With every tragedy sparked by violence, school leaders increasingly feel the urgency to prevent threats, secure their facilities, and protect their students, faculty, and staff. Referred to as facility hardening, school safety improvements and modern security measures require design teams to evaluate the risks and threats that make schools susceptible.

CSArch works hand-in-hand with specialized security consultants like Building Technology Consulting (BTC) to provide intelligent security solutions for campuses and sites, building perimeters, and school building interiors. Together, we develop and implement safety and security measures to address and mitigate the growing safety concerns that school district's face today.

While each school presents a unique case, there are several common strategies that school districts should consider. Here are a few of the ways schools can enhance the safety and security of their facilities.

Improving safety and security is at the forefront of school design. Across the country, communities and first responders are concerned about the vulnerability and the potential for violence. How can we protect the very places that are meant to educate, inspire, challenge, and comfort our youngest generations?

Secure vestibules enable staff to clearly observe lobby, entry, bus drop-off and parking areas. They also offer a safe haven for staff to take cover in an emergency.
Security Through Architecture

Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) is an approach that uses the architectural design of the built environment to reduce the occurrence and fear of crime. CPTED aids in deterring a criminal act before it happens, giving school staff and teachers time to prevent an act before it happens. It includes environmental barriers, constructed obstacles, and thoughtful entry portals for students, staff and visitors. CPTED offers ways to safeguard school entries against a threat. A few key design elements include:

- Separate student and visitor building entrances, with active security measures, to control entry to a building.
- Unencumbered visibility for administrators situated near or at entrances.
- Clear paths and site lines within buildings to achieve 100% visibility to guarantee a potential attacker will have nowhere to hide.
- Balance of clear glazing at classrooms and sufficient space within the classroom to tuck away.

Situational Awareness

Situational awareness is an imperative skill set when it comes to safety, as students and staff must understand their surroundings and feel confidently prepared. It could be as simple as knowing how to get out of a building during an emergency, or as complex as what to do if someone starts shooting a gun. We work with school districts to develop training and education on situational awareness for all faculty, staff and students.

Technology and Active Security Measures

Technology plays a pivotal role in situational awareness that teachers and staff should possess. Situational awareness takes on many forms, for example; observation of entry and exit portals to understand current events, what may come from an event, and up to the second information to reduce threats to a manageable level. Incorporating technology into day-to-day school operations is integral to maximizing situational awareness. Other active security measures include:

- **Video Surveillance: Visibility in real-time**
  Cameras with surveillance technology is becoming more prevalent in today's school environment. This technology helps staff understand current events, anticipate the outcomes, and ultimately reduce possible threats. Camera systems can now identify faces and license plates and can scan police databases. They can identify a bag left behind, follow a person as they travel around school grounds, and detect the color of clothing worn by a person in question. Surveillance systems provides critical information improving situational awareness and reducing threats to school property and people.

Access Control: Reducing unauthorized access

Access control security measures are common at most school buildings, but many schools can do a better job at implementing them to best mitigate today's threats. In addition to secure entry vestibules, creating and enforcing card access at all building entries and exits is a critical deterrent. Exits are required and designed for escape during a fire or event where students and staff need to quickly exit without obstruction. Active monitoring, electronic locks, video surveillance, and card access at each building entry/exit are key components to securing a school building and reducing vulnerability while still meeting code and providing a safe exit path.

As education design experts, CSArch has teamed with security consultant BTC to develop diligent solutions to monitor and address concerns with students and staff on an ongoing basis. Together, we provide intelligent security solutions for K-12 school campuses and sites. Alongside our school district clients, we also work with local authorities and educate them on the active security measures and plans our schools utilize to keep our students as safe as possible.

Contact me for more information on how to improve safety and security at your district.

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