



Each month the Wisconsin School Safety Coordinators Association (WSSCA) receives calls and emails with questions about what other schools are doing about school security. As the executive director for WSSCA, I've gathered scores of documents, studies and articles, and it's abundantly clear that there are no agreed upon or simple answers.

Nevertheless, there is common ground concerning our grave responsibility to ensure student safety and security. I'm happy to share some of the information WSSCA has passed along to our membership in recent months, and I hope you can find some value in these words.

— *Edward L. Dorff, PSP, Executive Director, Wisconsin School Safety Coordinators Association*

Common Ground on **SCHOOL SECURITY**



Edward L. Dorff

WSSCA executive director talks about school safety plans and Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design

Question: What safety and security measures are used in America's public schools?

RESPONSE: Schools use a variety of practices and procedures to promote the safety of students, faculty, and staff. Certain practices, such as locking or monitoring doors and gates, are intended to limit or control access to school campuses while others, such as the use of metal detectors and security cameras, are intended to monitor

or restrict students' and visitors' behavior on campus.

In the 2013–14 school year (the latest year for which data is available), 93 percent of public schools reported that they controlled access to school buildings by locking or monitoring doors during school hours. Other safety and security measures reported by public schools included the use of security cameras to monitor the school (75 percent), a requirement that faculty and staff wear badges or picture IDs

(68 percent), and the enforcement of a strict dress code (58 percent). In addition, 24 percent of public schools reported the use of random dog sniffs to check for drugs, 20 percent required that students wear uniforms, 9 percent required students to wear badges or picture IDs, and 4 percent used random metal detector checks.

Use of various safety and security procedures differed by school level during the 2013–14 school year. For example, higher percentages of

public primary schools and public middle schools than of public high schools and combined elementary/secondary schools (referred to as high/combined schools) controlled access to school buildings and required faculty and staff to wear badges or picture IDs.

Based on my visits to schools in Wisconsin, I think our numbers are a bit higher. I've yet to find a public school that doesn't control entrance/access in some way although I do find that I've been buzzed in without having to provide identification or purpose at some places. That's an issue easily checked and corrected. It needs attention because it's too easy to get lax.

Question: What are some of the conditions we can look to for improving physical security at our sites?

RESPONSE: Graduates of the WSSCA coordinator certification course are familiar with the concept of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED). It is a simple concept to understand, but a complex one to implement as every school and campus has unique characteristics to be considered and mitigated. Despite these differences, all schools can implement the core elements of CPTED.

- **Natural surveillance.** Keeping an eye on the whole environment without taking extraordinary measures to do so. Typical obstacles to natural surveillance include solid walls and lack of windows that provide visibility to areas of the school building that have experienced a high incidence of problem behaviors. Pruning shrubbery is one step that can be taken to improve

natural surveillance of school grounds.

- **Natural access control.** Determining who can or cannot enter a facility. Obstacles to access control include unsupervised, unlocked entrances to the building. Converting several secondary doors into locked, alarmed, emergency exits is one way to improve access control.
- **Territoriality.** Establishing recognized authority and control over the environment, along with cultivating a sense of belonging. Poor border definition can impede territoriality. Jointly controlled park land adjacent to a school would be an example of poor border definition. School uniforms offer one approach to both establishing a sense of belonging and making it easy to distinguish between students and non-students.

When schools fail to integrate environmental design concepts into expansion or reconstruction plans, an important opportunity is lost. Rectifying this oversight after the fact can be expensive and politically uncomfortable. Applying environmental design concepts from the beginning usually has minimal impact on costs, and the result is a safer school that can focus on its mission of teaching and learning.

Question: How do I know if my school/district is in compliance with state regulations for school safety and security?

RESPONSE: By now, all school districts in Wisconsin have complied with Wisconsin's 2010 Act 309 which, among other things, required every district to develop a school safety plan by the end of May 2013.

Something that may be overlooked however, is the requirement that each district review its plan at least once every three years following the enactment of that plan.

In addition to renewing your school safety plan every three years, the law lays out several school safety requirements that some districts may have forgotten about. For instance, at least twice annually, schools are required to "drill all pupils in the proper method of evacuation or other appropriate action in case of a school safety incident."

If you are charged with overseeing your district's safety plan, take some time to review the school safety requirements under state statute 118.07 (4) (d). In addition, make sure your school safety has met the three-year review requirements, and be sure to document that review on the cover or title page of your plan.

Question: What is one last piece of advice that you'd give to school leaders?

RESPONSE: Each school, district, and community should institute measures appropriate for their own circumstances. A design for an inner-city neighborhood may not be appropriate for a rural neighborhood. There is not a single solution that will fit all schools, but there are many good models that schools can draw from. For more information and resources, please visit our website at WSSCA.org or contact me at wssca@wssca.org. ■

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FOR MORE INFORMATION...

Recent issues of *The FOCUS* and *Policy Perspectives*, the WASB's policy publications, address related school safety and security issues. The February 2018 issue of *The FOCUS* covers policy issues regarding visitors to schools. And the February 2018 (Vol. 40, No. 8) of *Policy Perspectives* provides examples of districts reviewing school safety plans and related policy. You can find both of these publications at wasb.org. Note: *The FOCUS* is a subscription-based publication. Subscribers can log-in and view past issues of *The FOCUS* at wasb.org.