

Security Assessment Report
for
The Bedford School District
Bedford, New Hampshire

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Submitted by
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Overview

The firm of W. L. Bliss and Associates was retained by the Bedford, NH School District to conduct a Security Assessment of all schools in the District, including the new Middle School/High School Complex. The assessment was conducted from March 12 through May 15, 2007, and included extensive tours and examinations of each school's interiors and outside perimeter areas. We also conducted interviews and roundtable sessions with key administrators, teachers, employees and parents at each school.

In-depth background information and the history of the Bedford School District were provided by Superintendent of Schools Timothy Mayes and CFO Mark Conrad. We also met with key officials from both the Bedford Police and Fire Departments on different occasions.

The assessment team approached each school building individually but found that all of the buildings had many of the same security issues in common. We found that the leadership at each school was well aware of many of these concerns and that they were doing what they could to minimize the exposure of their student and staff populations. Equally impressive was the approach of each leadership team to these security issues; it was apparent that they considered security very high on their list of priorities each day.

Each school Principal appeared to have a firm understanding of the security challenges they faced, at the same time understanding that they were part of a larger team of schools, teachers and students. With that said however, as appropriately and as seriously as security is being addressed in Bedford, we did find that each school operated in somewhat of a vacuum from the other schools even though each are facing the same challenges in providing a safe, secured and prepared environment. For security to be effective, efficient and transparent throughout an organization the size of the Bedford School District, standardization of policies, procedures, training and technology must become the roadmap of the District's leadership team. Our review disclosed that the individual schools were approaching similar security challenges with a diverse set of protocols that should actually be standardized throughout the District.

The following are the highlights of recommendations we have made to the School District of Bedford, NH:

1. Establishment of a district-wide security and emergency planning committee, to include representatives of the Police and Fire Departments

This committee will operate as a coordinated body for the School District, addressing and standardizing all policies, procedures, technology purchases and training for security and emergency planning. Included in the committee's responsibilities will be the implementation of standardized response best practices for evacuation drills, off-site relocation exercises, sheltering-in-place protocols and school lock down procedures.

2. Expand training of school personnel in Emergency Response, Crisis Management, Identification and Management of Threatening Situations

Expanded training will allow school personnel to become familiar with best practices for emergency response that have developed over the past few years in light of the 9/11 attacks and other events in our nation's schools. All school staff and personnel should be familiar with the operation of the National Incident Command System (NICS). NICS capability is one of the standards measured by the US Department of Homeland Security when awarding grants to municipalities. Threat recognition training will also allow school personnel to recognize threatening behaviors that may lead to the prevention of a violent incident.

3. Improve district-wide communication capabilities and conduct research for software solutions that will provide immediate emergency notifications to all concerned school personnel and town residents

Post-incident critiques of nationwide emergency events always find communications to be a key indicator of success or failure in the response to an emergency. Bedford, NH schools will benefit greatly by improving the ability of all key personnel to communicate during an emergency, as well as provide the most up to date information to the parents and guardians of students involved in a crisis event.

4. Institute a district-wide staff identification system that can be integrated into new and developing security technology the Bedford School district may employ in the future

Standardized, recognizable staff identification will enhance building security at all Bedford schools and also provide an effective system of recognition for first responders and district employees during building evacuations, off-site relocations and other emergency crisis events.

5. Improve perimeter and access control security to all schools by employing technology that allows effective screening of visitors and provides early warning of evolving crisis events

This type of technology has been planned for the new middle school/high school complex, and similar technology must be considered for all other schools to provide the same protection to all students.

6. Initiate the recommended "interim" solutions cited in the individual school reports for visitor access control

Each individual school report contains recommended interim solutions that the schools can effectively employ without large capital expenditures. Many of these solutions

concern visitor access control, and once put into place will greatly increase security at all locations until more extensive technological solutions can be employed.

7. Immediately review and standardize student dismissal/pick-up procedures at each school

Currently only one school had an effective, safe and secure system for dismissing students who were being picked up by parents/guardians at the end of the school day. The lack of a secure, standardized practice was viewed as problematic and in serious need of immediate review. Standardization of rules and procedures at all schools will create a safer process that is practiced from the first day a student/family begins attending Bedford schools.

8. Installation of Panic Alarms at key locations in each school building

Emergency notification capabilities in each building were found to be less than efficient, with a high probability of failure during an emergency event. Each school had different problems to contend with, but they faced similar difficulties in making effective emergency notifications to first responders for assistance. At a minimum, each school should have a well placed panic alarm at the main office sign-in station to immediately notify first responders of an emergency. The installation of panic alarms should also coincide with implementation of standardized protocols for communications for all schools to follow when initiating a panic alarm.

9. Police and Fire Coordination – Table Top Training Exercises

Police and Fire Department coordination is instrumental to successful emergency response, and it is this synchronization of each department's duties and responsibilities which will limit injury and loss of life to school occupants. The actions of both departments will be critical to a successful response because both will be supporting the other in an emergency. Leaders of both agencies should immediately plan and initiate Table Top Training exercises that cover emergencies handled by each department. Table Top training will provide each department a starting point in understanding the capabilities, resources and assets that each can provide to the other during any emergency. This training will also cover the leadership responsibilities of each department utilizing the National Incident Command System.

10. Improve the system to lock all school perimeter doors during the school day

All schools had similar issues with perimeter doors remaining open while school was in session, except for the main entrance. Doors were found open at all schools during our reviews. School officials were provided with suggestions to better secure the school buildings once all students had entered in the morning. These recommendations should immediately be considered for implementation since the open doors provide unfettered access from remote perimeter areas into the schools.

Respectfully Submitted by

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