

## **Planning is Critical to Safeguard Your School Well into the Future**

Security is at the forefront of our minds and protecting our children, teachers and staff at school is a top priority. However, upgrading existing security systems or tackling a complete school security overhaul can be daunting. This is where the Electronic Security Association (ESA) would like to lend a hand. As President of ESA and the owner of a security integration business that works with schools, I recognize the challenges of designing or upgrading your school security plan and systems. The good news is that ESA recently released the Electronic Security Guidelines for Schools. The guidelines have been designed for you to turn to when reevaluating your security plan.

While far from common, tragedies like the events at Sandy Hook are no longer unimaginable. They can happen anywhere, at any time. I had the privilege of listening to Newtown, Conn. Police Chief Kehoe, at an industry tradeshow where he reminded us that no community is immune. Since 1948, ESA and its members have been responsible for helping to ensure public safety at all levels. The challenge has now been extended far beyond traditional notions of prevention and detection into a new arena: protecting our schools and our children against harm. As always, our industry willingly embraces this challenge and the release of these guidelines is the first valuable step towards an ongoing dialogue that can achieve that goal.

Each school is unique—not just in building design and use requirements, but also in size, location, demographics, and even the role a facility plays in the community. The guidelines emphasize development of a solution that is customized for the facility, considering all of those factors. Echoing remarks made by Newtown, Conn. Police Chief Michael Kehoe, the guidelines accept the premise that it is not possible to achieve absolute protection. But a comprehensive, well-considered approach can recognize and mitigate potential dangers and threats. The guidelines also emphasize safety of the school's most important assets – people – with protection of property and material taking a secondary role.

When utilizing the guidelines, you will gain an understanding of the steps necessary for creating a security solution including overall security planning, assessment of threats, procurement types, contractor selection, how systems affect schools, equipment types and system use. The guidelines also illustrate the importance of community involvement and communication between your school and first responders.

The document outlines a process and best practices – from a security audit to development of effective procedures during a school emergency – in terms that can be easily understood by anyone who knows more about schools than security. So here is an overview of ESA's "Electronic Security Guidelines for Schools." The guidelines are neither a project specification nor a manual, and definitely not a sales pitch. They are meant to inform and advise decision makers about your options, and the critical role electronic security professionals can play in keeping our schools safe.

### **Timing is everything**

Although summer may be the ideal time for security upgrades, since the facility is relatively empty, and disruption is at a minimum, this is the time to work through your site survey to identify and assess potential threats and vulnerabilities. This kind of appraisal can be done most effectively during the school year, when students and faculty can be observed and consulted during normal activities. This self-audit doesn't necessarily need to involve a professional. In fact, it will allow school officials to clearly

identify and discuss their needs so they can ask intelligent questions while choosing a security contractor, and continue doing so long after the relationship begins.

ESA urges all school officials to create an internal security team that will fulfill a number of functional roles, including risk manager, security manager, facilities manager, and IT manager. The document goes into valuable detail regarding the responsibilities and importance of each of these roles. These roles may fall to individuals who are already in place, and one individual may be responsible for multiple roles. An effective security team must also successfully interact with external agencies such as the school board, community life-safety officials, and first responders including law enforcement and fire protection.

### **Types of threats**

Unfortunately, it is well documented that threats come in many forms including external (intruders who attack upon entry) and internal (from students or others who are already in the school or have regular access to the school). Given the range of threats, the guidelines suggest approaching school security in terms of layers:

- An outer perimeter, including the parking lot, athletic fields or external buildings.
- A building perimeter, including primary and secondary entry points into the building.
- Interior spaces, such as classrooms, offices, hallways and stairwells, as well as larger areas such as an auditorium or cafeteria.

Each layer requires a different approach in terms of protection and technology, and those considerations should be weighed carefully following a security audit.

### **Selecting a contractor, equipment and implementation**

ESA's guidelines offer a helpful overview of the procurement process. It all starts with working with a consultant to determine a bid specification, and hiring a security integrator for system design and installation once proposals have been received. This approach tends to be favored for larger-scale projects with more complex requirements. However, working with one integrator for project evaluation, design and implementation on smaller projects or upgrades is acceptable. Working with a preferred vendor who has previous experience with the school, either through related work or previous projects allows a vendor to utilize familiarity with existing systems, or to create economic savings when combining or extending existing projects. The guidelines contain additional direction for school administrators regarding solicitation of bids, and for screening and selecting contractors.

ESA's guidelines also provide school officials with a useful overview of different types of electronic security technology, along with easy-to-understand explanations and options. The document reviews the basics of access control, video surveillance, monitoring and supervision, intrusion detection (including panic buttons), and communication options. The guidelines not only give a broad explanation of the stages of installation, but also emphasize the importance of training, documentation, maintenance, and scalability for future needs. They also provide ideas regarding potential funding sources, as well as contacts for additional information.

### **A question of balance**

Much of the discussion after Sandy Hook has centered on the desire to avoid making schools feel like "prisons" for students and faculty in order to ensure their safety. ESA believes that through a combination of good design, effective technology and thoughtful planning, schools can continue to be warm and inviting while still maintaining a high level of security. However, the guidelines emphasize the importance of balancing safety and convenience. Issues such as ease of access, controlled entry points, positioning of video cameras, discreet but prominent placement of signage, and training in new

equipment and procedures will have an impact on cultural and behavioral practices at the facility. The impact needs to be openly discussed and communicated with faculty, staff and students, particularly during the planning stages. Once established, expectations and responsibilities must be communicated effectively at all levels.

In conclusion, I encourage you to seek out an ESA member company in your area by visiting [Alarm.org](http://Alarm.org) to help you navigate the security options for your school. Utilizing the Electronic Security Guidelines for Schools will aid in your plans to ensure the future safety of your school, students, faculty and staff. For more information, go to [www.ESAweb.org/schoolguidelines](http://www.ESAweb.org/schoolguidelines).



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