

## K-12 Site Security

How to implement adequate site security when in charge of an old K-12 school facility?

Even though old schools exhibit unique vulnerabilities, there are *retrofit solutions* that offer administrators *cost-effective alternatives* without having to replace the entire campus.

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## Introduction

For schools, securing their sites usually involves a series of compromises. What you need often conflicts with what you can afford and implement. Budget limits and old facilities appear to be enough impediments to bring up-to-date educational buildings with the latest technologies. Fortunately, even though old schools exhibit unique vulnerabilities, there are retrofit solutions that offer administrators cost-effective alternatives without having to replace the entire campus.

An exceptional and inexpensive way to improve the security of a K-12 school is by installing retrofit access control solutions, which can satisfactorily prevent intruders from entering the site. These products are able to meet the difficult challenges faced by centers of learning, including time, budget, and aged facilities. A diligent risk assessment is necessary to identify areas of concern, sound solutions, and code requirements.

To really address student and faculty safety and upgrade campus access control, going keyless is the first step. Instead of relying on lock-and-key security, wireless locks must be carefully chosen and integrated to protect perimeter, exterior, and interior openings. These solutions render better security and are more convenient than mechanical locks, and are competent to provide K-12 administrators with an invaluable feature: remote lockdowns.

While newer schools are designed with superior safety measures, it is time to take a serious look at upgrading existing classroom and campus security with retrofit access management products.

## A comprehensive security strategy

In order to ensure the safety of students, teachers, and staff, it is important to adhere to the following provisions set by [The National Fire Protection Association \(NFPA\)](#).

- Classroom doors can remain locked to prevent intruders from gaining access. However, to guarantee that people can still evacuate during an emergency, doors need to have the ability to be unlocked from outside by authorized staff or first responders.
- Barricades and other similar devices are not permitted by the NFPA to protect classrooms. They can impede first responders from quickly entering the room, or they can be used by a bad actor to trap people inside and keep first responders from getting in.
- Exit doors leading directly to the outside can be locked from the outside. However, from the inside, they must allow people to exit the building without needing a key, tool, PIN, or effort. This requirement allows individuals to easily leave during an emergency.



Implementing access control options, besides the traditional keyhole locks, is urgent, as mechanical locks are a costly and ineffective method for safeguarding schools. For instance, if there is a breach or a key is lost or stolen, each compromised lock must be changed. This is a problem that can be completely avoided with wireless devices.

## Specific requirements for classroom doors



- The classroom door must be lockable *from the egress side* without having to open it.
- The lock cannot require special knowledge, a key, or tool to engage or disengage *from the egress side* of the door.
- The lock must be installed at an acceptable height: between 34 in. to 48 in. above the floor.
- The classroom door must have the ability to be unlocked and opened from outside the classroom with the necessary key or credential. This is important to allow in first responders when needed.
- Staff must be drilled in the engagement and release of the retrofit locks.

## EMERGENCIES AND DOOR LOCKING FUNCTIONS

The below are the exemplary entry and exit functions doors should perform when an emergency takes place in school.

EMERGENCY	ENTRY FUNCTION	EXIT FUNCTION
<b>Fires</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Allow the entry of firefighters and rescue personnel.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Allow direct, unimpeded occupant egress to the exterior from all occupied spaces, at all times.</li> </ul>
<b>Vandalism</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prevent unauthorized entry into the school and designated spaces within it.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Slow or prevent the exit of unauthorized people within the school if police are called.</li> </ul>
<b>Student Misconduct</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prevent students from entering unsupervised or unauthorized spaces.</li> <li>Allow rapid entry of school staff when problems (bullying, fighting) arise.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prevent students from barricading themselves in unauthorized or unsupervised spaces.</li> </ul>
<b>Active Shooter</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prevent entry of dangerous people into the school and into occupied spaces within it.</li> <li>Facilitate rapid lockdowns.</li> <li>Allow speedy entry of first responders.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prevent perpetrators from barricading themselves in a classroom or other space, particularly if holding hostages.</li> </ul>

## RETROFIT ACCESS CONTROL SOLUTIONS

Retrofit locks are a type of lock that can fit your current door and lock frame, eliminating the need to replace or reconstruct the lock hole size. As they fit on top of your existing deadbolt, retrofit upgrades are the perfect solution for elementary and high schools. Moreover, wireless devices avoid the greatest cost and inconvenience of traditional access control – the wiring at the door. They are simple to set up, use, and manage. The finish of the lock could also be customized to match the color and style of the door and environment.

Ideally, for educational institutions, locks are *keyless* and *wireless* in order to provide a safer school environment and decisively protect people, places, and property. Nevertheless, standalone and offline locks are a quick and easy-to-install alternative. Without the complexity of a networked system, these locks can still help campuses meet basic highsecurity requirements.

Contrastingly, wireless options offer unparalleled advantages. Once they are installed, they can grant access to authorized users with a phone app or fob via a secure Bluetooth signal, helping you successfully secure classrooms, gyms, labs, recreation buildings, health centers, servers, and the staff lounge. Further, this technology allows administrators to:

- Monitor specific users.
- Have access to real-time door monitoring.
- Personalize access to places, individuals, and specific times.
- Quickly issue, modify, or delete credentials without having to physically re-key or change locks.
- Connect to a centralized monitoring platform to control every single entry and exit point throughout the facility with an effortless installation and software compatibility.

- Lock down the school remotely with the press of a button, instantly creating a secure environment for all occupants.
- Save money.



#### **PERIMETER AND EXTERIOR DOORS**

A safe school starts with a secure perimeter, which includes primary and secondary entrances. Ideally, perimeter protection deters or prevents criminals from entering the campus. Extending access control to perimeter openings and secondary entrances can be accomplished with advanced retrofit devices that are both efficacious and economical. These locks provide greater security than mechanical options and should have the following features:

- Remote locking for a centralized lockdown
- Door status remote monitoring in real-time
- Wireless connection to a first-class access control software solution
- Integrated wireless and offline mode
- Remote scheduling for locking and unlocking
- Streamlined design
- Seamless integration
- Cost-effective (reduced wiring and labor expenses)



Perimeter locks must be certified for outdoor use, and fully sealed and coated for waterproof resistance. Depending on the location of the school, they could even be required to be windstorm rated.

Each exterior door (cafeteria, auditoriums, or front office vestibules) performs a specific function that must be carefully accommodated when designing and installing a unified access control system. Nonetheless, every door must effectively control access, while allowing for free egress from the inside.



Since exterior doors tend to have the highest traffic in schools, administrators must ensure they abide by fire and life safety codes. Observing [ADA requirements](#) is also necessary. With that in mind, touch-sense devices could be integrated to operate locks with just a light touch, making egress simple for persons of all ages and abilities.

To strengthen the security of students, teachers, and staff, a transition from mechanical devices to wireless alternatives in exterior doors should be considered by stakeholders.

## INDOOR SECURITY

For decades, classroom security has been inadequate. By utilizing mechanical locks, in the event of a school lockdown, the teacher is supposed to open the door, step into the hallway, lock the door, step back inside the classroom, and close the door. Undeniably, this time-consuming process exposes children and teachers unnecessarily to potentially dangerous situations.

A poor way to solve this dilemma was to keep the door latch locked at all times. However, this recommendation allowed students, in unsupervised classrooms, to lock others out. If the room was empty and the teacher forgot her key, it also posed a series of issues. For instance, interrupting other classes to gain a way in or going to administration for the master key, all while losing valuable instructional time.

There is a better way to secure students and teachers in classrooms. Wireless readers offer elegant and keyless access control, fast integration into managed systems, longterm performance due to the utilization of highly durable materials, compatibility, and most importantly, enhanced security for everybody in campus.

It is key to consider administrative offices separately, as they often use glass door installations to allow staff to conveniently monitor students. These doors represent an important investment schools make to improve the appearance of the building. Therefore, the aesthetics of the solution should be evaluated to not compromise the look of the door. A good option are electromagnetic locks since they can be easily mounted with glass door brackets, and do not have visible wires.

In an electromagnetic lock, the magnetic field secures the door and electronically controls when doors are locked or unlocked. However, if the power goes off, the door will be unlocked. This device can also be used in doors that require a basic or inexpensive level of access control.

### **BUDGET CONCERNS**

Access control with wireless devices is a remarkably flexible, scalable and reasonable solution. It offers K-12 school administrators with unmatched security without the wiring, conduit runs, access panels, trenching, or drilling. Not only do these disrupt learning activities, but they increase installation costs and time. Notably, schools — old and new — can stick to their often limited budget by adding locks to the system when needs develop or when they have enough financial resources to do so.

Despite the accessibility a modern access control solution offers educational facilities, the coronavirus stimulus bill, CARES Act, is also a promising way for administrators to obtain the funds needed to increase the safety of their schools. Local school districts are required to develop and submit spending plans that include information on mitigation strategies and solutions for a safe reopening and an explanation on how the spending will address the needs of disadvantaged students.

Certainly, implementing technologies like advanced access control with touchless door activation will eliminate high-touch points, from the perimeter to interior doors. Touchless access is the best decision for clean, hygienic day-to-day operations. This advantage can be amplified by utilizing an antimicrobial finish for high usage openings to protect kids and staff from bacteria and microbe transfer. Likewise, students with disabilities could be greatly supported with door automation.

## A QUICK AND EFFICIENT LOCKDOWN SYSTEM

Identifying the best lockdown strategy for your K-12 institution comes after a comprehensive hardware audit. Knowing the current status of security for every door in campus will avoid confusion and reduce response times when an emergency happens.

With an expert integrator, the right access control system can be adopted to protect the school perimeter, building perimeter, and classroom perimeter.



Although an access control system is probably the most critical component of any school safety strategy, when it comes to active shooters, access control needs to work in conjunction with an effective lockdown strategy. Primarily, leaders in educational establishments should have the ability to manage each entrance, for them to lockdown on demand every door, as soon as a threat arises.

Manual lockdowns should be avoided, if possible. Instead, it is recommended to utilize electronic door locks, connected wirelessly. This sophisticated solution allows teachers and administrators to remotely lockdown doors from anywhere in the classroom or the campus, with the press of a button, without unnecessarily placing students and staff in harm's way. Free egress is maintained in this function.

It is time to modernize your lockdown strategy if teachers are still obliged to step out of the room to lock the door, if there are doors that can be locked and unlocked by anyone, and if doors do not close automatically. In addition, door devices that slow down the movement of a door are a serious vulnerability that should be addressed.

## Conclusion

School security is a paramount factor for students, parents, and staff, regardless if the building is new or old. Although aged K-12 schools were not designed considering current threats, there are multiple retrofit physical security solutions that can — and should — be implemented to address crime. Access Control, arguably one of the most important components in a security system, offers a low-cost, effective, and flexible solution for schools that feel limited by the outdatedness of their campus and budget.

Getting rid of keys is the starting point to improve the security of your campus. With wireless access control products, an ideal learning environment can be built, while creating a more integrated way to operate the facility. Special thought should be given to the different doors available, their specific function, look, and location, to utilize the right retrofit lock device.

The benefits of upgrading K-12 schools with wireless locks are significant. They finally allow administrators to achieve real-time monitoring of every entry point and have total control when an emergency occurs thanks to remote lockdown functionality. The transition can be done at the pace of the school, as locks can be added to the system gradually.

Moreover, wireless locks provide a higher level of security than their mechanical equivalent. They fit seamlessly into your building and ultimately help you create a safe, yet inviting educational setting.

Contact your local office today for an on-site, no-cost security assessment.  
For more information call **800.261.2041** or visit [security101.com](https://security101.com)