



# 7 Common Gaps in School Safety & Security Plans

Whether you are a school district employee, parent, or community member, you probably rest easier knowing that your district has a safety & security plan. It is simply the norm in times like these, and while any workplace or community gathering space should have some kind of safety & security plan, school security is especially crucial.

The worrisome thing, however, is that many school safety & security plans have dangerous gaps. Financially crunched districts have done their best to piece

together systems and maintain staff training and skills over the years, but the reality of building and maintaining a truly effective solution is incredibly challenging.

Security experts have identified 7 common flaws and vulnerabilities in school safety plans. Read on to learn more about these gaps and their solutions.



### Security Gap #1

**There is no single person responsible for all aspects of a district's safety & security program.**

For the vast majority of districts, responsibilities for safety and security are divided among School Resource Officers (SROs), facilities & grounds professionals, human resources, and more, with each of these roles overseeing their own elements of safety and security. SROs provide physical security and work with students in the building; facilities managers handle entrance systems and associated technology; and HR ensures that periodic training is completed by staff. Administrators are typically involved as well in determining how students should be trained and drilled to deal with emergencies.

Unfortunately, too often when you ask a school district leader, "Who is the one person responsible for the safety and security program in your district?" or, "Who is the one person who knows every aspect of it—technology, training, policies and procedures?" it becomes apparent that there is not one person who "owns" school safety.

It's easy to understand how these kinds of piecemeal systems evolve, but the discipline of school safety and security has now reached a stage of maturity that requires more holistic management. This can be hard news for financially crunched schools, but the truth is that a well-designed safety and security solution costs far less than you would imagine, particularly compared with the cost of adding additional staff like SROs.

With the right technology, training for students and staff, and on-demand resources, districts can achieve and maintain a much higher level of security than the current average, without the level of costs that require approval by ballot.



### Security Gap #2

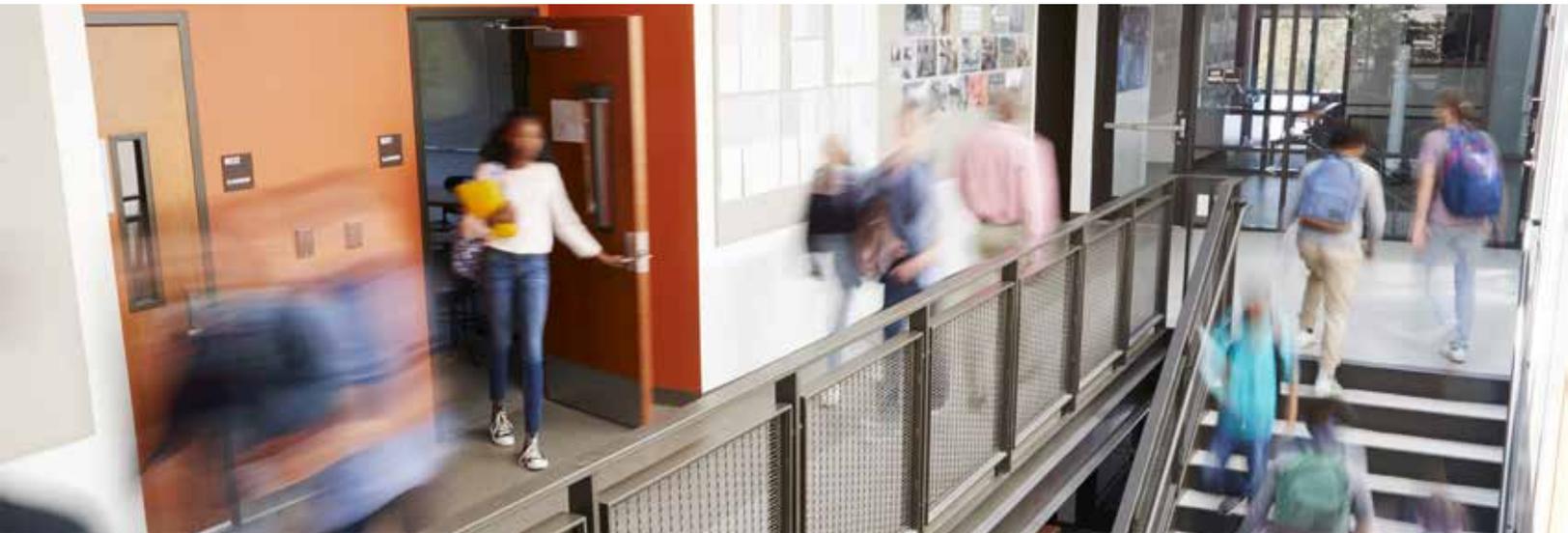
#### Training just “checks the box.”

When school districts are looking for a security “expert” to come into schools and conduct training for staff and students, they often choose a local police officer or other security professional who has received their instructor certification from a third-party training company. (Many of these training companies have clever acronym-based names for their techniques). The time it takes to earn certification from these companies varies, but it is very common to see courses ranging from one to seven days.

It does not take much critical thinking to realize that a weeklong course cannot make anyone an expert in school security—even if that person is a talented police officer dedicated to the community. We tend to trust that our local police departments know everything about security, and that we should have to look no further than their expertise. Many state laws for school security even require schools to conduct assessments “using their local law enforcement professionals.”

**The truth is that school security is an interdisciplinary field and true expertise is only achieved with significant experience and study.** Acronym-based training companies too often take a cookie-cutter approach with their curricula, and their graduates then go out and teach these techniques in a cookie-cutter way. As we know, however, incidents of violence are not “cookies,” they are snowflakes—no two are exactly alike.

Hence, conducting school security training to simply “check the box” is a big risk. We must demand true expertise in our trainers, and look for plans that are customized for schools and districts with relevant and reality-based training for the students and staff.



### Security Gap #3

#### Physical sites are not secured effectively.

While newly constructed schools are now built with security in mind, the vast majority of our schools were built before security became the pressing concern it is today. In both old and new buildings, limiting entry to a select set of doors still comes with the potential for problems. School reception staff should not need the skills of a security guard to handle visitor management and turn away unwanted visitors, but the setup of many school entrances unfortunately puts them in that highly vulnerable role.

An ideal school entrance scenario would enable known people—students, staff, and others enrolled in the system—to easily enter the building, while securing unknown visitors

outside. Visitors should be directed to a security kiosk or other check station where their identity is authenticated, and the purpose of their visit can be verified before they are ever face-to-face with anyone inside.

Installing cameras at entrances and throughout the building provides added layers of security and threat-response capabilities. While this can be a controversial measure, communities should consider the value of having real-time information on what is happening inside a school during a crisis.



### Security Gap #4

#### **We do not truly know who is in the building.**

In the ideal school entrance scenario described previously, ID authentication is conducted at the door. But what does this actually entail? Many visitor management or ID check systems incorporate a barcode scan of an ID document, which does provide a higher level of security than a simple visual inspection of the ID.

However, the unfortunate truth is that barcodes are one of the easiest elements of an ID to forge, and sophisticated fake IDs will have no problem passing barcode tests posed by these visitor management systems. These high-tech fakes are becoming increasingly common and can be purchased with relative ease on the internet.

To be truly certain in an ID document's authenticity, a much more thorough inspection is needed. However, this does not have to pose a higher burden on reception or security staff. Software that authenticates an ID—rather than simply scanning the barcode—offers a much

higher level of security. This authentication is performed by checking for the presence of known security features unique to each type of ID, such as watermarks and other features only visible under specialized lights. Authentication also confirms a match between the barcode data read by the scanner, the data printed on the front of the document, and data encoded on any chip in the ID.

This authentication process can be performed in seconds at a security kiosk without staff involvement, with a visitor simply inserting their ID into a card reader. For an additional layer of security, especially at an unstaffed kiosk, a live image can be captured of the visitor's face and then matched to the image on the ID document, to ensure that the person at the door is the rightful holder of the ID.



### Security Gap #5

**Plans do not account for what a threat is likely to do in a specific building.**

A good school security solution acknowledges that while anything can happen if an intruder gains access to the school, there is most often a “path of least resistance”—a natural flow to the building layout that guides visitors along. This path can be determined by just about anyone by walking into the building and asking, “Without knowing where everyone might be, which way would I go based on what I am seeing?”

Whatever the determination is, it is likely to be the same for anyone else. Once this path of least resistance is understood, a security solution should design simple ways to create resistance for an attacker, in as many places as

possible. In many cases, simply closing and/or securing one door can create much more protection for building occupants.

Insights like this further highlight the inadequacy of many of the acronym-based “expert” training courses described earlier. An off-the-shelf security program simply cannot diagnose specific building vulnerabilities the same way that a true school security expert can.



### Security Gap #6

**Most security systems do not have enough real-time communication capabilities.**

It is well known that bank tellers have covert panic buttons to summon police without tipping off an intruder—in fact, it’s a regular plot point in Hollywood heist scenes. Having a covert means of communicating a problem is also an extremely useful feature for school security systems, but finding a system with this capability is rare.

Another thing lacking from many systems is the ability to provide actionable intelligence in real time during an incident. Summoning authorities with a covert button can set the process in motion, but the best results come when first responders know many more details about an incident in progress, such as specifically where in the building it is happening, how many people are involved, and much more. Security cameras give authorities a view of the situation in real time and help them respond in the most fitting way.

An internal messaging capability can also be a lifesaver in a threatening situation. For example, if teachers can be made aware of the location of a threat during an incident, they can make more informed decisions on crucial issues like evacuation versus lockdown.

All of these examples fall into the category of detailed, real-time communication—something that tends to be lacking in most security systems. The sound of an alarm or the press of a panic button only sends one message to building occupants and first responders: that there is an emergency. But modern technology enables far more life-saving information to be communicated in the event of a dangerous incident of violence.



### Security Gap #7

**We assume technology will keep us safe in a crisis. It does not.**

This paper has highlighted a number of technology tools that should be a part of a school safety & security solution, but it is vital to remember that technology is only part of a good plan. The truth is that effective security has as much to do with **people** as it does with alarms, cameras, locks, and card readers.

An effective, integrated safety & security solution places significant emphasis on the “people” aspect of security. It is about creating truly effective and practical policies that everyone understands and follows without any exceptions. This can only be achieved with ongoing reality-based training and education, particularly in school buildings that welcome

hundreds of new faces every year. Training must be engaging and accessible to new members of the community at whatever time they join it, and it should be delivered by experts with real school security expertise.

Of course, training must also be practical—which means it should be available via both on-demand and in-person options to support school schedules and budgets. Having an on-demand option is also critical for periodic refreshers, as survival skills are perishable and should be updated on a regular basis.

A photograph of a school hallway with students walking away from the camera. The hallway has a brick wall on the left and a glass wall on the right. The text "Closing the Gaps" is overlaid in large white font on the left side of the image.

# Closing the Gaps

The security gaps described in this paper are major challenges facing thousands of schools around the country. However, expert help is available for school districts to close these gaps with a fully integrated, end-to-end security solution.

BrightTower Safety & Security Systems was designed and developed by leaders in organizational safety and identity management, and they are uniquely qualified to assist school

districts with the consultation, staff training, and technology solutions they need to create a culture of safety.

For more information:

[Schools.BrightTowerSafety.com](https://Schools.BrightTowerSafety.com)  
[BrightTower@veridocs.com](mailto:BrightTower@veridocs.com)