



Can school buildings be safe and welcoming at the same time?

The response to the above question is yes, but only if extra planning and care are taken to nurture a safe environment, free from extremes.



School Security

What does this entail?

I think we can all agree that a prison's environment represents the extreme of safety and security measures. The top priority in planning and designing a prison is to prevent violence and escape. All other design accommodations are secondary.

In school design, however, the primary objective is to create the best environment for learning. Does that mean a learning environment can't be safe? Of course not. A safe space promotes learning by ensuring students are not fearful. So how can a school building fulfill its intent as a place of learning without creating an impression that there is something to fear?

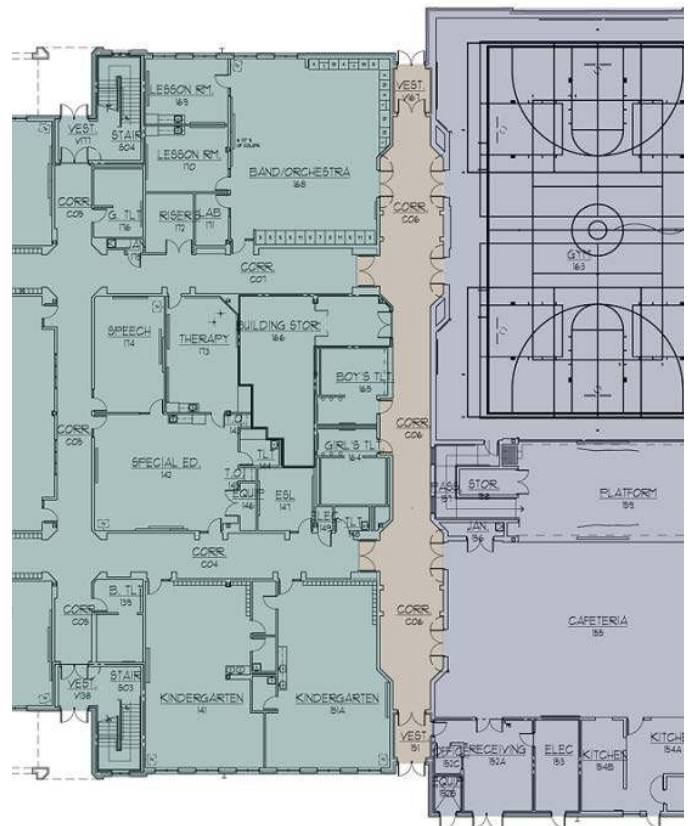
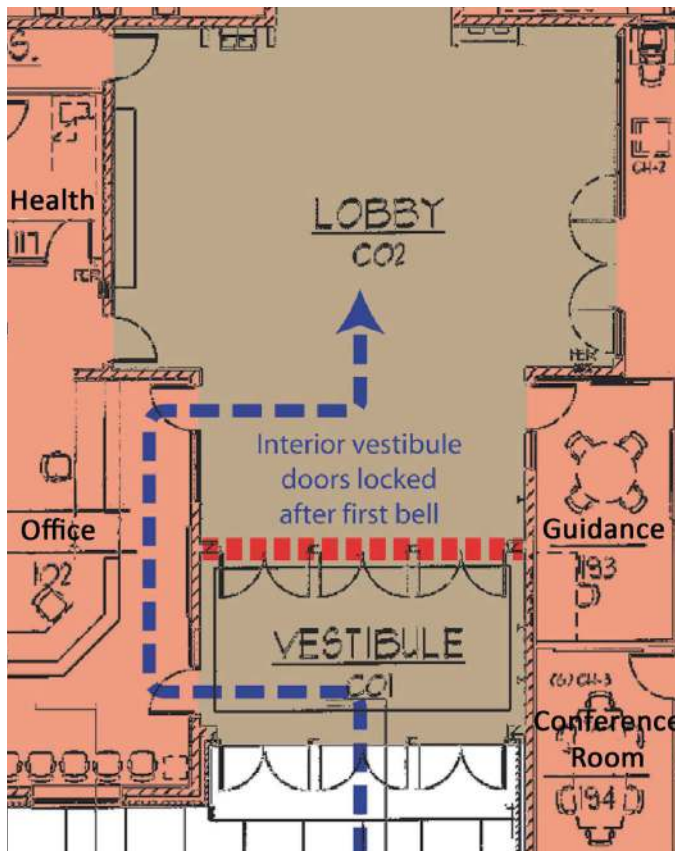
Secured Entrance Sequence

As a school designer, I want the security measures used to be less obvious but remain effective. For this reason, we implement layers of security as an approach. The first layer encountered by visitors, students and staff is at the front door, where we use an approach known as the "secured entrance

sequence."The approach was developed in 1999 as a result of the incident at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado. After the initial surge of students and staff enter in the morning, the interior vestibule doors at the front entrance and all other entrance points to the building are locked. Visitors are required to enter the front vestibule and then pass through the front office for screening by staff. This entrance sequence requires a door from the front vestibule into the school office suite, which may not be possible in older school buildings. In those cases, a camera and buzzer system is used to release the locked doors. While this can be less costly, it is a more obtrusive approach.

Compartmentalization

The next layer of security is compartmentalization. Should a security risk proceed beyond the front entrance, secondary doors located throughout the corridors in the school building can be automatically released, isolating the security risk to a smaller section of the school. These doors remain open during the normal school hours and are only released if a distress



button is pushed. An added feature of these doors is that the building can be sectioned off during evening hours, after cleaning personnel have finished and people may still be in the school using the gym or library. A cautionary note must be given to the placement and direction of swing of these doors. A design professional who knows the building code should provide not only the location, but also the correct hardware sequence to activate the doors.

Limiting Access

The next layer of security revolves around limiting access from other entrance points into the school and camera surveillance throughout the interior and exterior of the school. Card access readers should be used at all other entrances to the building, for use by only authorized personnel and to keep a record of use of these access points.



Unlike key access, card access can record who used the entrance point and at what time. The cameras can then be used to track people circulating throughout the building. Camera locations, card access points and compartmentalizing door locations should be determined by the same firm, so security continuity is maintained.

Safe Areas

Recently, there has been some discussion in the educational community about designing safe rooms or safe areas in our schools. In response to a safe place from an active shooting incident, we do not believe the consolidation of students in

large groupings is a good idea. We do believe, however, that safe areas be designed in schools for natural disasters, such as tornadoes. Hallways can be reinforced easily since they are typically interior spaces and have relatively short structure spans.

Other, more severe, security measures can be contemplated, but when do security measures create fear rather than make you feel safer? While safety and security should be taken seriously, let's keep the education of our students as the top priority in our schools.



Kim Hassell, AIA
800.208.7078
khassell@prarch.com
www.prarch.com

Kim is the Partner in Charge of the education studio at PRA. His mission is to interject creativity and innovation, enhance the quality of education and improve student, teacher and community life.