

School Security Best Practices for Openings

The following provides a combined overview of industry-recommended best practices for safety and security of openings, doors and hardware as provided by security organization, federal reports and past incident reports.

Note, this document does not contain quotes from each of these reports, but rather a summary of the common best-practice suggestions. A summary of the resources are listed at the end of this document.

Layers of Protection

Layered security has long been identified as a recommended practice for securing all types of buildings. This approach provides multiple security controls from the outside property line to the building perimeter to the classroom to help protect students and staff.

(PASS page 6, FED page 122)





District Considerations

- For the highest level of security, use electronic access control. (MSD page 349, PASS page 35)
Note, non-patented metal keys and low frequency/proximity cards can be easily duplicated.
- Classroom doors and student-occupied spaces should be closed and locked when classes are in session or rooms are otherwise occupied. (MSD page 85 and 346, PASS page 66)
- Key management
 - Use high-security patented, restricted metal keys and cylinders to improve access control. (Sandy Hook page 54, PASS page 60)
 - Establish policies and procedures to govern, track and revoke the distribution of keys and other access credentials as necessary. (PASS page 57)
 - Teachers, substitutes and other relevant staff should be trained on the proper procedures to lock and unlock primary and secondary doors as necessary throughout the day. (PASS page 58)
 - Provide keys/cards to on-duty law enforcement (or have a lock box) so they can gain entry during an emergency. (MSD page 346, PASS page 35)
 - Keys or credentials should always be in the possession of teachers and staff. (MSD page 85)
- Use a panic/duress alarm or call button at an administrative/security desk. (Sandy Hook page 52)
- Security plans
 - Have a written, unambiguous emergency plan or response policy. (MSD page 85)
 - Security plans should be coordinated with local law enforcement and community emergency responders. (PASS page 8)
 - Visitor management processes, including ID checks and temporary badging, are recommended for all building visitors. (Sandy Hook page 52, PASS checklist)
- Perimeter doors should be staffed when open for student arrival and dismissal. (MSD page 345, PASS page 57)



Building Perimeter: Main Entrance

- Guide visitors to a single control point for entry. (Sandy Hook page 51 CPTED, PASS page 58)
- Use secured vestibules with forced entry resistant doors and glazing. (Sandy Hook page 52, PASS page 58)
- Main entrance assembly (glazing, frame and door) should be forced entry resistant. (Sandy Hook page 51, MSD page 348, PASS page 58)
- Control visitor access through electronic surveillance with intercom audio/video and remote lock at the visitor entrance. (Sandy Hook page 52, MSD page 345, PASS page 59)
- Secure main entrance doors from a central location, such as the central administrative office and/or the school security office. (Sandy Hook page 51)



Building Perimeter: Perimeter Openings

- Use of perimeter doors
 - Access to school facilities should be kept to a limited number of controlled entrances. (Sandy Hook page 48, FED page 122, PASS page 57)
 - Restrict visitor access during normal school hours. For entrances that must be utilized during the school day, use an electronic access control system to ensure access by only authorized personnel. (Sandy Hook page 52, FED page 122, PASS page 57)
- Securing perimeter doors
 - Exterior doors should always be closed, latched and locked when students are in classrooms. (Robb page 71, PASS page 57)
 - All exterior doors should be equipped with hardware capable of implementing a full perimeter lockdown by manual or electronic means. (Sandy Hook page 53)
 - All exterior doors must be easy to lock and allow for quick release in the event of an emergency. (Sandy Hook page 53)
 - All exterior doors must meet fire, life safety and local building codes, as well as ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) requirements. (PASS page 60)
 - Use sensors that alert administration offices when exterior doors at primary and secondary points of entry are left open. (Sandy Hook page 53, MSD page 347, PASS page 60)
 - Provide closers on exterior doors so they automatically return to a closed, latched and locked position. (Sandy Hook page 53, MSD page 346)
 - Number all exterior doors that allow access to the interior of the school in sequential order in a clockwise manner starting with the main entrance. (Sandy Hook page 53)
 - Use forced entry resistant, burglar resistant and/or shatter resistant doors, windows, framing and anchoring systems. (Sandy Hook page 54, FED 123, PASS page 58)



Interior Layer: Classrooms

- Recommendations for classroom locks
 - Easy to lock and allow for quick release and free egress in the event of an emergency. (Sandy Hook, page 56, PASS page 72)
 - Lockable from inside the room by key, push-button or thumb-turn. (Sandy Hook page 56, MSD page 346, CPTED, FED page 124, PASS page 72)
 - Locks on classroom doors should be able to open from outside of the room with key, credential or other approved means to provide access for administration or law enforcement in case of emergency. (FED page 124, PASS page 72, model codes including IFC, IBC, and NFPA)
 - Comply with fire, life safety and ADA codes and requirements. (Sandy Hook page 57, FED page 124, PASS page 72)
 - Use ANSI/BHMA Grade 1 for all door hardware, locks and thresholds. (Sandy Hook page 56)
 - Locks should have visual indicators so occupants of the room can see the status of the door (locked or unlocked). (PASS page 72)
 - All doors must close and latch properly. (Robb page 70)
 - Do not use magnets or other devices to keep doors unlocked for convenience. (Robb page 71, FED page 124, PASS page 72)



Model codes include:

International Building Code (IBC), 2018 and subsequent editions.

International Fire Code (IFC), 2018 and subsequent editions.

NFPA 101 — Life Safety Code, 2018 and subsequent editions.



Interior Layer: Classrooms (continued)

- Other recommendations
 - Use door closers on classrooms so doors automatically return to a closed, latched and locked position. (Sandy Hook page 57, MSD page 346)
 - For classrooms that have exterior windows, post the room number in the upper right-hand corner (of the first and last window) so that it can be identified by emergency responders from the outside. (Sandy Hook page 54, MSD page 345, FED page 124)
 - Classrooms with windows should have the ability to conceal or obstruct window views, so an assailant can't see in. (Sandy Hook page 57, MSD page 346, FED page 124, PASS page 67)
 - Classroom windows and doors with sidelites should have glazing to be penetration/forced entry resistant. (Sandy Hook page 57, FED page 124, PASS page 67)
 - Identify interior hard corners/safe havens in all rooms, including assembly areas, blocks of classrooms and offices. (Sandy Hook page 55, MSD page 85, CPTED, FED page 124, PASS page 66)
 - Classrooms should have two-way communication with the administrative office. (Sandy Hook page 56, MSD page 347, PASS page 69)
 - Place door windows/sidelites at a sufficient distance from interior locking mechanisms. (Sandy Hook page 57, MSD page 348)



Interior Layer: Other Recommendations

- Shared space should have separate, secure and controllable entrances. (Sandy Hook page 58)
- The design of shared spaces should prevent unauthorized access to the rest of the school. (Sandy Hook page 58)
- Use electronic access control for MDF (Main Distribution Frame) and IDF (Independent Distribution Frame) rooms that house and protect district network infrastructure. (PASS page 35)
- Compartmentalize the building with interior cross-corridor doors to confine an event or emergency to a limited area of the building. (Sandy Hook page 55, PASS page 68)
- Use electronic access control to restrict access to building operations systems, mechanical, gas meter/regulator and hazardous materials rooms. (Sandy Hook page 58-59)

References



CPTED Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED)

The goal of applied CPTED principles is to prevent crime by designing a physical environment that positively influences human behavior. The theory is based on five principles: natural access control, natural surveillance, territoriality, activity support, and maintenance.

[Learn more about CPTED](#)



FED Final Report of the Federal Commission on School Safety

Published on December 18, 2018, this report was developed by a joint commission for the President of the United States. Members of the Commission included Secretary Betsy DeVos of the U.S. Department of Education (“ED”), Acting Attorney General Matthew Whitaker of the U.S. Department of Justice (“DOJ”) (succeeding former Attorney General Jeff Sessions), Secretary Alex Azar II of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (“HHS”), and Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (“DHS”).

This report provided a review of school safety practices and recommendations.

[Read this report](#)



MSD Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School Public Safety Commission

Published January 2, 2019, this is the initial report of findings and recommendations presented to the Governor, Speaker of the House of Representatives and Senate President.

[Read this report](#)



PASS (Partner Alliance for Safer Schools)

Established in 2014, the Partner Alliance for Safer Schools (PASS) brings together expertise from the education, public safety and industry communities to develop and support a coordinated approach to making effective use of proven security practices specific to K-12 environments, and informed decisions on security investments. This report references the 6th edition guidelines and checklist published in March 2023.

[Learn more about PASS](#) | [Get PASS guidelines and checklist](#)



ROB Investigate Committee on the Robb Elementary Shooting: Interim Report 2022

Published July 17, 2022, this report by the Texas House of Representatives provides a factual accounting of the events at Robb Elementary school and overview of the primary breakdowns in security.

[Read this report](#)



SANDY HOOK Final Report of the Sandy Hook Advisory Commission

Published in March of 2015, this report details the event at Sandy Hook Elementary School and provides recommendations on school security.

[Read this report](#)

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