program and sign in-sign out system.

School Design

School design is an ever-changing field. Our program evaluation of our local district in the area of school design highlighted several areas of both strength and concern.

School security audits, school security-themed professional development activities, and active school security management can dramatically improve all levels of school security.

The strengths were apparent in the clear identification of school perimeters through a combination of fencing and natural obstacles. Landscaping near school buildings maximized visibility, and signs and traffic calming measures improved the flow in and out of school parking lots.

We did note a need to improve school lighting, especially at night, and to improve access control on campuses with multiple buildings.

RID Coordination

School security audits, school security-themed professional development activities, and active school security management can dramatically improve all levels of school security. With that in mind, we offer the following recommendations for schools and districts:

- Conduct security audits and evaluations of each school and district facility to gather information for guiding site-based and district-wide decision making.
- Implement effective and ongoing professional development for school and district administrators in the areas of (a) security terminology and “look-fors,” (b)



security procedures and best practices, and (c) RID framework-based training to bolster relationships, improve infrastructure, and support the principles of effective school design.

- Establish programs to nurture relationships among all stakeholders and at all school levels.
- Review and improve the security infrastructure, such as (a) primary and secondary lines and systems of communication, (b) intrusion detection, and (c) surveillance and visitor management programs.
- Review and improve school and campus design elements: (a) clearly delineate school boundaries, (b) upgrade lighting in dimly lit areas and entry/exit locations, and (c) install video intercoms, vestibules, and computerized visitor clearance and monitoring software.
- Invite local law enforcement officers to use the school as a “substation” during the day and evening hours, providing increased police presence as a deterrent. In addition to supporting the work of school resource officers and creating a sense of security in the building, this approach will help promote relationships between the school and community agencies.

Our Final Thoughts

Attention to the power of relationships and the alignment of resources to maximize them, the critical examination of infrastructure, and the thoughtful implementation of design can positively affect the lives of not only the students but all those engaged in educating them.

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