

Safe Steps Forward

Campus Safety Trends Include Increased Visibility, Better Communications

By SCN Staff

SCN Recently touched base with two experts with the design firm H2M for their takeaway on top trends in the world of school safety. Our thanks for their valuable time and insights to Michael Lantier, P.E., LEED AP – Assistant Vice President | Deputy Market Director, Education; and Saverio J. Belfiore, AIA - Vice President | Market Director, Education.

SCN: *How has the focus of school safety and security shifted over the past decade?*

A few decades ago, schools were more open to the public with visitors being able to walk right onto campus and even into the main office for assistance. Unfortunately, due to extreme events over the past couple decades, most schools now require visitor acknowledgement prior to entering the building. Visitor management is successful with the use of architectural elements and/or technology. An entrance vestibule with two-way communication can keep a visitor on the exterior of the building while reviewing the purpose of their visit. Advances in technology, such as access control and surveillance systems assist in managing/reviewing occupants.

Lock-down protocols and training have provided schools with the practice of how to react during an actual emergency. These drills provide methods of bringing students into safer areas and can be effective for both interior and exterior threats.

With the issues related to the global pandemic, safety concerns have not only included physical threats, but also the spread of the Covid-19 virus and other illnesses. Filtration and ventilation are a priority to ensure the highest levels of indoor air quality possible.

SCN: *With school safety such a huge concern these days, how can campus design help contribute to protecting students?*

Safety should start on the exterior of the building. As pedestrians and vehicles enter the site; clearly designated visitor, bus, and walking paths should be visible and easy to understand. Traffic monitors should assist with the flow of traffic and people during critical time periods. All interior and exterior personnel should have the means of constant communication to notify each other of issues.

At times other than normal drop-off or pickup, visitors should be acknowledged and validated prior to gaining entry into a building. This requires dedicated visitor entrances and secured doors throughout. Typically, this is accomplished via entry vestibules with visitor screening protocols in use.

There are professionals available that can perform security risk analysis for new and existing buildings. With this assessment, schools can acknowledge what they are doing right as well as areas of needed improvement. The security risk analysis should be developed based on specific school and community needs.

SCN: *And what do you see on the near horizon as critical in providing safety in schools?*

Communication. Unfortunately, everyone is receiving so much information about so many different topics, communication and retention of that information is difficult these days. In the near term, we will see schools reviewing and rehearsing their safety and security protocols, as well as their emergency response plans. These plans need to be communicated and well thought out. These plans need to be practiced and understood.

SCN: *What are some of the most important safety elements necessary to school design in 2022?*

As always, all life safety systems are of foremost importance. These systems may include fire alarm systems, sprinkler systems, gas detection, emergency lighting, exit lighting, paths of egress and/or emergency generators.

Specifically, in 2022 the priority for school safety includes management of unauthorized people and indoor air quality. Schools are requiring visitors to gain permission prior to entering the building. This can be accomplished with access control technologies and dedicated entrance vestibules. Filtration and ventilation have also taken precedence in response to the global pandemic. School designs should take into consideration systems that provide high indoor air quality. In many cases this means an increase in air exchanges and higher filtration ratings.

SCN: *What do you foresee in terms of possible changes to designing secure schools?*

If security vestibules have not been implemented, they will be installed as this will be a primary means of managing visitors.

Technology currently has the capability to provide secure facilities. Additional



Limited entry points and increased access control can help boost school safety.



Safety details like up-to-date fire equipment and emergency preparedness are crucial.



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access control, surveillance, and lock down technology will be implemented. Designated entrances and exits will be created and enforced. Access control technology will be used to monitor and alert exterior door breaches and unauthorized access.

SCN: *How do you balance the need for student safety with the goal of also creating a friendly and welcoming school campus?*

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