



# Security Audits and Inspections

## Resources

Law enforcement agencies, many State Departments of Education, and the National School Safety Center (below) provide checklists, manuals, technical information, training and consultation related to security issues for schools.

- *Creating Safe Schools, What Principals Can Do* by Marie Somers Hill and Frank W. Hill, Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- The National School Safety Center (NSSC), 4165 Thousand Oaks Blvd., Suite 290, Westlake Village CA 91362, <http://www.ncss1.org>
- *Practical School Security: Basic Guidelines for Safe and Secure Schools* by Kenneth S. Trump. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, Inc.
- *Safe School Design: A Handbook for Educational Leaders- Applying the Principles of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design* by Tod Schneider, Hill Walker and Jeffery Sprague. Eugene, OR: ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management, University of Oregon.
- *Safe schools: A handbook for violence prevention.* By Ronald D. Stephens (1995). Bloomington, IN: National Education Service, 1995.
- *School Crisis: Under Control* video hosted by Edward James Olmos
- *School Safety Check Book* published by the National School Safety Center, 1990.
- *Techniques for Managing a Safe School.* By Beverly Johns and John P. Keenan. Denver: Love Publishing Company.
- DeMary, J., Owens, M. & Ramnarian, A.K. (June, 2000). *School Safety Audit Protocol*. Richmond, VA: Virginia Department of Education.

An overall assessment of the security of each school building may be one important way to reduce crime and violence on school grounds. A security assessment might include a wide variety of ideas to address crime, safety, and security concerns related to schools and school grounds. Some of these security related issues involve the building and property, and others are programmatic or procedural in nature. The measures included within a security audit are intended to determine the potential for security problems or crime and to lead to interventions that would prevent or deter the likelihood of crime or violence.

Similar audits and inspections related to fire safety, accident safety, natural disasters, chemical spills and hazards, or health and hygiene concerns in buildings may also be advisable, and might be incorporated into a comprehensive “safety audit” which includes security issues (Stephens, 1995). These portions of a more comprehensive “safety audit” are beyond the scope of this document. Individual state policies may now require security or safety audits, sometimes as a part of school accreditation (See your state’s policies). Additionally, “emergency planning” for during and after situations related to violence or behavior are addressed on a separate fact sheet.

### What Topics Are Addressed in Security Audits?

Security audits cover a wide range of issues from physical facilities, to policies, programming and prevention plans. Often a checklist of the topics included in security audits are used as a starting tool for these audits, with additions and modifications made for a specific facility. These security checklists are available from school safety organizations (such as the National School Safety Center), and law enforcement agencies and other sources (Stephens, 1995; Trump, 1998). Any one of the specific items on such a checklist may have little direct significance by itself. However, taken together as a comprehensive audit, they may have a significant impact on overall school security, and result in significant crime and violence reduction.

**Audit of Physical Facilities.** Generally the building and grounds of a school facility can be divided into interior and exterior areas. For the exterior, a variety of issues such as building access points, security lighting and cameras, fences and landscaping, traffic flow, etc., might be of importance and would typically be included on a checklist. On the interior of the building similar questions might apply, including access to and locking of all interior doors, sight lines or cameras for monitoring, access to telephones or intercoms, as well as first aid supplies, etc. These are merely illustrative of the many kinds of issues and topics that might be addressed in a comprehensive security audit for each school.

**Audit of Organization and Procedures.** In addition to physical facilities, an audit would also address procedures and operations within a school. This might involve timing of school day start and dismissal in relation to traffic and weather conditions, efforts to improve traffic flow within a building, procedures for handling lunch and large group assemblies, etc. Are there procedures in place for locker searches for drugs, weapons or contraband? Are procedures in place for evacuations and lock downs of school building? Are staff clear about when and how to call for emergency assistance? Is a sufficient number of staff trained in CPR and first aid and know where to access these supplies? Are there ways that the organization of staff and students can be modified to increase supervision to reduce crime and related problems?

**Other Issues.** In addition, a security audit might discuss the needs for alarm transmitters, cameras, metal detectors, random drug searches, and identification badges (Quarles, 1993), or other policies such as restricted building access, uniforms or dress codes, the need for school resource or security officers, crime watch groups, crime reporting hotlines and many other security related issues.

## What Do We Know about Security Audits and Inspections?

Although there has been little direct research regarding the value of security audits they have strong support from the law enforcement community as useful crime prevention tools. No direct research regarding school security audits specifically was found, but generally studies support the overall role of environmental planning and modification in preventing crime (Schneider, 2001), as well as for many specific crime prevention ideas related to lighting, architectural barriers, etc. (Green, 1999). Both common sense and this research suggest the value of these security assessments and inspections.

One study suggests that of all secondary school assaults and robberies, 32% occurred between class periods and 26% occurred during lunch, and that violence is more likely to occur in those spaces where it is difficult to determine who claims responsibility, such as stairwells, hallways, and elevators (Astor, Meyer, & Behr, 1999). Buildings designed to minimize these “un-owned” spaces have been found to decrease the amount of crime. Placing an adult or a video camera in these locations did not, by themselves, reduce crime. Monitoring, whether completed by a hall monitor, security guard, or metal detector, was only as effective as the people responsible for the monitoring.

Recognizing that problem behaviors often occur in transition areas such as hallways and cafeterias, researchers in another study trained teachers in an elementary school in active supervision (Colvin, Sugai, Good, & Lee, 1997). During supervision, teachers actively promoted rule-following through specific acts such as looking around, moving around, escorting students, and interacting with students. Teachers were also taught to inform students of what appropriate behaviors would be expected of them when transitioning. These techniques significantly reduced problem behaviors during school entry, cafeteria, and school exit transitions.

### Making Security Audits and Inspections Work

In implementing security audits there may be a variety of questions about how to make them effective.

#### Who Can Conduct Security Audits or Inspections?

While school officials might conduct a security inspection, a community based committee of local volunteer citizens, parents, school officials, building administrators, and students might lead to better results. The community volunteers might include a local architect, a local police officer, as well as security consultants recruited for their expertise, and other volunteers. Such teams bring much expertise, along with differing perspectives.

Once formed, these teams would carefully inspect each building inside and out, day and night to note any potential security issues that could be addressed or corrected.

**When Should These Audits Occur?** Since buildings and the uses of these buildings may frequently change, a

comprehensive audit, which might include multiple inspections, should occur at least once per year, and possibly more often if needed based on crime data. At least some of these inspections should be at night after all activity at the building has ended to permit a chance to review security for potential theft, vandalism, and related crimes. Other inspection should also occur at various times during the school day while school or related activities such as bus loading are occurring to assess security issues during those occasions.

**Implementing Security Audit Recommendations?** As an audit is conducted, careful notes should be made of all suggestions for improvements in physical facilities or procedures. The committee should also examine data related to crime or inappropriate behavior in that school, and make recommendations in light of the constraints and mission of the school. It can then discuss and prioritize recommendations as a result of the inspection, and develop a written report of final recommendations. These recommendations should be provided to the school administration and school board for action related to implementation, and would need to be assessed in light of the overall goals, needs, and resources of the school system. Sometimes parent or community organizations, grants or other sources can provide funds for some modifications in school facilities or procedures based on the audit. Without the resources or the will to implement recommendations growing out of a security audits, the audit itself will have little impact on security in that school.

### Conclusion

A comprehensive security audit with implementation of resulting recommendations is an important overall element in the prevention of inappropriate behavior, crime, and violence within the school setting.

*Reece L. Peterson & Allison Strassell, June, 2002*

### References

- Astor, R.A., Meyer, H.A., & Behr, W.J. (1999). Unowned places and times: Maps and interviews about violence in high schools. *American Educational Research Journal*, 36(1), pp. 3-42.
- Colvin, G., Sugai, G., Good, R.H. III, & Lee, Y.Y. (1997). Using active supervision and pre-correction to improve transition behaviors in an elementary school. *School Psychology Quarterly*, 12(4), pp. 344-363.
- Green, M. (1999). *The Appropriate and Effective Use of Security Technologies in U.S. Schools and Law Enforcement Agencies*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice.
- Quarles, C. (1993). *Staying Safe at School*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Schneider, T. (February 2001). *Newer technologies for school security (ERIC Digest 145)*. Eugene, OR: ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management, University of Oregon.
- Stephens, R.D. (1995). *Safe schools: A handbook for violence prevention*. Bloomington, IN: National Education Service, 1995.
- Trump, K.S. (1998). *Practical school security: Basic guidelines for safe and secure schools*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, Inc.

## About the Safe and Responsive Schools Project

The Safe and Responsive Schools Project, funded by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, is dedicated to developing prevention-based approaches to school safety, discipline reform and behavior improvement in schools.

Websites: <http://www.indiana.edu/~safeschl/> or <http://www.unl.edu/srs/> Or Contact:

Russell Skiba, Indiana Education Policy Ctr., 170 Smith Ctr., 2805 E. 10<sup>th</sup> Street, Bloomington, IN 47408; 812-855-1240; [skiba@indiana.edu](mailto:skiba@indiana.edu), or

Reece L. Peterson, 202A Barkley Center, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Lincoln, NE 68583-0732; 402-472-5480; [rpeterson1@unl.edu](mailto:rpeterson1@unl.edu) ©2003 Skiba & Peterson