

Risk Manager

Answers, resources and information to help assess and reduce risk

Assessing and Securing School Buildings By Kyle B. Stewart

The first notion that comes to mind when you think about assessing and securing school buildings is most likely during school hours when students and staff are within your buildings; however, how much thought is given to assessing and securing school buildings during special events outside of the normal school day? Regretfully, due to some recent unfortunate events, school districts across the nation have expended numerous hours evaluating, planning, conducting drills and implementing changes in their protocols to enhance the security of their buildings for the safety of their students and staff members during school hours. However, as the winter and holiday seasons approach which typically coincide with multiple events being scheduled indoors and/or the district facilities being utilized outside of normal school hours; this is an excellent time to review building security protocols during non-school hours and holiday breaks with all district staff members.

Specifically, non-school hours and extended holiday breaks provide an opportunity for school buildings to be subjected to acts of vandalism, break-ins and theft of district and personal property within the school buildings. Although district buildings may be equipped with surveillance monitoring systems and/or patrolled by a local law enforcement agency; the potential for false alarm activations are likely and may place a strain on responding agencies and/or district personnel. Most false alarms are caused by staff members accessing buildings protected by intrusion alarm systems that are not deactivated correctly prior to entry; therefore, the protection of the district facilities can be greatly improved if the number of entries into buildings during non-school hours and extended holiday breaks are kept to a minimum.

Additionally, thought must also be given to securing

access for visitors to non-designated areas within a school building during events outside of normal school hours and/or use of the facilities by an approved outside organization. These events typically may include visitors accessing the district's auditorium for the purpose of attending a school play or performance, multi-purpose rooms for meetings or the gymnasium for tournaments or other athletic events. As a standard best practice, each organization requesting the use of district facilities should have received prior approval through the submission and completion of the district's "Facilities Use and Hold Harmless Agreement" and verification of acceptable certificates of liability insurance coverage.

The specific district protocols for accessing and securing district buildings during non-school hours and extended holiday breaks should be reviewed with all staff members including, but not limited to, the hours staff are permitted to access the buildings, area(s) within the building that are accessible, school district personnel to contact in the event of an emergency and/or identification of an abnormality, how to properly activate/deactivate alarm system(s) and which personnel are capable of activating/deactivating alarm system(s). Several discussion points and best practices are highlighted below that should be reviewed with applicable staff members in an effort to ensure district facilities are secured outside of normal school hours.

All Staff Members

- All classroom windows should be secured, if applicable, at the end of the school day.
- Ensure all interior doors to classrooms are closed and locked (including connecting classroom doors).

- Valuable equipment and devices (i.e., tablets, laptops, portable projectors, etc.) should be locked in cabinets or within locked rooms that are protected by intrusion alarms and/or surveillance monitoring systems.
- All non-essential electronic devices within the classroom should be powered down and unplugged.

Support Staff Members

- The building's HVAC system should be set to the environmental temperature ranges specified per the operating protocol utilized when the building is not occupied to conserve energy.
- Inspect the entire campus before it is secured at the end of the day or before an extended holiday break to ensure all doors and windows are closed and locked.
- Ensure all interior and exterior gates are locked.
- Ensure all perimeter and/or interior lighting that are to remain illuminated is functional and set to the appropriate times, if applicable.
- Double-check to ensure that the alarm system is functional and properly activated.

For additional information or training on best practices and safety management within your school entity, please contact Director of Risk Management Sharon Orr at (866) 401-6600, ext. 7152 or sorr@cmregent.com.