

Physical Safety

Physical safety refers to the protection of all stakeholders, including families, caregivers, students, school staff, and the community, from violence, theft, and exposure to weapons and threats, to establish a secure learning environment. For students to learn, they need to feel safe.

Visibility and Sight Lines

Effective sight lines allow for the clear visibility of hallways, entrances, and communal areas. By eliminating visual obstructions, schools make it easier for staff to monitor student movement, deter intruders, and identify potential safety threats quickly. Large windows and open spaces can enhance sight lines, particularly near main entry points, stairwells, and corridors. In common areas, such as cafeterias or the media center, transparency is key to reducing the likelihood of unnoticed behavioral issues.

Night Lighting of Parking Lots and School Grounds

Adequate lighting on school grounds, especially in parking lots, sidewalks, and entryways, deters trespassers and enables clear visibility for surveillance cameras. Motion-activated lights and strategically placed fixtures help create a well-lit environment, minimizing shadows and blind spots. This type of lighting increases the safety of students and staff during after-hours activities and discourages loitering or criminal activities on school property.

Controlled Access and Zoning

Classrooms are designed as a safe refuge for students and staff. Additionally, zoning within a school divides the building into sections that can support after hour activities. By separating learning areas, administrative offices, and recreational spaces, schools can control after hours movement within the building.

Wayfinding and Clear Signage

Clear signage and intuitive wayfinding aid students, staff, and visitors in quickly understanding the layout of the school and moving towards safety during an emergency. Effective wayfinding includes well-marked building exits, arrows, maps, and distinct markers for key areas, like restrooms, offices, and classrooms, in addition to site signage for parking and entries. Signs should also be accessible for all students, including those with disabilities, ensuring that information is easily understood in stressful situations.

Secure Entry Vestibules

Secure entry vestibules provide a buffer zone at the main entrance, allowing schools to monitor visitors and verify their identity before granting access. This design involves a controlled two-door system where visitors enter a secure space and must be identified before gaining entry. Additional access control measures, including a visitor management system within the main entry vestibule, will require visitors to present their identification. The physical structure of a secure vestibule serves as both a deterrent and an effective screening process, ensuring unauthorized individuals are less likely to enter the school.

Preparing for Natural Disasters

Designing school facilities with natural disaster preparedness in mind is crucial for areas prone to earthquakes, wildfires, or other hazards. Through thoughtful design, safe zones can offer protection during severe weather events. In earthquake-prone areas, schools can incorporate reinforced classrooms and corridors to protect occupants from falling debris. In wildfire-prone regions, buildings can be sited and constructed to minimize exposure to fires. Be prepared to discuss evacuation and sheltering in place plans as part of educational commissioning. All applicable building code requirements must be addressed.