



The Need to Adjust Security Measures to Account for a Changing Environment

A recent client engagement has caused me to drive past the K-12 school campus in a neighboring town several times over the last week. This school district recently put a referendum on the ballot proposing temporarily raising local taxes in order to raise money to make security upgrades to their aging facility. The referendum had passed with nearly unanimous support, indicating that the community cares deeply about ensuring that its children are protected while in school. This additional funding along with a grant from the State allowed the school to make major improvements to the security posture of its facility, including:

- Adding an electronic access control system and issuing access control cards to staff, so that exterior doors that would not be used as public entrances (playground, bus loading area, etc.) could always be secured.
- Upgrading its video surveillance system and adding cameras to each entrance and to the playground so that the image of anyone entering the building or interacting with children on the playground would be captured on video.
- Adding security film to its exterior window and door glass, to prevent an intruder from entering the building by breaking out a window or door.
- Fully fencing the elementary school playground with a six-foot-tall chain link fence to prevent children from wondering off or being abducted.

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He has served as the senior most security executive (CSO) for organizations in the healthcare, financial services, education, hospitality sectors, and as a Regional Security Director for Mayo Clinic.

As the Director of Enterprise Safety and Security for ECMC Group he was responsible for overseeing the redesign of the security and safety programs for a non-profit career college system operating sixty-eight campuses located across twenty seven states, and as President of Security Advisors he has assisted many institutions in adjusting optimizing their security programs to better meet their needs.



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- Adding secured entrance vestibules so that all visitor traffic is directed through two lobby areas (one for the elementary school and one for the middle/high school) where they can be vetted and signed in and provided a visitor badge by office staff prior to being allowed through the final door into the building itself.

These are all excellent practices that I recommend for any school, work together to provide a safer environment for the school's students and staff, and in my opinion were a great use of the more than a hundred thousand dollars the district invested.

When I drove past the school last week, I noticed that they had made some changes to help with infection prevention in response to the COVID pandemic. This is absolutely necessary in light of the current crisis and I can't applaud schoolteachers and administrators enough for the adjustments they have been forced to make to keep our children safe from disease.

In this school's case some of the changes that they have made are holding classes outside in tents that have been set-up and in grassy areas around the school, and promoting cohort segregation to prevent infection spread by using multiple additional exterior doors for students to enter and leave the facility. Unfortunately, these two measures, while excellent for infection prevention had almost completely negated the efforts the district had made to secure its campus.

When I drove past the school in the middle of the day I counted no less than nine exterior entrances propped open while teachers were providing instruction to their pupils either in the nearby tents or sitting in the grassy areas of the campus. I am certain that this was necessary because in the everyday pre-COVID operations of the school these exterior doors would be used as emergency exits only and had not had electronic access control hardware installed to allow a staff member to re-enter through the door if they exited.

Unfortunately the need to prop these doors open so that staff could provide instruction outside had resulted in an unintentional bypass of the strict controls that school had implemented to ensure that any visitors were required to enter through the two designated entries and had the opportunity to be vetted and signed in prior to gaining access to the school as anyone could now walk directly into the classroom hallways through any of the propped open doors.

Additionally, the elementary school classes had been segregated from each other for recesses so that the children were not mingling on the playground to risk infection between cohorts. While this is a great infection control practice, it had resulted in some of the classes utilizing non-traditional areas for recess such as the high school's practice football field and a grassy area behind the school that backs up to a wooded area. These changes





have negated the investment that the school had made in ensuring that the playground was fully fenced and covered by video surveillance as neither of these areas had either of those measures in place.

My observation driving past the school during the time of the morning when parents were dropping their children off, was that what had typically been a relatively orderly process with all children entering through two distinct entrances which were staffed by several of their teachers had now been altered so that children were entering through the door nearest their particular classroom which was typically either propped open and unstaffed or held open by a lone staff member. This of course creates further acerbates access control issues and had made the pre-defined traffic patterns irrelevant adding to the potential confusion.

I won't argue that these changes weren't necessary in light of the need for social distancing and infection control, but they do indicate that the school's administration may have developed a case of tunnel-vision concentrating with so much focus on their response to keep children safe in the pandemic that they did not take into account how it was affecting the measures they had invested so heavily in to keep the children safe from other threats that have not gone away just because we are currently in a pandemic.

This phenomenon is not limited to K-12 schools, while this school provided a great illustration of the issue, I have seen similar issues repeated at hospitals, colleges, and businesses. Security is a situational discipline, and when either the threat landscape or the operating environment changes an organization must step back and re-evaluate the security measures it has in place to ensure that they are still relevant and effective in countering the security risks faced by the organization. Not only do outdated security measures present the potential for greater risk to an organization's assets having security measures in place but unknowingly bypassed creates a real threat of liability for the organization if an event does occur.



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