

ENFORCING SAFETY STANDARDS IN SCHOOLS – THE CRYING NEED OF THE HOUR

By Pramoud Rao

The famous French writer Victor Hugo once said, “**He who opens a school door, closes a prison.**” A school is verily a launching pad for children’s career, elevation, progress and success. But of late, schools in India and elsewhere around the world are witnessing unpleasant incidents quite regularly. The recent tragedy at Bangaluru calls for effective steps to strengthen security systems in and around school premises.

Comprehensive Approach

School safety requires a broad-based effort by the entire community, including management, faculty, educators, parents, pupils, parents, law enforcement agencies, stakeholders and the media. By adopting a comprehensive approach to addressing school safety focusing on prevention, intervention, and response, schools can increase the safety and security of their pupils.

Good security management is about being proactive rather than reactive. The emphasis should be on prevention rather than detection. This should be borne in mind when planning a school’s security. We must create an ecosystem in which our children can learn without fear from both internal and external forces.

Constitutional Rights

The Constitution of India recognizes the vulnerability of children and their right to protection. **Article 15** guarantees special attention to children through special laws and policies that safeguard their rights. The right to equality, protection of life and right against exploitation are enshrined in various articles of our Constitution and reassures India’s commitment to the protection.

safety, security and wellbeing of children *inter alia* all people. Hence, children in our schools deserve a better and safer academic atmosphere.

Management's Responsibility

Security and safety in schools is a management's responsibility. It is a management function of the leadership of the school. The principal is the Chief Security & Safety Officer (CSSO) of the school. He/she is responsible for planning and administering the day-to-day security and safety arrangements at the school within the policy framework laid down by the State Education Board. The Board is in turn responsible to the Minister of Education for ensuring that effective policies, programs and measures are developed and successfully implemented for the safety of pupils/students, staff and school property. At common law, the Board also has a moral and legal duty to take care of the safety of pupils/students entrusted in the care of the school

Security Concerns

The common security concerns in schools are:

- Agitation
- Arson/Fire
- Bullying
- Burglary
- Group Fighting
- Illicit activities
- Intrusion to school premises
- Personal safety of staff, pupils and visitors to school premises
- Theft
- Vandalism
- Violence

Modern technology should be judiciously used in meeting the above challenges. But it is possible only if the security system is maintained constantly properly.

Three Core Standards

Three core standards can be effectively used to increase physical security at schools and serve as a starting point for security measures. They are **surveillance, access control and emergency alerting**. All three standards are only effective when they are employed together as they form the three pronged response to a school's security profile.

A. Surveillance:

Surveillance is a core capability that all schools should have. The ability to view surroundings both internal and external is a key element in early warning and defensive posturing. Surveillance cameras that are visible to the public mitigate the concept of anonymity and increase transparency in and around the school facility. Key leadership and certain administrative personnel should engage in and have routine access and exposure to surveillance monitoring as needed for security purposes. Surveillance monitoring should be located in areas of the school that have the ability to restrict access but not so restrictive that monitoring becomes difficult to access by authorized personnel during emergencies.

B. Access Control:

Actively engaging/controlling the flow of people into the school facility is another core capability that all schools should have. Access Control protects against unauthorized persons gaining access to facilities. Access Control involves some level of interaction with school staff that will make determinations about entry/denial. Access Control should be layered throughout the building as it will act as an obstacle towards threat progression.

C. Emergency Alerting:

The ability to communicate within the school using systems is the third capability. Leadership should be able to communicate directions from many locations within the school. Communication is a two-way street, And so, subordinates in various locations within the building must be able to communicate with leadership as well. The school must have capabilities to make emergency calls for help to off-site emergency organizations and inform the public with official information.

Security Strategies

To prevent unsavory incidents in schools, the Management should enforce strict policies and make them known to all pupils, parents, other stakeholders and visitors.

Establish Safety & Security Committee: This is vital first step to deal with security issues. The Committee has to advise the Principal and the Managing Committee about the security measures to be adopted or upgraded in the school premises. The Committee should also be approachable in case of security breach.

Crisis Management: The school must put a **Crisis Management Plan** in place and faculty, staff, pupils and parents understand their roles in that plan. The plan should be reviewed periodically.

Law Enforcement Coordination: The school and key staff should regularly meet with the officials of local law enforcement agencies regarding school issues and potential concerns/crises. These officials could also be invited as Chief Guest in school functions so that they feel honored but also attached with that

particular school. They will be ready to help the school in times of crisis.

Policy Development & Volunteering: Parents and pupils should be encouraged to get involved appropriately in school safety/security issues. Their ideas and suggestions could be considered.

Safety Week: Schools should organize a '**Safety & Security Week**' every year to educate pupils, parents and the public on the importance of safety and security and encourage them to come out with useful ideas to meet the crisis. Best ideas should be suitably rewarded.

To enable each group to act in consonance , the Management should prepare a broad 'Dos and Don'ts' Guideline and display it prominently in important sections in the school so that everybody is in the know of things.

For Management & Faculty	
Dos	DON'Ts
<p>Establish a Safety & Security Department</p> <p>Install adequate security devices at appropriate places</p> <p>Supervisors should check proper maintenance of security devices</p> <p>Ensure a security policy is in place and is monitored and reviewed every quarter.</p> <p>Ensure that staff are aware of, and adhere to school security and participate in training where appropriate</p> <p>All members should be issued with ID badges and will display them whilst on the premises</p> <p>All staff appreciating the importance of security and understand the School's policy/procedures and their own responsibilities.</p>	<p>Corporal Punishment</p> <p>Make pupils stand outside the classroom</p> <p>Rush to media without discussing internally</p>

<p>Staff training needs are kept under review and training arranged as and when necessary.</p> <p>New staff are informed of the School's security policy/procedure</p> <p>Parents and pupils are informed of the security policy/procedure and encouraged to help ensure that the School has a safe school culture</p> <p>Regular reports will be made to the Governing Body.</p> <p>Advice will be sought from the police where necessary</p> <p>Collect evidence for all charges.</p> <p>All crimes will be reported to the police</p> <p>Appoint a spokesperson</p> <p>Check the background of both teaching and nonteaching staff</p> <p>Security Guidelines Signboards Should Be Kept At Vantage Points</p> <p>Know where the fire extinguishers and first aid kits are kept</p> <p>Counselors must be appointed to correct pupils</p> <p>Keep a 'Complaint Box' to address the pupils' complaints</p> <p>Random dogs to sniff for drugs</p> <p>Keep the emergency contact numbers handy</p>	
<p>For Pupils</p>	
<p>Always Come In School Uniform</p> <p>Carry Your Identity Card</p> <p>Report immediately on any abnormal things/activities /behavior noticed</p>	<p>Tobacco/Cigarette/Alcohol</p> <p>Firearms/Acids/Toxic Chemicals/Obscene Material/Heavy Bag</p> <p>Quarrel/Fighting/Aggressive Behaviors /</p> <p>Bullying /Foul Language/Spitting/Defiling/ Illicit</p>

	Activities.
For Parents/Visitors	
Must sign the register at the entry/exit	Trespassing
Always be accompanied by security/staff/pupil inside the school premises	Photography
Report any abnormality in children to teachers/principal	Circulating school internal matters

Time For Transformation

It is time for our schools to set up a full-fledged '**Safety & Security Department**' to prevent all kinds of unwanted happenings. The Director of State Education Board should make surprise visits to schools and see whether they have established such department for their own safety. Those schools that do not have a functioning Safety Department should be declared 'Unsafe' and penalized with a hefty fine for gross negligence. If the school does not comply within 100 days it should be derecognized.

A school is indeed a temple of learning. Its sanctity and serenity should be preserved and protected by all means. Security to our children is the crying need of the hour. The dawn does not come twice to wake up any one. Are the school authorities listening? If so, let them get cracking.

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