

An Opinion on the Fundamental Physical Security of U.S. Educational Institutions

Published on February 18, 2018

I continue to read about all the concerns around school security. There are several themes; it was the system, it was the FBI, it was local law enforcement, it was the firearm. The one item that has received precious little coverage is the fundamental physical security of our educational institutions. Fundamental physical security consists of three primary principles, detection, delay, and response. In a great system these three are equally important. When you have an “effective” system the sum of detection, delay, and response must be less than the adversary task time. In this case it was an active assailant, but it could equally be a disgruntled employee, parent in a custodial battle, or theft. Essentially, we should be able to detect an event is occurring, delay the event as far away from the protected environment as possible, and have a trained and qualified response force who arrives as rapidly as possible.



Then we have another aspect of physical security which is; people, equipment, policies and procedures, all equally important. A camera or access control system does not stop someone, they are tools, we must have people that monitor that system who are properly trained on the equipment and what to do in the case of an event.

Others must know what to do as well, when to shelter, when to evacuate, and how to do it. In the San Bernardino shooting we read about the fourteen who were injured or lost their life. What we did not read much about was the excellent practiced plan, policy, and procedure the building had, which resulted in the rapid and orderly evacuation of over 3,400 people.

So, you may be asking yourself at this point, “Jeff what are you getting at here?” Simply, in educational facilities we have great fire protection systems, practiced drills, and published regulatory Standards which dictate a process, methodology, and minimum requirements for equipment, education and response. Don’t you think it is about time, that we have the same requirement for the physical security of our children?

I have walked into many educational facilities including pre-schools, K-12, and college campuses. In my experience these are porous environments with poor access control, a lack of adequate visitor management controls, and often legacy security equipment. Or in some cases the physical security equipment is present but nobody knows how to use the system or monitor the devices.

I should not be able to walk into any door of an educational facility without first having to encounter a secure door, a security reception desk, and then enter a secure waiting area where I can approach customer service people, await an escort, or get badged to access the protected areas of the building.

We have the capability and technology to be successful. The technology is used in train stations, casinos, corporate campuses, and airports. We can integrate video cameras with video analysis, critical communications, gunshot detection, access control, and visitor management into a single monitored platform, with pre-programmed responses to identified events.

We may not stop everything, but we can certainly reduce the impact of these events. We can train executives, educators, employees, and children on what to do in an emergency and *really save lives*.

There is no excuse for anyone who is not authorized to be able to approach an educational building without first encountering an effective physical security system and people who have been trained according to a practiced and disciplined policy and procedure.

Enough hand wringing and blame gaming, let's get serious on protecting our children and start making the legislative, regulatory, and financial investments to achieve high quality physical security of our educational institutions.

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