

2008 National School Safety Study Executive Summary

School systems are faced with the daunting challenge of protecting students and staff in our free and open society, making school security is an important issue to all Americans. And although school systems have addressed the issue in a proactive and positive manner, when crisis situations occur we are reminded that much work remains to be done.

The American Association of School Administrators (AASA) and its members are addressing the need to close the safety gap by participating in and releasing the results of the 2008 National School Safety Study. This survey, administered by Ingersoll Rand Security Technologies in consultation with RETA Security, Inc., is the first study to professionally assess and focus on the subject of security in our nation's public schools. In a strategic partnership with these two organizations, AASA and its membership now have a foundation on which to further promote the most secure learning environment in every school community.

The partnership allows professional perspective for bridging security gaps that currently exist, in addition to providing a benchmark against which school districts may measure themselves. The survey findings also:

- Create a platform for visibility of the subject and point to the need for additional funding sources
- Point to the importance of placing a priority on access control and communications
- Include recommendations for funding sources to pay for integrated security, access-control systems and monitoring technology.
- Offer processes that cost little or nothing in terms of resource allocation.

Meeting the Security Challenge

School security came into the national spotlight more than a decade ago, during the Columbine tragedy, and districts have made significant strides in developing effective prevention processes and programs.

The results of the survey revealed good news in that regard:

- ***More than 90 percent of all respondents to the survey affirm that their district's schools have written crisis procedures addressing protocols for fire, weather, medical emergencies and violence.***
- ***Three-quarters of respondents possess and make parents aware of systems that will be used to communicate with parents in case of emergency.***
- ***More than 70 percent of respondents report that students and staff are periodically surveyed about their perception of the extent to which bullying is present in the school community.***

There remains more to be done, and with the results of this study we can now definitively identify opportunities for action. Specifically, in the area of access control and ground security:

- ***While two-thirds of all responding districts lock public entrances to buildings, one-third reported that exterior doors are occasionally or often propped open.***
- ***Eleven percent of all respondents reported that their school does not have a functional Safety Committee (comprised of teachers, parents, and emergency responders) that meets regularly to review policies, programs, responsibilities, issues, and needs.***

Survey respondents also indicate the need for an infusion of capital is clear:

- ***When queried about funding, approximately 80 percent of administrators describe their situation as "stretched" or "inadequate" — a clear sign that policymakers and others could do more to make certain that our schools aren't forced to choose between teachers, textbooks and security.***
- ***Almost 60 percent of school buildings have no "panic" exit devices installed in strategic locations, which represents a potential violation of the Fire and Life Safety Code.***

- ***Fifty-eight percent of respondents report that all interior and exterior doors can be manually locked from the inside, although no respondents report the ability to quickly lock down classroom, office and gathering-room doors electronically in the event of an emergency.***

Looking to the Future

With results in hand, the organizations responsible for this survey are now working on how best to leverage the information to the advantage of America's school communities. Potential plans include regional training initiatives for AASA members, which will encompass actionable programming for areas that need no additional resources.

Grant funding toolkits will also be provided to educate administrators in the area of state and federally funded formula and competitive grants for which their districts may be eligible. Grants such as these are often the only means schools have to upgrade security with integrated security, access control systems and monitoring technology. Additionally, AASA members have access to Ingersoll Rand Security Consultants to conduct site surveys that can be used as a platform for understanding and responding to building-based security needs.

Within this framework of collaboration, AASA and its partners invite the association's members, state and national policymakers and the public at large to become full participants in the mission to provide safe and healthy learning environments in every public school system.