

Security Assessment: Is your School Secure?

Many institutions are rethinking building security. Doors remaining unlocked, lack of CCTV coverage, unwanted visitors with easy access to buildings, as well as the inability for the school to react in a time efficient manner have been just a few of the challenges that have been identified. M3T Corporation has had the privilege to work with a school in Virginia, near the nation's capital. This school has made the safety of their students, teachers and staff a priority. Exterior doors on the building are locked always, multiple cameras are operational around the building, there is only access to the front of the building which is controlled by video intercom and, finally, a software-based visitor management program with badging is enforced for visitors entering the building. The school has also taken measures to have their students, teachers, and staff perform regular emergency and lock down scenarios to be best prepared for an undesirable situation as well as train students and staff to identify any strangers in the hallways that are not wearing appropriate badging. At first glance, this site would seem well prepared.

M3T Corporation was asked to perform a security assessment at the school. On the perimeter of the school, we noted some gaps in video coverage that could be corrected with additional exterior cameras. Other than a few changes to their CCTV system, the school had a strong exterior perimeter. We found the inside of the school could benefit from some changes. Overall school security was mainly reliant on their strong perimeter and was lacking a secure interior perimeter. Also, there was no efficient way for the school to go into a lock down procedure; teachers would go outside of the classroom door to lock it with a mechanical key and then pull the door shut to secure the classroom. This was not a time effective or safe process. We partnered with the school to upgrade their security with the goal of improving school security and safety for the students, teachers, and staff.

Creating an Interior Perimeter: Advantages to Electronic Access Cards

By identifying areas around the perimeter that lacked video coverage, the addition of more exterior cameras provides the school with seamless coverage in the critical outdoor playground, parking, and pedestrian approach areas.

We next needed to secure the interior doors for students and teachers to protect against unauthorized entry into the classrooms. The installation of 58 wireless locks were added to the existing classroom and staff doors. This work entailed removing the existing mechanical cylindrical and mortise locks, modifying the lock pocket in the door where needed, deploying a new strike plate, and mounting the new electromechanical smart wireless lock. The use of wireless locks and an electronically programmed access card allowed for the elimination of mechanical keys for the teachers.

Mechanical keys can create unique security headaches.

- Keys can go lost requiring a full rekeying of a master keyed facility
- Keys can be left in a door defeating the purpose of the locking mechanism
- Keys provide no audit trail of the use of the door
- Keys can be costly – they cannot be made invalid or in operable without rekeying the lock

Advantages to Electronic Access Cards

- Unlike keys, electronic access card can simply be disabled in the software

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- Electronic Access Cards can be more cost efficient; no need for costly rekeying work
- They offer versatility to the facility such as different access levels for different groups, including after school programs.
- They can be used to track entry and exit into different doors, adding an extra layer of security

Installation of Wireless Locks: Lock Down Set up at the Push of a button

Each lock installed communicates to the wireless gateway for real time communication back to software. All locks are equipped with an interior push button to manually initiate the lock down feature. Staff and the administration have the ability to initiate lock down through a PC or Smart Phone if needed as well as to remotely unlock a door if requested. The locks are on a schedule to allow for doors to be unlocked or locked based on the day of the week or time of day. With card access, each teacher has access to their specific door as directed by the principle and configured in the system. The security added by the wireless locks does not interrupt the day to day schedule and routine of the school.

In the event of a lockdown, the teacher will pull the door shut, if it is open, and press the lockdown button preventing anyone from accessing the room, unless a key override is available. This lock configuration also prevents other staff/teachers from accessing the room if a valid badge falls into the possession of an inappropriate person. All doors can also be placed into a lockdown state electronically from the web application. Staff can initiate the lockdown of all classroom doors quickly from their computer or smart phones. The school now can protect its students, teachers, and staff on the inside of the school and move into a lock down mode in a much faster, more efficient and safer manner. Through these wireless locks, the school has created a secure interior perimeter, not just relying on the exterior walls and doors of the building for security.

Conclusion: Mitigate Risk & Provide Peace of Mind

It is important for all schools to constantly evaluate their facilities, their personnel, and their procedures to identify gaps that may exist and be exploited by those who mean to do harm. Schools should remain one of the safest places in our communities. Every school is different in their budget, security needs, and security solutions though, all schools have the same overall goal when it comes to the safety of their students and staff. Every school wants be able to provide peace of mind and confidence to the students, teachers, and staff as well as the parents outside of the building that their school is a safe educational haven. Today, there is a large range of different security options available to tackle the different challenges of each facility. The wide variety of systems available, whether it be a fully integrated system, stand-alone system, or wireless solution, can all help schools in the overall goal of keeping children, teachers and staff safe. The effort, attention to detail, and sense of urgency this particular school has taken to improve security is to be applauded. The hope would be that many schools follow suit in evaluating and taking action on their potential need for security enhancements both inside and outside their buildings, closing the exposed security gaps.