



Security for Administration Centers and School Board Meetings

These sites are often overlooked for safety planning by school leaders.

School board members and superintendents typically focus their safety planning and preparedness measures on school campuses, but they often overlook security and emergency planning for administration centers, board meeting sites and support facilities.

Today's climate of economic uncertainty, school budget cuts and the growing politicization of education issues create a new level of risk for the adults running districts. Failure to take reasonable preparedness measures can lead to increased risks and the potential for greater liability.

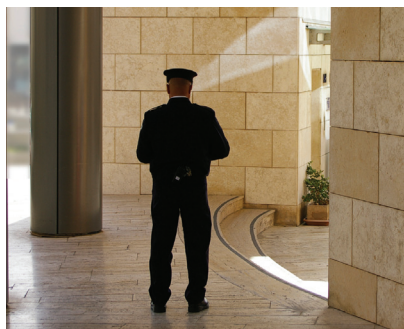
Higher-Risk School Sites

Administration buildings typically house board offices, superintendents, human resources staff, special ed staff, student services and expulsion hearing officers. "Two of my greatest concerns are safety considerations during employee termination processes and recognition that critical situations can occur at any time at school board meetings," says John Weicker, director of security for the Fort Wayne (Ind.) Community School District.

The district has a close working relationship with law enforcement agencies and other community emergency responders. But Weicker knows that school officials are often the first responders to a critical incident, and need to consider where they face higher safety risks.

Districts also typically have stand-alone facilities separate from administration centers that house transportation depots, food service operations, maintenance and custodial operations and storage—and are often overlooked in safety planning.

Boards and superintendents are quick to point to limited budgets and to concerns about community perceptions that they are beefing up security for themselves



instead of at facilities housing students.

While budgets and student security are legitimate concerns, they do not negate a district's responsibilities to protect all employees.

Common Security

In our security and emergency-preparedness assessment consultations, the most common gaps at administration and support service facilities include:

- Inadequate or nonexistent access control
- Minimal or nonexistent communications capabilities, such as the lack of a public address system or a fire alarm system
- No site-specific crisis teams, meetings or planning efforts
- Absence of drills such as fire drills, lockdowns and evacuations

School leaders should not set a lower standard of care for those employees. The families of these individuals, the school community and possibly a judge or jury will find this difficult to understand should someone be injured or killed in a situation that could have been prevented.

Preparedness Measures

School leaders should insist upon reasonable security and emergency-planning measures for administration centers, support facilities and school board meetings. "We have to train our administrators and

their support staff to have the knack of being able to discipline and hold people accountable, while still treating them with dignity," says Weicker.

Weicker's district, along with other public and private schools in the county, received a federal grant in 2004 to address school readiness and emergency preparedness. This included training for bus drivers, office staff, custodial and maintenance employees and food service staff.

Last year, Weicker set up a workshop that I had provided for board members and administrators specifically focused on security for school board meetings and administration centers. He invited officials not only from his district but also from districts nationwide. Learning how to treat people was just one part of the workshop.

"Not returning phonecalls, talking down to people, making people sit and wait for a meeting they already know will not be pleasant, or just plain leaving people with a feeling they are less than a human being can get someone seriously hurt or killed," Weicker says.

Protecting All Staff

School board members and superintendents have a responsibility to establish reasonable security and risk-reduction measures for all employees. Workplace violence has no boundaries. School leaders must not forget to protect themselves and those support staff who work hard to serve children on a daily basis. **DA**

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