It's Time to Upgrade the K–12 Security Infrastructure

By Robert Boyd

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Many of our nation's K–12 buildings are antiquated and don't offer the safe, secure environment our communities expect for our children, teachers, and administrators. This lack of security means our schools are at risk of being "soft targets" for those looking to inflict harm.

The Secure Schools Alliance was created to help mitigate the unprecedented number of security threats our schools face today. The alliance includes educators, law enforcement officers, families, public officials, and security hardware and industry leaders who believe America's K–12 public schools need security infrastructure upgrades.

In April 1999, the shootings at Columbine High School showed us how vulnerable our schools are, prompting a national outcry for new school and first-responder protocols to address active-shooter scenarios, lockdowns, and school evacuations. Many of those protocols are in place today. And although they do offer plans of action and emergency preparedness for our students and school officials, we've seen time and time again that on their own, these protocols don't always prevent the horrific violence that a determined assailant can cause.

The December 2012 shootings at Sandy Hook Elementary reminded us how vulnerable our schools are. In the aftermath of that tragedy, the Sandy Hook Advisory Commission included recommendations about safe-school design and operations.

More recently, in October 2015, the shootings at Umpqua Community College in Oregon reminded us of the vulnerability of our schools. Since then, dozens of urban, suburban, and rural school districts have faced threats of violence. Whether credible or not, school administrators are forced to evaluate those threats and make decisions that affect thousands of families and local economies.

Mitigating Threats

The Secure Schools Alliance is looking to continue the discussion of safe school design and school security infrastructure for our nation's schools that was begun after Sandy Hook.

The state of school security infrastructure is a nationwide issue, and the alliance believes schools should not be forced to use limited educational resources to provide additional security for facilities. Local schools should not be burdened with the cost of mitigating the threats of the unpredictable world in which we live. School resources should go toward the education of our children. The alliance is working to advocate for direct funding to improve K–12 security infrastructure.

That does not mean that the Secure Schools Alliance prescribes solutions. Those are local decisions. However, the alliance believes that those who are making decisions regarding solutions should have access to best practices, security standards, and forums where school officials can share information and resources. The alliance is working to develop a database of best practices and to provide a discussion forum regarding this issue.

Just as the Secure Schools Alliance advocates that decisions about solutions are local, it believes that assessing the facility is also a local responsibility. Unfortunately, no nationally accepted standard or format exists for assessing the security of a K–12 facility. The alliance is working with national law enforcement organizations to identify a simple tool that can be used by any trained law enforcement officer to assess a school's security infrastructure, at no cost to the school.

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