

Creating an Alliance to Secure Our K-12 Schools

By Robert Boyd

For a moment, think back to when you attended elementary and secondary school. Many of us reading this article probably went to school at a time when we felt safe there. We participated in fire drills and, if we are old enough, we recall hiding under our desks to practice for a potential Cold War nuclear attack from the Soviet Union.

Thanks to changes in our fire and building codes, it has been more than 55 years since there was a death in a school by fire, and we, of course, defeated the communist threat.

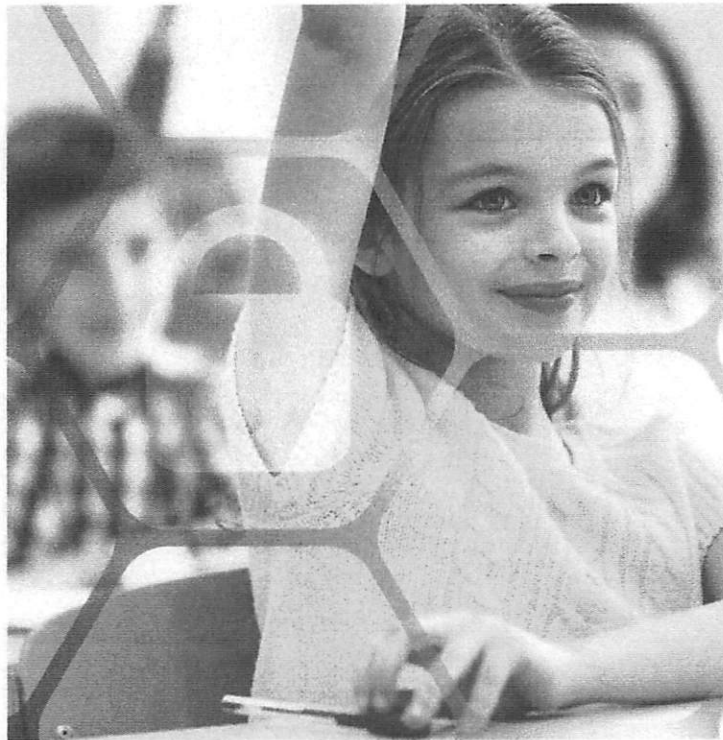
It never occurred to us, as kids, that we might face a serious threat from intruders, let alone other students we might see every day. The words "lockdown" or "shelter in place" had not yet entered the lexicon of America's schools.

Columbine changed how we view safety at schools. Students had committed the violence against other students and teachers. Statistically speaking, most violence occurring in K-12 schools today, especially high schools, is caused by students.

However, I am also reminded that, exactly three years ago, we were jarred again as Sandy Hook showed us that our schools are also vulnerable to similar attacks from intruders from outside the school community. Now, we implement lockdowns in our schools even when an incident occurs nearby; but how safe are those facilities? Unfortunately, without the proper equipment and procedures, a school lockdown may

protect students and teachers from a determined attacker about as well as hiding under desks did from nuclear fallout.

On December 2, 2015, the attacks in San Bernardino added to the threats faced by our schools and other facilities - terrorists seeking soft targets with a likelihood of high casualties.



A little known fact is that education facilities are recognized by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security as critical assets that need protection, as a critical infrastructure subsector. Those responsible for ensure the security of our homeland need to recognize that the need for improved security at our schools now goes beyond traditional concerns. Securing school facilities is as much of a homeland security issue as it is an education one.

The Secure Schools Alliance is taking

the leading role of bringing together educators, law enforcement, parents, corporate and community leaders to improve and ensure the safety and security of America's K-12 schools. The Alliance is working to create opportunities to educate and generate productive conversations around this critical issue. We want to raise the profile of schools under the National Infrastructure Protection Plan and support federal and state assistance for education facilities to address unmet critical infrastructure protection needs. We also believe our communities would be well served by the availability of a national standard for assessing the security of K-12 facilities and are working to identify or develop one.

Do you believe that our schools, students and teachers are critical assets that should be protected? Do we really need to have another mass school or terrorist incident before we take sensible steps to harden our school facilities?

Fortunately, the security industry offers many practical and affordable solutions for improving the security of K-12 facilities. Lets' work together to raise awareness of this important issue and do our part to help keep our children safe.

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