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## **School Safety for Security Teams**

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School Safety for Security Teams

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Abstract

This paper is an introduction to school safety intended on helping a new school security team member jump start their training. It includes some data and situations a security member may come across in the year. It is hoped that by reading this, the new member will be able to immediately begin their duties and have a strong foundation on the people, emergency situations and tasks that are assigned to the position.

*Keywords:* School security; Emergency procedures; School staff; School violence history.

### **School Safety for Security Teams**

Over the past 25 years when we talk about school safety, school shootings are foremost in our mind. Columbine, Parkland, and now Uvalde are the driving force beyond this. These incidents were horrific, but school safety is so much more. In the “Report on Indicators of School Crime and Safety:2021” (U.S. Department of Education, 2021) they list 23 key indicators that encompass school safety. As a security professional, you may encounter every one of these situations. You are not expected to be an expert on all the indicators but should be familiar with them to understand what to look for. This document will help guide you through some of the most prevalent ones to jump start your training and ease you into your new position. I would love to address every issue that can be seen in a middle school but that would turn this paper into a book. I will focus on three areas; a rare situation, a common situation, and a situation no one hopes to come across. Because it is in the news, we will start with school shootings.

School shootings get a massive amount of coverage, and they should but they are rare. In the year 2020 to 2022, there were 93 school shootings that resulted in injury or death. (U.S. Department of Education, 2021) That is a very high number but when the stats are reported, they fail to tell the whole story. People miss looking at what the definition of a school shooting is. Most publications define a school shooting as any incident that occurs on school property and involves a gun. This means that if someone pulls out a gun on school property and does not fire, a gun fires off property and hits a school, or if an incident involving a gun occurs on school property even if school is not in session. This does not lessen the impact of the incident, but the numbers are exaggerated when looking at student involvement. The question is how can we mitigate the possibility of school shootings?

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If we are to make schools completely safe from gun violence, we would need to enact measures that are equal to a prison. High fences, metal detectors and searching everyone who enters the building. This would work but it would not foster a very friendly learning environment. So, the question is what we can do to avoid being a target to an active shooter. The military uses methods that make the enemy avoid contact with a patrol and we can use some of these methods in a school environment. In Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom, the military found that there is one way to avoid being ambushed. If an area looks ready and is vigilant to attacks, people avoid going through with the attack. Schools are already taking a step forward in this. Single point access, School Resource Officers (SRO) and full-time security hardens the schools. Our actions also can help. High visibility of our patrols also will make those who want to do us harm less likely to go forward with their plans. Statistically speaking, you will never encounter an active shooter, but the second area of focus will be the one you will see regularly. School disciplinary violations will encompass most of your time.

Middle school is one of the most difficult times for the students. The school schedule is different, multiple schools are combining into one, puberty is in full force and finally relationships between two kids are beginning to form. This can be a stressful time for the students. In the Nampa School District, we track all discipline actions to track trends and see where resources are needed most. The main area of focus has been bullying. 22.2 percent of the students in schools have reported being bullied and most of that is cyberbullying (U.S. Department of Education, 2021). The Nampa School District takes these reports seriously and the punishments for these can be some of the strictest. For a student to learn, they must feel safe, but bullying is not the most prevalent disruption to learning. The main reason is class disruption.

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Classroom disruption is only second to bullying when talking about school issues. In the 2009-2010 school year 8.6 percent of all reported incidents were due to classroom disruption. In the 2019-2020 school year that jumped to 15.3 percent (U.S. Department of Education, 2021). This includes everything from general disruption to acts of violence against teachers. To lessen the impact, the Nampa School District does not allow electronic devices during school hours. This lessens the disruptions and allows more focus on the classroom assignments. Even in passing and during lunch, these devices are not allowed. In the past they have been used for bullying, coordinated disruptions, and calls for violence. I have noticed students getting on their phones to message other students so they can meet in a bathroom to vape. Consistent enforcement of the rule helps because students know what is expected and eventually, they will lose their device. To get them back, repeated violators need to have their parents come to school to pick them up. We also track specific classes that have a history of disruptions, and a security team member will join the class to help maintain order. There are some disruptions that are caused by outside influences. These influences cause emotional issues that can overwhelm the student and others can be called in to help.

School counselors are vital to the mental health of a school. When we find a student that is constantly disruptive, a counselor can be called in to talk with the student. These students do not respond to discipline and need additional assistance. Some schools even have a psychologist that is in the school part time to assist even further. A school cannot maintain an acceptable level of discipline without taking mental health into account. It is unfortunate every year there is a student that will attempt or successfully take their life. The counseling staff is there to help only if the rest of the staff is watching for the signs.

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The Jason Foundation (The Jason Foundation, 2022) is a great resource for information on middle school suicide. Nationwide, suicide is the number two cause of death for middle schoolers and the numbers are going up (U.S. Department of Education, 2021). Security team members see the largest variety of students outside of the classroom and need to watch for signs. Security needs to make a point to talk to students that are sitting alone or withdrawn. Teachers need to report students that are not doing schoolwork at the level that have been. We need to also remember that there are times when no signs are shown. There have been students that take their life and looking back, no one saw it coming. These suicides are the hardest to recover from because even though no one saw it coming, there will be a feeling that something was missed. This is where formalized training comes into play.

As stated before, when a person accepts a position as a security member, there is no formal training involved. You are given physical tools but the remainder is up to the employee to learn. There are often times where you feel helpless because you do not know what to do and you understand that you are a major part in the development of young students. When security is involved, you are making decisions at the most vital part of their life. Young men and women are rebelling, and you are responsible for acting in a way to change their behavior. If you act too harshly, you may be acting in a manner that simulates their home life. Acting too mildly allows the student to think that their behavior is acceptable. There is a gray area that needs to be figured out and learning, in a formal setting, allows for better preparation in handling these matters. There is training available, but the cost is up to the employee. National School Safety and Security Services (National School Safety and Security Services, 2014) has a great program but in order to attend, the employee must pay all the fees. If a school district is serious about school safety, they need to budget the training of all security specialists that want the training and allow

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the trained specialists to train others. This would be the beginning of formalized training in school security.

This document is not a complete list of everything you will come across in a normal school year. The intent is to give you an idea of what to expect and allow you to better prepare for the year. School security is not an exact science as it is a job of reaction. Security reacts to issues as they come up and it is hoped that the correct methods are used to handle each problem. The thing to remember is that we are human and will make mistakes. The mistakes we make are not the end as we can use these to build relationships. I have often apologized for my mistakes, and it opened a window to build a stronger relationship. Students, at this age, are looking for consistency and some are looking for the structure they do not get at home. Security is not easy as we have two jobs. First prevent harm to the staff and students and manage the situation after a disruption has occurred. The remainder of this document is designed to familiarize yourself with the staff, terms used and the duties the security job entails. This position is a very rewarding one and is one that can be underused if you do not strive to learn.



### **Important Terms**

To communicate properly in the event of an emergency, terms have been standardized. This way when an emergency comes about, local police will be using the same language as school faculty. This section will include terms you will be using as well as law enforcement so if you hear something, you will know what to do. When I first started working for the school, actual emergencies and emergency drills were difficult for me because I did not understand what was happening. Understanding these terms are vital to the safe operation of a school.

- An active shooter is a situation where a person, with a weapon, is actively involved in violence in the area. The person may be outside the school, in another business committing the violent act. In this case, the school will activate emergency procedures. The intent of an active shooter is to injure or kill as many people as possible. There is usually no pattern to their actions as they go into the situation wanting to kill a specific person but will engage targets of opportunity.
- A behavior contract is a contract between the school, the parent, and the student. It sets up requirements of behavior for the student to avoid further discipline actions. This is established by the dean of students.
- Breach is the term used by law enforcement teams to indicate they will be entering a building or room. They will call “breach” on the radio to notify all teams what is happening. This command can go along with gunfire so be ready for this.
- Leakage is the initial red flag that happens before a school incident. It is when someone plans, boasts online and purchases items to cause harm within a school.

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With the advent of social media, leakage usually happens in this environment. At school, it will come through writings, drawings and statements made to other students.

- Lockdown is a safety procedure used during an emergency usually involving an active shooter. This is the most talked about situation involving school incidents. When the alarm sounds, everyone in the halls enters a classroom and the room is locked.
- Hall Freeze is just like the lockdown. The difference is that even though the halls are cleared, the classes continue as planned and staff are allowed in the halls. This is usually called for a medical emergency.
- An intruder is any person that enters the building, and their intentions are not known. This may be someone who has proper access to the school, but their identity is not known.
- A threat is an intruder or other person who plans on doing harm to the school or its occupants. This person poses an immediate danger and will result in a lockdown.

### **Where I fit**

Who do I answer to and who do I ask for help is something often asked in a new position? At a school there is no difference. This section will help navigate the school hierarchy and help prevent confusion.

- The school principal is the chief administrator of a school. His/her job is to make sure the school is operating within the guidelines set forth by the Idaho Board of Education and the Nampa School District. In the daily performance of your

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duties, you will need to ask little from the principal. The principal is only used by security when there are no other options available.

- The vice principal is the person who makes sure the school runs smoothly. You will go to him/her if you need to purchase items or if there is a security concern. You will interact with the vice principal often while performing your daily duties. If you are not sure who to talk to about a school issue, he/she is your main contact. The vice principal will also conduct all emergency drills and function as principal when the school principal is not in the school.
- The dean of students is the person you directly report to. The dean is responsible for the discipline of the school. If you are asked to remove a student from a class or if you see a student violating the rules, you will bring the student to the dean. More experienced security members may assign minor discipline consequences, but this is only with guidance of the dean. Remember the dean is responsible for discipline so his/her decisions override your actions. Do not take it personally because this override is usually due to behavior contracts or other agreements between the dean and the student.
- Teachers are one of your “customers”; they are responsible for the education of the students. If you have any issues with teachers, you will bring these issues up with the vice principal.
- The school resource officer (SRO) is a member of the Nampa Police Department and will be in uniform. He is there to provide security as well as provide guidance. His/her expertise is vital to school security and if an emergency occurs, you **MUST** follow the instructions from the SRO.

- Schools are assigned a nurse to monitor the wellbeing of everyone in the school.

If there is any type of injury, either send the student to the nurse or if needed call the nurse to your location.

### **Procedures and Duties**

When I first started working for the Nampa School District, I was not sure how to do my job. If there was an emergency in the first few months of school, I may have done more harm than good. This section will help a security member obtain a basic understanding of what to do if a situation arises that needs immediate attention.

- There are two situations in which a fire alarm will sound. First is if there is a fire and second if there is a fire drill. Once the alarm has sounded, your actions will be the same on both occasions. For a drill, you will be notified weeks in advance. Before the drill, you will meet in the office to make sure all areas are covered. If there are no changes to personnel, your assigned task will remain unchanged. For security, you will be assigned a hall in which you check EVERY classroom to make sure it is empty. Once the room is cleared, you will close the door. Once your area is clear, you will leave the school and leave the building to assemble behind the school. The school holds a drill every month school is in session.
- If there is a medical emergency, the administrators will call a hall freeze. The teachers will check the halls to make sure they are cleared and then close the classroom door. Your job will be to make sure ALL the halls are free of students. If a student does need to be in the hall for some reason, they will be escorted. The main reason is to make sure that emergency personnel can move around the building and provide a level of privacy for the student or faculty member.

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- A lockdown is the harshest and most secure activity. A lockdown is called if there is an immediate threat to the school and its occupants. The most widely talked about reason is in the case of a school shooting. During a lockdown, ALL persons in the school will enter a classroom or office. Doors will be locked; lights will be turned off and students and teachers will hide out of sight of the halls. The security team will clear the hall they are in and then hide themselves. It is reasonable to feel that you need to stop the shooter, but this is not a good decision. The security team is not trained or equipped to eliminate the threat and will most likely do more harm than good. If we fail to stop the intruder, we will be giving them our keys to all the rooms, a radio that can relay information from the inside. Because we are not in uniform, we would cause confusion when law enforcement teams breach the building. It is better for us to act as a comfort to students and a relay from a hidden position. We should only act when directed to do so by law enforcement. The school is required to perform two drills a school year and a hall freeze can act as one of these. When a drill is performed, you will be paired with a law enforcement officer and help verify if the teachers performed their duties correctly.

### **Daily Duties**

- When students arrive at school, you will be assigned one of two tasks. The first will be monitoring the orderly conduct of students in the common area while they eat breakfast. The second will be to monitor the gym where students gather before being dismissed to class. All students begin their day in the commons then at 7:10 migrate to the gym. While in the gym, students are to remain seated in the bleachers. Teachers will be assigned to monitor the hall and assist you in the commons and gym area. You will be the one releasing the students at a predetermined time.

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- While classes are in session one of your responsibilities is making sure students are in class. We have a policy that any student in the halls is escorted. This allows us to know where students are at when there is an emergency. We also are called to classrooms to remove a disruptive student. These students are taken to the office and talked about how their behavior can be modified for them to return to class. Between classes we monitor the halls for disruptive behavior and act on all disruptions. The security team also checks the doors in the school to make sure they are secure and report any problems to the vice-principal. The team also monitors the track, field behind the school and other areas around the school for unauthorized persons. The school ground is off limits to the public from 7:00am to 4:30pm. This time allows for a clear area for the school and all after school activities.
- At lunch both security personnel will be in the commons monitoring the orderly conduct of students. The dean will notify you when students are to be released outside for the remainder of lunch. The doors by the auxiliary gym must remain unlocked while students are outside. One of the security team members will help monitor students outside. At the end of the lunch period, the whistle will be blown, and the students will be escorted back into the school. There will be balls available for students to check out by providing their student IDs. The ID will be taken and returned once the ball has been returned.
- Every Wednesday, we monitor the student athletes from the time school lets out until their coaches arrive. This time allows them to eat, do homework and get ready for practice. The time spent in this study hall depends on what the coaches request.
- After school, the security team monitors the bus loading area and the staging area in the gym. We also ensure that all students not involved in after school activities or riding the

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bus are out of the building. All other students must leave the campus until 4:30. We make sure that students safely get on the correct bus. Inside the gym, students are staged, waiting for their bus number to be called.

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