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Study Finds Major Gaps in School Safety and Security

**The entire nation can learn from Idaho**, where thorough safety and security assessments completed last fall show that a significant portion of the state's K-12 campuses are still vulnerable.

By Robin Hattersley Gray · February 18, 2014

The Idaho State Department of Education released its findings on Feb. 12 that summarize assessments done on approximately 10% of its schools. What was discovered is disturbing and most likely applies to K-12 schools across the country. Areas of particular concern include access control, visitor management, key control, communications, emergency operations plans, backup power, teacher and staff training, as well as student and/or parent involvement in safety planning, among many other things.

Rather than use these results to bash Idaho, I'd like to applaud its officials for embarking on such thorough safety and security assessments of its school buildings. Not only that, they should be praised for having the dedication to transparency to make the findings public. Those of us in the campus protection field know we can't address our campus safety and security weaknesses until we know what they are. Studies like the ones done in the Potato State that shed light on strengths and weaknesses are the first step.

The Idaho assessments showed that the average amount of time an assessor was inside each school before being contacted and asked to report to the office was just under 10 minutes. In 19 of the 74 schools that were visited, the assessment team member was not contacted at all and self-reported to the office. Additionally, only 29 of the 74 schools had classroom doors that can be locked from the inside with hardware meeting fire code.

In 62 schools, communications were sufficient for daily operations; however, in most cases a power outage would render the systems non-operational. Additionally, the general lack of a comprehensive communications plan at both the school and district levels assures that communications will be a major impediment to effective emergency operations.

The assessment also found that only five schools include parents and/or students in safety planning and/or policy development. Only five out of the 74 schools that were assessed have

some type of anonymous reporting system. When it comes to training, only 11 schools have key staff trained in NIMS/ICS procedures.

There is no way to sugarcoat these findings. To put it gently, they are cause for significant concern. To put it bluntly, they are downright scary

That being said, I know the problems found in this study aren't limited to the state of Idaho. I challenge other states to take the bull by the horns and conduct similar studies of their K-12 campuses. It wouldn't surprise me at all if they discover very similar and disturbing protection gaps. Only then will we truly be able to address our school safety and security challenges.

***Below are some of the specific findings of the Idaho state-wide assessment:***

**Access control and visitor management:**

-In 71 of 74 schools that were inspected, unauthorized entrance was achieved through access points other than the designated main entrance. In 66 schools, multiple points of ingress were available.

-The average amount of time an assessor was in the interior of a school before being contacted and asked to report to the office was just under 10 minutes at 9.43 minutes. In 19 cases, the assessment team member was not contacted and self-reported to the office.

-The designated points of entry are monitored to control building access in 37 of 74 sample schools.

-School staff members monitor all entrances and exits during student arrival and departure in 40 of 74 schools.

-Doors required to be open for student passage are monitored in 28 of the 74 study schools.

-40 of the schools in the sample had exit doors equipped with push bar exit devices that are flush to resist chaining.

-Classroom doors can be locked from the inside with hardware meeting fire code in only 29 of the sample schools.

-42 schools have a policy that requires classroom doors are either locked or unlocked; 32 have no policy regarding such.

-Of the 41 schools that had either portables or nonadjacent buildings, 20 have a policy that requires locked or unlocked doors, leaving 21 campuses with no policy.

**Key control:**

-In 31 cases there was no master key control policy.

- In 45 cases keys could not be matched to the person issued the key.
- In 43 cases keys could be duplicated without great difficulty.
- In 65 cases the policy had no provisions for when doors should be re-keyed.

**Video surveillance:**

- In 33 cases the equipment would be considered obsolete.
- In no case would the current installation be considered adequate coverage of the building interior.

**Communications and backup power:**

- In 62 of 74 cases communications were sufficient for daily operations; however, in most cases a power outage renders systems non-operational (includes public address systems and internet protocol-based phone systems).
- The general lack of a comprehensive communications plan at both the school and district levels assure that communications will be a major impediment to effective emergency operations.

**CPR and AEDs:**

- Only 15 schools have a current list of staff trained in CPR and/or AED use.

**Emergency operations plans (EOP):**

- 24 of the 74 schools assessed have an EOP that is multi-hazard.
- 18 schools have an EOP that contains ICS and is NIMS compliant
- 40 schools report integrating local law enforcement in their EOP planning.
- 25 schools include school floor plans, site plans, and utility location.
- 32 EOPs identify an established chain of command and 20 designate an incident command post with alternative location.

**Disciplinary procedures:**

- 49 of the schools assessed have developed systematic problem solving strategies.

**Parent and student involvement in safety planning:**

- 5 Schools include parents and/or students in safety planning and/or policy development.
- Student involvement in building positive climates and participating in extracurricular activities happens in 42 and 36 schools respectively

**Incident reporting:**

-Only 5 of the 74 schools have some type of anonymous reporting system.

**Staff and student training:**

-11 schools have key staff trained in NIMS/ICS procedures.

-19 schools provide annual training in conflict resolution and problem solving

-22 schools train annually for bullying prevention.

-6 buildings have received some level of training in recognizing suspicious packages and items

-29 have received training in recognizing suspicious people and behavior on campus.

-34 schools report that staff has been trained on recognizing student threats in notes, journals, classwork and conversation.

-41 of the school's office staff has been trained in threatening suspicious phone calls/bomb threats.

-29 schools report that students have been specifically trained on issues of sexual harassment and gender respect.

-9 schools report that their students have received specific training on dating violence.

-25 schools report Title IX coordination for students and staff.

-19 schools have trained their substitute staff on emergency operations procedures.

-39 schools have staff members who have been trained to identify and work with potentially dangerous students.

-26 schools have some type of formal mental health threat assessment process.