

Complex decision making in the K12 market

An expert roundtable discussion

Upgrading security can be an incredibly difficult process. In addition to procuring funds in the age of continual budget cuts, wading through a veritable sea of security options, and soliciting input from the various stakeholders who will be directly impacted by the new system, there is also the challenge of running the gauntlet of decision makers. Each group has different priorities and concerns that must be addressed and resolved before a solution can be implemented. For many K-12 schools, this arduous process can be a barrier to implementing much-needed security upgrades.

But there are ways to streamline the process and make the experience one that is empowering and solution-focused, rather than contentious and overwhelming. Allegion recently reached out to several experts in the field of K-12 school security for their tips on how to successfully navigate the approval process and find a security solution that is affordable, sustainable and effective.

Panel Participants:

Randy Braverman has over 26 years' experience in managing security operations in a variety of roles including Security Consultant, Director of Security and Campus Safety, and law enforcement officer. He has overseen full-scale emergency crisis exercises and coordinated the efforts of local, county, and state authorities, military forces, hospitals, and school personnel within these exercises. An Emergency Preparedness Specialist, Randy conducts vulnerability assessments using the ALPHA™ vulnerability assessment methodology and provides technical assistance for emergency and crisis plans for school districts, municipalities, and corporations. He is also an instructor for the Illinois Law Enforcement Training and Standards Board Executive Institute: Illinois School and Campus Training Program.

Lori Greene, DAHC/CDC, CCPR, FDAI, FDHI is the Manager of Codes and Resources for Allegion. She has been involved in the door and hardware industry since 1986 and is considered to be one of the foremost authorities on building, fire and life safety codes related to door openings, and their implications on security. Lori also serves as a member of the BHMA Codes & Government Affairs Committee.

Paul Timm, PSP is an Associate and Vice President of Physical Security Services for Facility Engineering Associates. Paul is a board-certified Physical Security Professional (PSP), the author of *School Security: How to Build and Strengthen a School Safety Program*, and a nationally acclaimed expert in school security.

Mark Williams Vice Chair of The Partner Alliance for Safer Schools (PASS). He has been involved in the architectural openings industry since the mid-1980s, working as a code instructor with local authorities and with architects and school staff to discuss the safety and security of education facilities. At the time of this panel, Mark served as the senior architectural consultant at Allegion.

In the grand scheme of school security, where does access control rank in terms of importance?

Randy Braverman: I agree, it's definitely high. For me, maintaining a safe learning environment involves protecting students and staff from outside threats. This begins with restricting access into the building. The school must control who is allowed into a facility and who is not. Schools must have one access point into the building and someone should be watching anyone who enters from that point. Also, during an emergency, if you do not know who is in the building, then you will have issues with accountability.

Lori Greene: I also think access control is an important part of security, especially because striking the appropriate balance between security, life safety and convenience is such a challenge. If door openings are secured in a way that results in doors that are not easily accessible and convenient to use, building occupants will find ways to override or bypass them, creating security vulnerabilities.

Mark Williams: Access control is a critical piece of layered security and the building perimeter. However, it's important to remember that controlling the building perimeter involves more than just looking at the front door. With the school buildings, that level of perimeter security varies depending on their perception of what access control is. Most schools will get on board with a secure vestibule at the primary entrance of the school. There will be a card reader there and usually an intercom system to communicate with the office. But when we begin to look at the secondary and tertiary entrances that exist primarily for egress purposes, the attention to security tends to fall off in many cases.



In what kinds of school emergencies has access control played a role?

Paul Timm: I would say its absence or existence plays a role in almost all school emergencies. Without it, people can get access and do serious damage. As Robert mentioned, in situations like Rancho Tehama, it's only because of access control that the school was able to initiate a lockdown very quickly and prevent the shooter from gaining access and inflicting additional casualties at the school.

What are some of the biggest security vulnerabilities most schools face?

Randy Braverman: I think open and unrestricted access to buildings plays a big role in creating security vulnerabilities. Additionally, many schools have untrained staff who don't know how to properly handle emergencies or even maintain daily safety measures. The same is true for students who have not executed proper drills to prepare for emergency situations. A lack of preparedness and training creates vulnerabilities in security.

Lori Greene: I agree - schools definitely need to have training programs and regular drills for both staff and students to ensure they know what to do in the event of an emergency. The other big issues that come to my mind are school policies that do not mandate locked exterior doors, the inability of teachers to lock their classroom doors, glass without enough impact-resistance to slow an intruder, and the amount of time and effort necessary to completely lock down a facility. If the doors are required to be locked manually, building occupants may be unprotected for a longer period of time and the people responsible for locking the doors face greater risk because they may be exposed to the assailant.

Mark Williams: I would also echo what Randy said about a lack of training and awareness for staff and students. That leads to the perception that, "It can't happen here," which leads to doors being propped open, not monitored, and latch bolts being taped in a retracted position.

What other concerns do you have about exterior doors? What other measures can be added to help with access control?

Randy Braverman: I agree that there ought to be formalized standards or guidelines in place for schools to follow. I think the most common issue I see with exterior doors is that people frequently prop them open or go out of doors without any kind of oversight. I would suggest schools install a door alarm, so if the door is opened or propped open, an alert is sent to designated staff, and they can immediately respond.

Lori Greene: I feel that, in addition to the issues Robert and Randy raised - implementing standards and monitoring perimeter doors - impact-resistant glazing is really key. It can help delay an intruder who is attempting to gain access by breaking the glass and reaching through to turn a lever or push on the touchpad of the panic hardware. There are films that can be used to retrofit existing glazing and increase the impact-resistance and the time to breach the glass.



What are some of the most common barriers to implementing new security solutions in K-12 facilities?

Lori Greene: I would say the biggest barrier by far is cost, but complexity is also a barrier. This is why you see the growing popularity of inexpensive “quick fix” products that can simply be ordered online and installed by building department employees. Many of these products do not comply with the code requirements for egress, are not listed for use on fire doors, and do not meet the accessibility standards, but those problems are often overlooked in an effort to solve the security problem quickly and inexpensively.

Paul Timm: The first one that comes to my mind is probably denial. The idea that, “We’ve never had a problem

so we don’t need to change anything” is pretty common. Cost is obviously another, but there’s also the difficulty involved in building consensus. Schools will have some people who think we have to improve access control while others want to focus on installing video surveillance cameras. When we can’t agree, the right issues don’t get addressed.

Mark Williams: I agree, there are several. For me, one of the first is the lack of a roadmap for schools to follow. As Robert mentioned, schools are experts in providing education, but they are not experts in school security and systems. Next is the lack of standards that can be referenced by model building codes, similar to NFPA 80 and the Americans with Disabilities Act. There are a plethora of options and most school districts lack the expertise to understand what they need and what a good system looks like. And lastly, the budgeting process in new construction results in budgets being put together ahead of specifications. Many times, by the time we get involved, we are challenged by what was and was not budgeted.

What stakeholder groups would typically be involved in the safety and security decision making process?

Randy Braverman: IT should also definitely be involved as well as the director of campus safety, the business department, police and first responders, administrators, staff and parents. Setting up tip lines and soliciting input from students can also be very helpful.

Lori Greene: I find that it varies from one school to the next. In some schools, the PTA/PTO has raised money to pay for classroom barricade devices – often without consulting the local fire marshal. School administrators are usually involved in response to pressure from parents and teachers. In some districts, these decisions are made district-wide by the department responsible for the city/town buildings. I always recommend that the local fire marshal and law enforcement officials should be involved as they will be the first responders in an emergency situation. Security professionals can also assist with navigating the available products to meet the needs of the facility.

Mark Williams: The Partner Alliance for Safer Schools (PASS) recommends a cross functional team consisting of: security director (school), school administrator, local law enforcement, the Authority Having Jurisdiction (AHJ), IT (school), an integrator and an Architectural Hardware Consultant (AHC).

What sort of knowledge and expertise would be necessary to make the right decisions?

Lori Greene: I think it's vital for decision makers to have an understanding of best practices, available products, and the codes that apply to doors and hardware.

Paul Timm: I agree, which is why I think hardware manufacturers have a level of expertise that is key. They are the real code experts and that is essential. Staff members who have facilities knowledge are also helpful. I would also suggest the director of buildings and grounds - that person has a real wealth of knowledge of what could be needed. Legitimate security consultants could also be very helpful.

What is the best way to get approval/buy in from administrators?

Randy Braverman: I think most administrators understand the importance of safety measures, and they hear the demands of parents and the public to make safety a priority. If they don't, they need to be better educated about the best practices that can be easily implemented to limit vulnerabilities. Many of these measures are low cost, yet high impact. And when districts are investing money into safety products, it is imperative that administrators be given a first-hand demonstration of the product to see how it operates, how it can improve the school facility, and how it can be implemented most effectively. Testimony of successful strategies in neighboring schools and districts can also help direct administrators in their decision-making.

Paul Timm: I think education is number one. If they aren't informed about the pros and cons, vulnerabilities and solutions, that's a big problem. Collaboration is also important - bringing the decision to a broad base of decision makers instead of just one group. Also, accountability. One person can be afraid to make a decision, but a group can make that call and give support.

How do school decision makers look to learn about new security solutions (peers, product sampling/trial basis, etc...)?

Paul Timm: It seems like if a product has endorsements from another district or superintendent, they are much more inclined to follow suit. People want facts and solid information to make decisions. They want to see data and real world results. Experience is also important. If we piloted a product in one building, it offers a lot of information that can be used to support its installation throughout a district.

What is the best practice approach to garner as much buy in as possible given the various decision makers and their potential agendas?

Paul Timm: I find that following the formula of collaboration plus consensus is vital. You get a broad base of decision makers together and find consensus - agree on the steps we're going to take. When we start making decisions in silos, we really run the risk of getting into trouble.

Mark Williams: As I mentioned earlier, I think we also need to adopt standards (like PASS Guidelines) that the model codes reference, consistent with organizations like the NFPA and ADA guidelines, so schools have a roadmap to follow and don't have to reinvent the wheel each time a school is built or renovated.

What third party experts are helpful to the process and, if so, what qualifications should administrators look for?

Lori Greene: There are quite a few consultants out there and while some may have a great reputation overall, many will only be familiar with one aspect of school security. For example, if the person has a law enforcement background, he or she may be less familiar with the life-safety requirements. A code official will likely understand what is required for egress, fire protection, and accessibility, but may not be aware of all of the available products or be able to recommend the best solution for the facility. It's important to work with someone who has a solid grasp of the big picture when it comes to school security.

Paul Timm: I agree, a good security consultant with solid credentials - a Certified Protection Professional (CPP), or a Physical Security Professional (PSP) - is key. There are a lot of school security consultants who do not have credentials and that makes me nervous. You might get a really good uncredentialed consultant, but I think board-certified credentials are vital from an accountability standpoint.

Mark Williams: Certainly a security consultant with a solid track record of specifying and implementing appropriate systems based on the individual needs and demographics of a given facility is important. I would also suggest getting input from integrators, door hardware consultants with code experience and architects with K-12 experience in designing secure schools.

About Allegion

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012081, Rev. 5/19
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