PROTECTING OUR STUDENTS IN 7 STEPS

A Solution-Oriented Analysis of K-12 School Security for Standardizing Safety Policies, Nationwide.

About Protecting Our Students

The vision for this white paper is to spur our country back into concrete, measurable, substantive action in considerably decreasing the frequency and enormity of mass shooting episodes in our K-12 schools.

We do this, not by attempting to solve the politically charged and ultra-complex, root causes of these incidents: i.e. school gun control and mental health treatment, because we may never address these areas enough to make a sizable decline in school shootings.

Instead, the most expedient method of reducing the frequency and severity of these events is to treat the symptom rather than the cause with our advanced, universal and standardized, state-of-the-art K-12 school gun safety solutions.

Mission, Vision, & Goals

We introduce POSSafetyNet℠, an assessment, certification and implementation program for the unification of K-12 school gun safety and security policies, nationwide.

This paper outlines the case for implementing a unified security approach by:

- Measuring and evaluating our school's vulnerabilities to an attack with POSSafetyNet℠

- Implementing a standardized policy of best-practice security solutions

Join us as we form a national alliance to address our nation's K-12 mass shooting problem by providing effective, universal best-practice security solutions to schools in an objective, consistent, cost-effective manner.

An Urgent Crisis

Over the last thirty years, school shootings have gone from an erratic occurrence to a frequent tragedy.

From 1969-1978, there were 16 school shootings in the United States. From 1979 to 1988, there were 29--almost double the previous decade.

The deaths due to gun violence on school grounds near-double again from 1989 to 1999, and again from 1999 to 2009.

Since 1980, there have been a total of 138 fatal school shootings that killed 297 victims. Since 2000, there have been school shootings in 43 of the 50 states.

Incidents of school violence – defined as instances that require a response beyond the institution's regular capabilities – spiked by more than 185% from the 2016-17 school year to 2018-19.

Yet, even as they become more commonplace, these cases are persistently viewed as "abnormalities"—each new incident provoking surprise and shock.

185%

Spike in school violence 2016-2019.

Sandy Hook:
A Watershed Moment

The Sandy Hook Elementary School mass shootings in Newtown, Connecticut was a tipping point for many in America. Public opinion finally demanded that a solution be found to the accelerating problem of gun violence in our country's schools.

Despite the substantial public outcry, no progress has been made since 2012 that would make our school children any less vulnerable to an active shooter attack.

Instead, the opposite has occurred: The last 7 years have seen an increase in mass tragedies -- resulting in the unnecessary deaths of dozens of young children -- on the sanctity of school grounds.

"A NATION LIVING IN PALPABLE FEAR, WE STILL FAIL TO TAKE ACTION."

A nation and our students living in palpable fear, we still fail to take action. In contrast, the Aviation and Transportation Security Act was passed by Congress on November 19, 2011 -- just 70 days after the terrorist attack of September 11th.

As a result of that swift action, the TSA has protected our nation's transportation systems creating a safer air travel experience for millions of travelers each year.

Why then, when such swift action is possible, do we continue to fail the more than 76-million school-age students currently enrolled in America's schools?

How long do we debate while schoolchildren die?

Because the two major directions that the discussion in the U.S. has taken, the drive to provide real, practical solutions and action to this inexorable problem has dramatically deteriorated.

Despite children being our greatest resource, measures to protect our students have been disorganized and inefficient due to the absence of uniform nationwide policies that could ensure comprehensive gun safety measures are taken every school across our country.

Almost immediately after each school tragedy, the gun control debate is reborn in the US. Groups on each side all assume their conventional positions and posturing.

Do we limit assault rifles? Should the availability of high-capacity ammunition magazines be limited? Maybe background checks should be augmented?

The issue of gun control is so polarizing that events which demand collaboration continue to leave us divided.

Concurrent with the gun-control discussion, the public debate also turned to mental health treatment in the U.S. not being adequate.

The argument is that guns are not the problem, but guns in the hands of mentally unstable people were the root cause of the K-12 mass shooting problem.

Is mental illness to blame?

Dirk Matson, Westmoreland County behavioral health administrator: "There is little evidence to support that mental illness drives gun violence." According to the National Center for Health Statistics, less than 5 percent of 120,000 gun-related killings in the U.S. [between 2001 and 2010] were carried out by a person diagnosed with a mental illness.

Because we are so eager for a solution to the problem of gun violence, the argument that mental illness drives gun violence persists despite having no face value.

However, it creates more harm by strengthening the stigma associated with mental health, preventing many people from seeking help that have a real mental illness and who are not violent.

There are expert counter-arguments which state that mental illness is not the cause of mass shootings at all.

According to an article published by Brett Sholtis of the news outlet WHYY, dated August 8, 2019, "A history of violence and substance abuse are much more accurate predictors of future violence than a mental health diagnosis."

He adds that those with mental illness are more likely to be victims than perpetrators.

"So the first thing I'd say is, the most important things we can do to prevent the next mass shooting are not about psychiatric diagnosis, psychiatric interventions, but it is about threat assessment," states John S Rozel, MD. Associate Professor of Psychiatry and Adjunct Professor of Law.

"THE MOST IMPORTANT THINGS WE CAN DO TO PREVENT THE NEXT MASS SHOOTING IS THREAT ASSESSMENT."

A Closer Look at the Present State of School Security

The absence of a comprehensive, standardized approach to school security is due to a lack of oversight.

School shootings have unleashed a variety of responses from federal, state and local governments, as well as school officials, directed at increasing school safety and security levels to prevent future K-12 mass shootings.

Yet, a broad evaluation of school security preparedness across the U.S. reveals an extensively diverse assortment of applications, methods, and levels of vulnerability.

The absence of a comprehensive, standardized approach to school security is due to a lack of oversight. There exists no single, centralized governing or directing body created to achieve forward progress.

As a result, school security has largely been left to local school districts or, in the worst-case scenario, individual schools themselves.

Many smaller school districts do not even employ a Chief Safety and Security Officer and therefore lack access to objective, sound advice, and education regarding how best to protect their schools.

The absence of a qualified security official places the life-saving task of creating and implementing school safety and security plans on already overburdened administrators and or maintenance professionals.

In an attempt to secure their school facilities, consult with local security companies. If the safety and security company is objective and chooses a supplier with a broad array of integrated security systems that can address the school's unique situations and needs, this approach can be effective.

But, school officials aren't provided training standards to help them judge how effectively a security contractor can perform.

An unbalanced security provider would yield an inefficient application of security solutions, thereby wasting valuable budget capital on improper, ineffective systems.

What could go wrong?

1 The security professional chosen could specialize in a given area and not address the institutional needs in an all-inclusive fashion.

2 An unbalanced security provider would yield an inefficient application of security solutions, thereby wasting valuable budget capital on improper, ineffective systems.

3 A worst-case scenario would be a security dealer who preys on the school's resources and price gauges while not providing suitable solutions.

There are no certified, specialized school security companies for standardizing policies in existence today. This lack of regulation means that providing school security has become a subjective, imprecise, inconsistent and most likely not optimally cost-effective process.

A Common Thread

75% of school shooters are current or former students of the breached schools.

In all of these events an assailant or assailants have gained access into a school, either forcibly or routinely, with a considerable amount of weapons and ammunition and have continued to have access for a prolonged duration of time, allowing them to kill or injure as many victims as possible before being apprehended or taking their own lives.

All of these school shootings could have been stopped or severely limited by controlling initial and continued access into the school of anyone carrying weapons and ammunition.

This action will not eliminate K-12 school mass shootings, but utilizing currently available, state-of-the-art security technologies, most of the events we have seen in the past could have either been severely curtailed or prevented.

A Chronology of School Shootings vs. Proposed Security Countermeasures

An assault from a mass shooter can happen at any time during the school day. It is most difficult to control access to the school when students are arriving in the morning and leaving at the end of the school day since a large number of people are entering all at once.

The chronology outlined below will describe how to improve the protection of the school, while class is in session and the facility is controlling access from outside visitors.

When a mass shooter attempts an assault at a school, their typical objective is to gain access to the facility with weapons and ammunition. During school hours the assailant can manage access to the school in several ways:
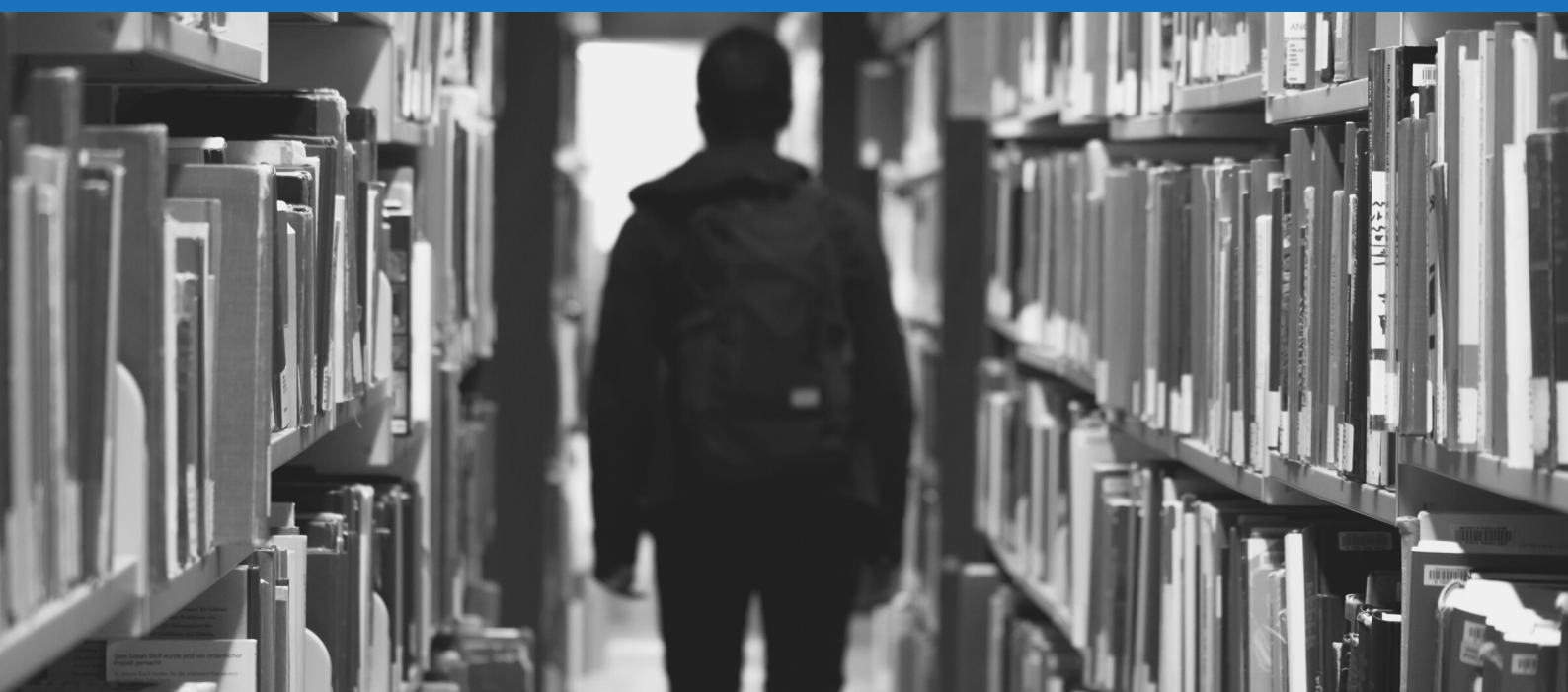
1 Gain entry via the front entrance.

2 Enter through the side or adjacent entrances
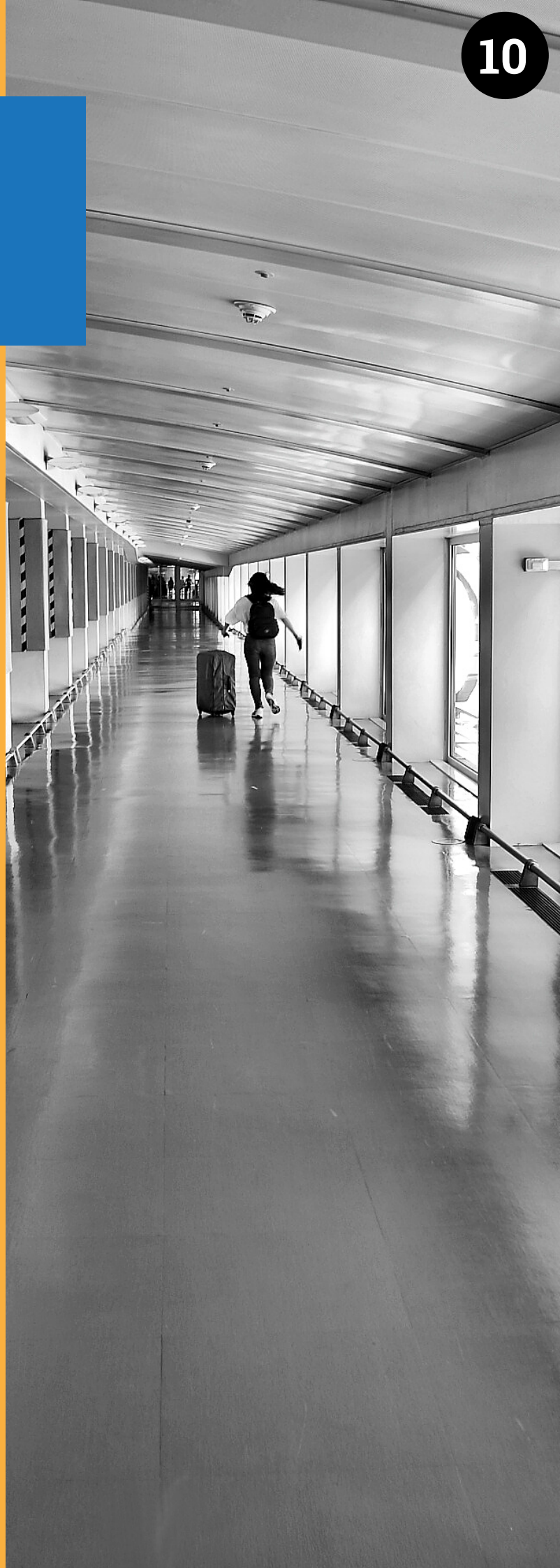
3 Attempt access through a window

Security Measure #1

LIMITING ENTRANCE AREAS

A comprehensive security plan begins with controlling the flow of visitors to enter through one central entrance. For example, at the front of a school, all perimeter barriers and fencing should be of an anti-climb nature to route everyone away from the side windows and doors of the facility and in through the main entryway.

When the intruder approaches the school the anti-climb barriers and fencing re-routes them to the front of the school. If he/she attempts to get in through a side door, those are locked, protected by anti-ballistic glass and monitored so that they go into alarm mode, should they are propped open, for entry at a later time.

At this point, an attacker has no choice, but to approach the school by the main entrance.

Security Measure #2

ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE ACCESS

When approaching the facility during times when class is in session, any intruder would be faced with a door that has an access control magnet or strike controlling entry. Additionally, if fitted with anti-ballistic glass, it could not even be overcome by gun fire and a visitor has to reveal their purpose via a video intercom system to security.

Security Measure #3

VISITOR MANAGEMENT FOYER

Assuming all seems okay with a visitor that is scrutinized at the front door, the potential intruder would be granted access into a vestibule area, otherwise known as a man-trap, to have his/her identification checked by safety and security personnel.

The security personnel would interact with the visitor via a window, equipped with anti-ballistic glass, to prevent forceful entry.

The visitor is now contained in a trap between two doors and cannot exit or enter without being granted permission by security officials. It is significant to note, that at this point the identification vetting process is being done in total isolation and with lack of access, to the rest of the school.

Assuming that all is well with the identification process, the visitor or potential attacker is now approved access to the next level of safety and security in the school; the administration office.

If a shooter is somehow inadvertently and unintentionally granted access with a firearm, the assailant would still be prevented from entering the rest of the school. The administrative office should be separated from the rest of the school by an auxiliary access point.

Security Measure #4

SCHOOL CORRIDOR ACCESS

After gaining authorization at the administrative offices, the visitor is then granted access to the inner passageways of the school. Naturally, if the visitor has been vetted in the offices, he/she is not carrying any visible weapons or ammunition and has not initiated any hostile activities.

However, after granting the visitor access to inner school corridors, the safety and security plan should still call for access control to classrooms, as weapons and ammunition could have previously been hidden for retrieval, for use during this access event and/or the intruder could be working with a co-conspirator attempting to physically enter the facility from another exterior entry point.

Round the clock, 24/7 safety and security is needed at schools to prevent a person from hiding weapons and ammunition in the facility during off-hours at the school.

Additionally, exterior measures, such as anti-climb fences to schoolyards and non-primary, exterior doors protected by anti-ballistic glass and door position alarms (to keep doors from being propped open from the inside) all would limit the feasibility of many intruder scenarios being explored.

Security Measure #5

ACCESS TO CLASSROOMS

It is a matter of school policy as to whether or not classroom doors should be closed and locked when teachers are conducting classroom sessions is a matter of school policy. There are valid arguments to support both positions. The safety and security plan should support both schools of thought.

Assuming an active shooter has somehow defeated the previously outlined layers of access control and gained access to the inner corridors of the facility and is now menacing the classrooms, the following countermeasures should be in place:

ELECTRONIC INTRUDER LOCKS

Are the baseline protection that should be present on classroom doors. These locks are unique in that they can be locked by a school official from the inside of the classroom and they do not require a user to walk into the hallway to operate.

MANUAL INTRUDER LOCKS

Are the baseline protection that should be present on classroom doors. These locks are unique in that they can be locked by a school official from the inside of the classroom and they do not require a user to walk into the hallway to operate.

ACCESS CONTROL SYSTEMS

Consist of electronic intruder locks combined with a networking feature that allows any authorized teacher or school administrator to approach any networked lock in the facility, enter a code or activate a key fob and lock down all classroom hardware locks electronically in a school. The thinking behind this is that it multiplies the "eyes and ears" in a facility and deputizes a number of teachers and administrators in being able to initiate a global lock down, should a security threat develop.

Security Measure #6

EMERGENCY NOTIFICATION & LOCKDOWN

At this level, the security plan entails the ability to notify the police and lockdown the school during any stage of the access control process.

If an intruder begins an attack when approaching any stage of access, including:

- **At the external video intercom**
- **Having his/her identification checked while inside the man-trap**
- **When in the administrative offices,**
- **Inside the inner hallways and classrooms**

Panic buttons can be activated at any stage to summon local law enforcement. Also, a school lock-down can be initiated at any of the aforementioned stages of access. Some municipalities have the ability to connect the school's lock-down alarm directly to local law enforcement authorities. This is preferable, versus routing the signal through a third-party central station.

Security Measure #7

AUDIO/ VIDEO MONITORING

An additional security measure that helps greatly to lessen the progress of an active shooter is the ability to monitor the school via video cameras, on a real-time basis, as the event is unfolding.

This system, coupled with an up-to-date floor plan of the facility, enables local police to remotely monitor the whereabouts of the shooter and develop a plan of action accordingly. The intention here is to quickly and severely limit the scope of casualties, by gathering intelligence on where to intercept the assailant.

POSS℠: A Community of Education Security Specialists

K-12 Educational Administration and Leadership have been unsuccessful in establishing adequate and objective nationwide guidelines. As a result, thousands of schools across the country struggle to address and prevent the possibility of a mass shooting on their grounds.

To meet that need, Protecting Our Students has launched a unification of a national school security program (POSS℠) which leverages the expertise of America's security experts; Certified School Safety Professionals, Law Enforcement, Government and School Security & Crisis Preparedness Specialist, from across the U.S.

The process of choosing a centralized, knowledgeable safety and security consultant and installation company is extremely complicated because of the many different facets and channels involved in providing the various security products necessary in addressing the challenge of sufficiently protecting our country's schools.

The safety and security industry is not one unified industry. The industry is comprised of many different specialties, channels, and operatives. The major segments and channels of the broader entity known as "the security industry" follows:

INTEGRATORS

These are installers that typically specialize in and integrate high-end access control, video, security alarm, and other systems for their clients. They usually do not install locking hardware, although they often sub-contract this position outside and are increasingly integrating locking products with the access control system.

SECURITY AND FIRE ALARM DEALERS

These professionals primarily install residential and commercial intrusion and fire alarms. Their main function is to provide alarm monitoring to their clientele. They may install limited access control and video systems, but at a lower technical level and they do not usually provide a completely integrated solution. There are some higher-level security and fire alarm dealers who may supply some integration of systems. They rarely install, integrate and/or sub-contract the installation of locking and securing hardware.

CCTV DEALERS

CCTV (closed-circuit television) professionals install locally multiplexed and networked video camera and recording system devices. They sometimes integrate these systems with other functionalities.

LOCKSMITHS & LOCKING PROFESSIONALS

These safety and security professionals install all varieties of locking hardware, push bars, magnetic locks, strikes and standalone, electronic access control locks. With the advent of wirelessly networked electronic hardware and locks, they can install low to mid-level access control systems but do not provide integration with other systems.

No statistics exist on what percentage of and how many schools have improved their respective security levels across the U.S. Directionally speaking, clearly many schools have made substantial improvements. However, there are no quantitative measurements and no standardization on how effectively these school institutions have made themselves less vulnerable to unwanted access by an active shooter and active shooter management.

Qualitatively speaking, and informally gauging achievements during the past year, some schools have enhanced classroom locks, others have installed ballistic glass on exterior doors, yet others have installed more video monitoring. Moreover, some schools have enhanced their control of access by visitors during school hours.

However, it is uncommon to see schools, particularly in small districts, whereby a methodically standardized and unified approach has been taken in using state-of-the-art security solutions, available today, to absolutely guarantee with a high degree of certainty that no unwanted intruders will gain access to the school and that active shooter management is standardized across the U.S.

The means currently exist whereby a school, without seeming prison-like, can now control access through one single, bullet-proof entry point, evaluate visitors while they are still outside of the school, then have them enter a man-trap, bullet-proof foyer where their identification and possessions are scrutinized and then are granted access to the school's administrative offices.

Once inside the administrative offices, a visitor would still be greeted with high technology hardware locks at each of the individual classrooms as yet another access control point.

To reach a classroom, under this arrangement, a visitor would have to be granted physical access at four (4) different points to reach a classroom. If so desired, the school can be sectioned off into wings, to further control and deter admission, if needed.

At each stage of this process, panic alarms can be set off to alert the school as well as authorities of an intrusion. Video surveillance monitoring can be layered on via video cameras, to guide law enforcement officers in real-time management of an event, if necessary.

Uniting Security Systems Specialists for a Better Cause

The knowledge base and safety solutions currently exist to prevent access by an active shooter to a school and active shooter management. The problem lies in disseminating this information, education, and expertise to school decision-makers in an objective, legitimate, standardized and unified manner.

POSSafetyNet℠: Secure Our Schools

As a united front of security systems specialists, POSS℠ implements POSSafetyNet℠, a standardized, comprehensive assessment and appraisal tool.

This assessment measures the efficacy of how well the total group of security systems and structures work together, including:
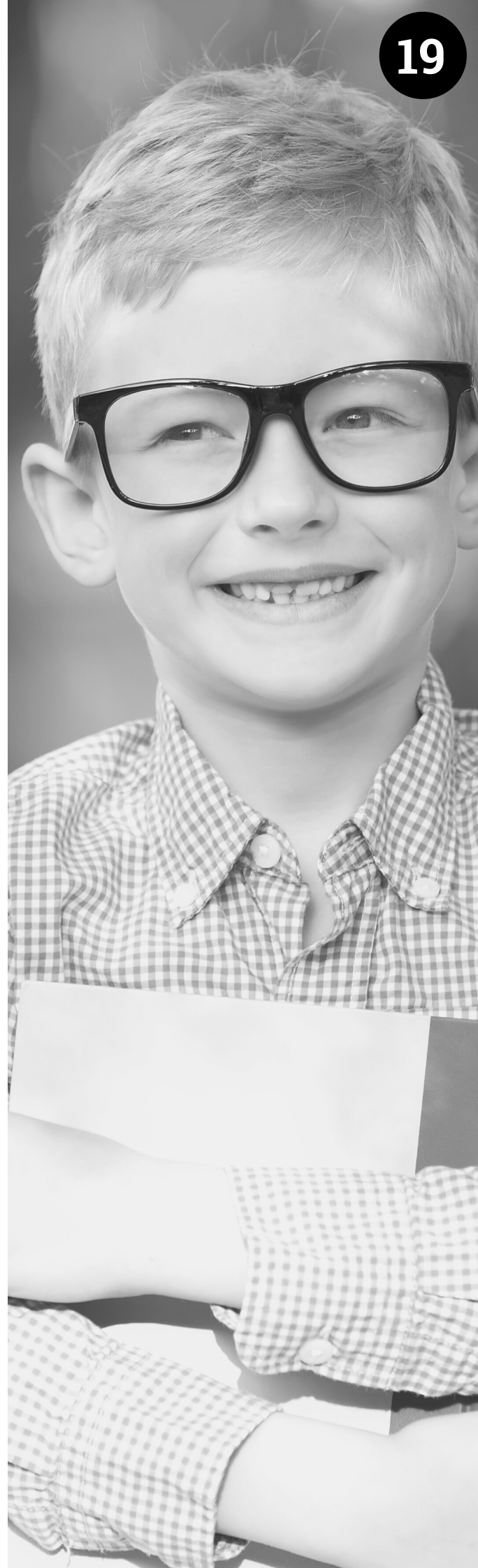
EXTERIOR PROTECTION

INTERIOR PROTECTION

ELECTRONIC LOCKING SYSTEMS

VIDEO & AUDIO SURVEILLANCE

ACCESS CONTROL SOLUTIONS

POSS℠ partners with local security professionals to create a school security alliance. This certified body of security integrators would be trained and certified on how to assess facilities and install required, cost-effective, specialized, approved school-specific safety measures.

When constructively applied to the K-12 school active shooter problem, we trust that the POSSafetyNet℠ will substantially limit the possibility of an active shooter gaining access to a school.

What POSS℠ + POSSafetyNet℠ Could Mean for K-12 Schools

Implementation of the recommendations in this white paper would transform the level of safety, security, and protection present in U.S. schools, and standardize and unify safety policies, nationwide.

Our vision for improved school security going forward is to achieve the following objectives:

Build a unified national K-12 school security program.

Consisting of members from educational organizations, security companies, law enforcement, and government, which would establish a construct whereby proven safety solutions, knowledge and education would be made readily and consistently available to all educational institutions in need of them.

This program would provide a similar function to K-12 schools as the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) serves the fire industry.

The mission of the international nonprofit NFPA, established in 1896, is to reduce the worldwide burden of fire and other hazards on the quality of life by providing and advocating consensus codes and standards, research, training & education.

Create a unified approach.

Providing proven safety and security systems and solutions for educational facilities that control and limit the access of potential mass shooting assailants.

Supply a standardized measurement tool.

To evaluate the vulnerability of schools universally across the U.S.

Generate an assessment checklist.

Appraise with standardized measurement tool to evaluate K-12 school facilities.

Train and certify specialized K-12 school security experts.

Training security experts on best practices for applying the assessment and checklist process and installing the required safety and security solutions, to adhere to the minimum and maximum standard of school security requirements.

Whether you are responsible for a small preschool or a K-12 school district, our goal is to create an environment that fosters a student's interest in learning. A goal that's only possible if everyone is present and safe.

POSSafetyNet℠ protects K-12 schools with a standardized and unified, efficient, reliable and certified network-based safety and security program for implementation, nationwide.

When you give to Protecting Our Students, you're making a meaningful impact upon the security of our country's K-12 schools. You help us develop and deliver our free standardized safety programs to our students across the nation.

How You Can Help

Visit our website, call, or email Protecting Our Students to donate to our mission. Or, you can request a POSSafetyNet℠ school evaluation with a POSS℠ Certified K-12 Safety & Security Professional.

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