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About the cover:

Police and school security officers have become an integral part of many schools. Here Chicago policeman Howard Kilroy is surrounded by children outside Kosciuszko Elementary School. Photo copyright © 1989, the Times Mirror Company.

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BY PETER D. BLAUVELT

The presence of drugs, gangs and violence on school campuses has made security a major concern for today's educators.

School security: 'Who you gonna call?'

Two words say it all — *crack* and *gangs*. At one time, only major urban school districts and large city school systems had to be concerned with "crack" cocaine and youth gangs. Unfortunately, school districts across the country now are having to develop plans, policies and strategies for coping with these issues and the resulting increase of fights, assaults, homicides, drive-by shootings, weapons and general disruption to previously "quiet" schools.

The reason for this change in the educational climate is quite simple — it is called economics. The amount of ready cash that is made available to the average youngster is frightening. For relatively little or no effort, a child — 7, 8 or 9 years of age — can make several hundred dollars just for providing early warning to drug merchants that the police are in the area. Junior high and middle school youngsters are employed as mules, handlers and messengers, with substantially greater rewards.

For high school students, who are willing to take some risks and to whom

the drug suppliers are more than willing to furnish crack on consignment — meaning no money up front — an underground economy is formed in which tens of thousands of dollars change hands every week. The risks are low and the rewards are great — at least in the minds of those youngsters who feel that material objects gained today are of greater value than those that come from accepted legal sources of income. What most of these youngsters fail to acknowledge — or they are convinced that it will only happen to the "other guy" — is the fact that their chances of growing up to become adults are greatly reduced when they involve themselves in the drug-distribution network. Death or serious injury often awaits them, and, in many of our schools, this event can and does occur with frightening regularity.

Responding to security issues

School districts are faced with an enormous dilemma. Do they invite the police in and have them take up residence on school campuses? Do they try to ignore the problem and hope it will miss them? Do school districts employ personnel for the sole purpose of providing protection to their campuses? If they do, should it be a contract guard service? Or do school districts hire their own security personnel and make a major commitment of time and resources to establish a full-fledged department of school

security or department of school police? These difficult questions require careful review before a final decision is made.

When deciding the proper response to security issues, it is critical that it be a systemwide decision and not an individual school's choice. The ramifications of security issues are too important to allow one school to make this type of choice. Litigation has become a way of life for many public schools, which now may find themselves being sued for real or imagined wrongs. The lack of appropriate security for a school or a school function has become an all-too-often-cited reason for litigation. Juries have become sympathetic to plaintiffs when schools are cast in the "bad-guy" role for failing to safeguard children.

Step 1: Collecting data

The systematic collection of all "security incident data" in the schools must occur before any decision can be made or any serious discussion can take place. Information is the key to control. Frequently, school districts find themselves in a reactive position in which others outside the school system try to define the problem or problems for the district. This places educators at a tremendous disadvantage.

Instead of responding from a position of strength — i.e., timely, accurate, factual information — school administrators find themselves reacting to allegations

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that may or may not be based on facts. All too often, these allegations are based on someone's imagination, hearsay, rumor or a vindictive intent to cause disruption. Educators need to be the controller of events, not be controlled by events. The ability to do this is dependent upon *information*.

Every school system needs to have a uniform incident reporting system whereby all designated security incidents are recorded and systematically filed by each school. An incident report may be as simple as recording information on a 3-by-5 index card, or it may involve a printed form designed to be computer

compatible. The important issue is that the following questions be answered:

- What happened?
- When did it happen?
- Where did it happen?
- Who was involved?
- What action was taken?

If the incident report forces these questions to be answered, then schools will have the information needed to make informed decisions.

Another issue that needs to be addressed is the tendency for school administrators to treat criminal acts and violations of school rules as one and

the same. When school administrators do this they are leaving themselves open to great criticism and possible prosecution for failing to report a crime to the proper law enforcement agency.

Arson, assault and battery, breaking and entering, possession of controlled and dangerous substances (drugs), possession of a weapon on school property, larceny, robbery, extortion, bomb threats, sex offenses, trespassing and vandalism are all *crimes*. The police must be notified when any crime occurs at school. Even if the police choose not to make a report or decline to submit the case for prosecution because of the

minor nature of the offense, school administrators may pursue administrative sanctions for the violators.

Step 2: Analyzing data

Once security incident data has been collected, it then must be analyzed. This process is called *incident profiling*. The key to the process involves how incident reports are filed in the school or school district. Historically, schools file all student reports by the student's name. This process is the most logical and should be continued. However, when a security incident occurs, it is imperative that a copy of the incident report also be filed by the category of offense.

For example, suppose that Joe Doe was the victim of an assault and battery. In addition to filing a copy of the incident report in Joe Doe's student folder, a copy needs to be placed in a folder called "Assault & Battery." Each school should establish a central file for each category of offense, and every administrator who handles student complaints needs to place a copy of the incident report in the appropriate file.

After a relatively short period of time, school administrators can begin the task of analyzing security data. Data that should be extracted from each report include:

- type of offense;
- day of the week and time the event (class period) occurred; and
- location where the offense took place.

A simple hand sorting of the incident reports quickly will indicate when the school is most vulnerable to a certain type of activity. This allows administrators to determine where and when to deploy their resources. Such records can be a powerful management tool to help administrators maximize available personnel and reduce the vulnerability to violent acts within a school.

Step 3: Selecting the right response

Armed with accurate security incident data, a school district is prepared to begin discussion about how it should

best respond to real incidents or the potential threat of violence to the educational system.

Underlying all successful school security/school police programs is one common theme: the need for a defined security department within the organizational structure. Important variations may exist from school system to school system regarding the scope of the security department's responsibilities, activities, formal titles and placement. These variations should not be allowed to obscure the fact that school security increasingly is an area of professional specialization within education; it cannot be conducted on an ad hoc basis. In most school crisis situations, only a pre-existing, formally defined security department can hope to bring effective management to crisis resolution.

Five basic options are available to any school district selecting a security response:

- Do nothing.
- Employ local police.
- Contract with a guard service.
- Hire security professionals.
- Combination of options 2, 3 and 4.

Each of these options has advantages and disadvantages. However, within these options or their appropriate combination will be a program that meets the needs of any school system.

Option 1: Do nothing

A number of school districts do not need a formally organized security program. If a school system experiences little daytime crime, has few burglaries or acts of vandalism, and the local law enforcement agency is able to respond quickly and handle the few incidents that do occur, then it may have no need for a specially organized security operation. But for those schools that have an identifiable security problem requiring a "security presence" in the school, then the remaining options are of interest.

Option 2: Employ local police

Historically, police have played a signif-

icant role in public education. They have been involved in handling truancy, juvenile crime and major collective disturbances as well as in providing manpower when a situation required a "show of force" to act as a deterrent to potential disrupters. They also have provided patrol personnel for the protection of school property at night and on weekends and holidays.

More recently, many police departments have initiated the "Officer Friendly" program, which is designed to improve the police image with younger children, and the DARE program, which brings officers into schools to teach drug prevention programs. Officers also are involved in child abuse programs and youth crime prevention programs. These are more or less traditional police roles and are recognized by educators and the community as valuable resources.

In a school system where the presence of officers is required all day, every day, the roles are considerably different. In these schools, officers are needed to patrol school grounds, parking lots, hallways, bathrooms; check student identification; handle trespassers, class cutters and truants; investigate criminal complaints; deal with disruptive students; and prevent disturbances at after-school activities. Additionally, they must be available to counsel students and faculty members on security issues. These are not "traditional" police functions, therefore, many officers do not view being assigned to a school on a full-time basis as "true police work" and may resent such an assignment.

Advantages:

- Personnel are trained.
- The size of the force can be increased or decreased as needs dictate.
- Radio communications are established.
- Reporting procedures are established.
- A pre-employment background investigation has been done.
- Officers have high visibility; personnel are uniformed and armed.
- Prestige and interest accompany police.

- In most larger departments, support personnel are available.
- Police power is extended beyond school boundaries.
- Relatively little ambiguity exists about authority.

Disadvantages:

- Officers are responsible to an authority other than the board of education.
- Police lack flexibility in dealing with delinquent acts.
- Personnel are armed and generally in uniform.
- A lack of commitment to the educational philosophy frequently may be encountered.
- Turnover of personnel on school assignment can be high.
- Generally, the school has no input in selection of personnel assigned.
- School personnel may become overly dependent on police to resolve all problems that may develop.
- The possible violation of student rights and resulting libertarian controversies may occur.
- Officers may be dissatisfied with school duty assignments.
- This option can be costly if schools must pay for their services.

If employing local police is selected as an option, it is strongly recommended that a formal agreement be prepared which clearly sets forth the duties and responsibilities of the police department and the school system. It is far better to have these issues identified and resolved before the crunch comes than after, when both parties tend to point accusing fingers.

Option 3: Contract with a guard service

Often this option is the first response schools take when attempting to respond to the public's demand that something be done to stop the increase in school disruptions. When this occurs and the role of the security guard is not clearly defined, the opportunity for success is limited if not totally unattainable. Remember, if a guard service is going to

be secured, it is generally required that a bid be put out for response. But unlike other hired services, a low bid is never a sufficient criterion for awarding a contract to a company that provides guard personnel.

Guard companies have been relatively successful where their primary objective has been to act as a deterrent to crime. But schools present a different set of demands, and the effectiveness of contracted guard service is suspect in a school setting if they function as the primary security response.

Advantages:

- Cost is low.
- The size of the force can be increased or decreased as needs dictate.
- School assignments and deployment are at the discretion of school authorities.
- School authorities have the right to dismiss unsatisfactory guard personnel.
- Options exist as to how guards are dressed and whether they carry weapons.

Disadvantages:

- Personnel are more likely to be poorly trained and educated.
- No pre-employment background investigation is conducted.
- Security guards may have a lack of commitment to and understanding of the educational philosophy.
- Turnover of personnel may be high.
- Guards may lack insight into student problems.
- The contractor may employ marginal personnel who frequently would be unemployable elsewhere.
- The contractor may inadequately supervise personnel.
- School personnel may have difficulty supervising and controlling the guards.
- A general disrespect for "Rent-A-Cops" may exist among students and others.
- The degree of the school's liability for misconduct or errors by guards may be uncertain.

Option 4: Hire security professionals

As schools begin to identify new ways to respond to increasing school crime and violence, this option becomes more viable. Before serious discussion takes place concerning this option, school districts must be careful to address two critical issues: availability of funds and qualified personnel.

A good school security or school police program is going to cost money. How much depends on the size and scope of the security operation. If the program's primary focus will be to deal with daytime, in-school incidents, then the costs will be considerably less than a program focused on both daytime and nighttime operations. Providing staffing 24 hours a day, seven days a week, is costly but the level of security is superior. Because competition for every educational dollar is intense, proponents for implementing a security program must base their position on solid statistical data gleaned from security incident reports. When estimating costs, keep one-time expenses, i.e., vehicles, radios, burglar alarm equipment, etc., as start-up costs and not recurring costs.

The second critical question that must be resolved concerns the availability of qualified, school-oriented personnel to serve in the program. Many school systems have benefited from the availability of retired police officers and college graduates who majored in police science, criminology and related fields but do not want to work for a police department. The advantage of retired police personnel is that schools are able to hire an individual with 20-plus years of investigative experience who knows the court system. Such individuals truly are invaluable when establishing a security program. One word of caution — anyone who is hired must like working with kids. If a person has a problem dealing with youngsters who are acting out unwanted or unacceptable behavior, he or she does not belong in a school security program. The individual will be unhappy — and so will the school.

Advantages:

- The school system selects personnel.
- Personnel are responsible to the school system.
- The school system defines the role of security personnel.
- Duty assignments can be flexible.
- Personnel are committed to the educational program.
- The school system determines the mode of dress and whether or not weapons will be carried.
- The school system has central control over the entire security program.
- An incident reporting system can be specifically designed to meet the school system's needs.
- An in-house response unit is available to meet crisis requirements.

Disadvantages:

- The program must be budgeted a year in advance.
- It is difficult to increase force size quickly.
- Dismissal of personnel must follow

established procedures, i.e., "with cause."

- The program can be costly.
- A training program must be implemented.
- Schools often become overly dependent on security personnel and tend to involve them in administrative issues rather than just security issues.

Option 5: Combination of 2, 3 and 4

Schools and school systems vary. No one approach is going to meet everyone's needs all of the time. Flexibility is the key to effective security. At times, a school will need to call on local police for support. This is generally for a short period of time but may, depending on the severity of the problem, extend from several days to several weeks.

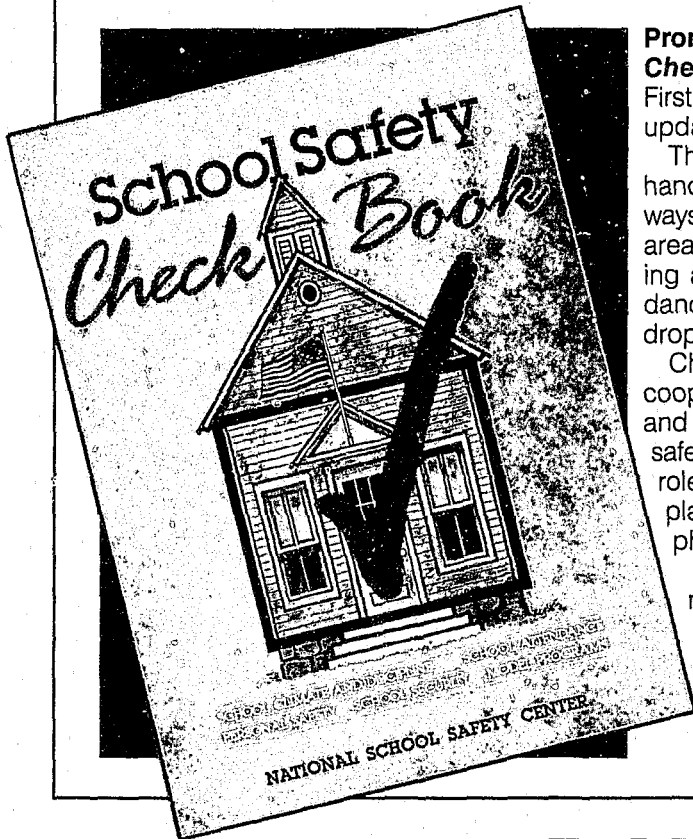
Evening activities, particularly those events that attract large numbers of people and require parking control, often can be effectively handled by contract guard service. It is relatively

inexpensive and releases school security personnel to be on duty inside the event.

Developing a security presence

One final issue needs to be addressed when developing a security presence in and around schools. Regardless of which option is selected, other than doing nothing, every school system needs to establish an office of school security with a competent person as the director or chief. This first step will place the school district in a proactive posture, where incident data will be collected and analysis will be performed.

It is imperative for the success of the security program to have the director of security or chief of security report directly to the district superintendent's office. Security ultimately deals with matters of life and death. The superintendent must have immediate access to school security officials — and school security officials must have immediate access to the superintendent. □



Promoting safe schools is the theme of the **School Safety Check Book**, published by the National School Safety Center. First printed in 1988, a revised 1990 edition now is available with updated statistics and new model program information.

The **School Safety Check Book** is designed as a practitioner's handbook. Chapter I, "School climate and discipline," suggests ways to assess school climate and how to address problem areas. It offers administrators and teachers guidelines for developing an effective school discipline plan. Chapter II, "School attendance," examines the reasons students are absent and eventually drop out of school, giving strategies for increasing attendance.

Chapter III, "Personal safety," shows how schools, working in cooperation with parents, law enforcement, social service agencies and other community members, can promote the health and safety of children. Chapter IV, "School security," describes the role school law enforcement or campus security personnel can play, as well as outlining other methods in making campuses physically safer and more secure.

The **School Safety Check Book** is both a practical resource and a comprehensive guide for any administrator working to promote safer campuses and quality schools.

To order, send a check for \$12 per copy to:

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