

## **Top Ten Security Tools for School Violence Prevention** **By Dr. Steve Albrecht, PHR, CPP, BCC**

Following every school shooting on a K-12 campus, there is no shortage of advice, suggestions, or demands for change. Not all of these approaches are practical or possible; some are expensive, not feasible, and don't account for the culture of the school district and the community around it.

Many media-offered experts offer solutions that just can't be practically done at most campuses: locking down the entire facility, issuing key cards to every student, installing expensive cameras or panic alarm systems, trying to screen every visitor, asking local law enforcement to station a fulltime officer on site. So what will work to prevent these unpredictable (and rare but catastrophic) events?

It's time to go back to a calmer, common-sense response to this national discussion, using tools and ideas that may already exist or can be put into operation on campus. This requires an approach to use the critical components of school security and violence prevention: safety planning, finetuning existing policies, installing cost-effective security devices, creating District-led Threat Assessment Teams, and using real-time threat management protocols.

We can also get guidance from the 2002 "Safe School Initiative" report created by the US Secret Service: Most shooters don't warn their targets directly; they tell a third party, and many of them felt disconnected, disaffected, depressed, and vengeful.

It takes a team to run our schools and districts; it will take a team to respond to the school violence issue. Consider these must-haves for our K-12 schools:

### **1. Hire more school counselors (trained in threat assessment and response).**

The ratio of counselors-per-student is painfully low. They are pulled in many directions and don't always get to speak to as many students as they would like who are in crisis. Besides increasing their numbers state by

state, they need to be fully trained in the best practices for threat assessment and violence risk assessment.

## **2. Parental involvement (in school security and behavioral concerns).**

The D.A.R.E. drug abuse and violence prevention program uses a triangle model, asking for the support of the schools, police, and parents. The parents are sometimes the least supportive and that helps the concept fail. Every campus should have updated contact information for the parents or guardians for every student. They need to be brought in to discuss what they are seeing at home with high-risk students.

## **3. Gun safety education (for kids, and urging that parents use trigger locks and safes).**

Campus shooters often get their guns by stealing them from their families. Many people still believe their children won't find their guns, so carefully hidden in dressers, nightstands, under beds, and in closets. We need a national campaign to secure every gun in every home. We need to use grant or federal funding, and even trigger lock giveaways or low-cost gun safes, provided by gun manufacturers.

## **4. Gold Star Program (reaching out to those kids who have fallen through the cracks).**

This unique idea is simple: during teacher Staff Development days, print out lists of the names of every student in the school and post it on the walls of unused classrooms. Ask teachers to put a gold star near the name of any student he or she has had no contact with. Patterns will quickly arise, showing those kids who have not had support or interaction from anyone on campus (a risk factor in the Secret Service study).

## **5. Anonymous tip lines (for threats, pending fights, and other security problems).**

Students who tell us after a shooting incident that they knew it might happen (another factor in the Secret Service study); demonstrate the need

for them to be able to tell adults, in an anonymous, protected way. This includes recorded message lines, Twitter accounts, or other privacy-controlled social media sites, where campus administrators can monitor, investigate, and determine the validity of the tip.

#### **6. Security officers and devices on campus (cameras, better door hardware, phone lines in classrooms, etc.).**

In a perfect world, where costs were not a factor, we would have the luxury of putting a trained, screened, armed security officer on every campus. Until then, the use of trained, screened, and vigilant security officers has a deterrent and early-warning value. Cost-effective security devices are available, to create entry chokepoints, stronger classrooms, and mass notification systems. Security is not someone else's job. Every employee should know he or she is in charge of keep themselves and everyone else safe. Teachers and staff who bring potential security problems to the principal or the police should be rewarded.

#### **7. Media plans (already in place).**

Just like the police and military have a "go bag," school districts need to create multiple copies of a current, organized media kit. They need a trained spokesperson, who has already met with the local law enforcement Public Information Officer or chief, and can speak accurately on behalf of the district and its campuses.

#### **8. Regular drills (evacuation, safe rooms, fire, earthquake, tornado).**

Under stress we respond as to how we have been trained. If you have never been reminded that you need to dial "9" first to get an outside line before you dial 911, or that if you dial 911 on your cell phone, the state highway patrol may answer, then under stress you may not respond correctly. Students, teachers, administrators, and staff need to participate in regular active shooter drills; lockdown / shelter-in-place / or safe room drills; and fire and disaster drills. The key to success against an armed perpetrator is safe evacuations, barricaded safe rooms, or fighting back until the police arrive.

## **9. Daily police presence (and student interactions).**

If there is no assigned School Resource Officer, local police and sheriff deputies need to ramp up their patrols of the perimeters, parking lots, and even take a walk on campus, every day, at irregular times. The more they can see and be seen by students as a source of help, and not the enemy, the better.

## **10. A District-led Threat Assessment Team (who meet regularly).**

As with workplace violence prevention efforts in organizations, there is great power and harnessed intelligence when the stakeholders in a school district can get together in person or by conference call, for high-threat situations. This includes bomb threats; gang problems; a student making veiled threats, or creating disturbing essays or drawings; threats to or by employee, including domestic violence; angry, disruptive, or threatening parents; or any event that poses a significant liability or risk to the District, staff, and students. Threat Assessment Team (TAT) members often include District administrators and school business officers, risk and safety managers, principals, master teachers, counselors, psychologists, attorneys, and security officers.

Dr. Steve Albrecht, PHR, CPP, BCC, is a San Diego-based speaker, author, consultant, and trainer. He focuses on high-risk employee problems, threat assessment, and workplace and school violence issues. In 1994, he co-wrote *Ticking Bombs*, one of the first books on workplace violence. He is board certified in human resources, security, and employee coaching and holds a doctorate in Business Administration, an M.A. in Security Management, a B.S. in Psychology, and a B.A. in English. He worked for the San Diego Police Department for 15 years and has written 16 books on business, HR, and criminal justice subjects. Contact him at [drsteve@drstevealbrecht.com](mailto:drsteve@drstevealbrecht.com)