

# SCHOOL

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DAN DEMLAND/STAFF ARCHITECT  
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Safe & Secure Schools







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# Reflecting on Sandy Hook:

Among the lessons learned is, be creative.

By Sarat Pratapchandran

**O**N A HOT ARIZONA afternoon, I enter the State's largest high school campus, passing through security to meet Officer Kevin Quinn, president of the National Association of School Resource Officers (NASRO). Dressed in police uniform and with his car parked on campus, Officer Quinn is the quintessential face of security in this 80-acre campus, home to 3,500 students.

Quinn and his band of school resource officers (SRO's) are emerging as the face of campus security in the wake of the Sandy Hook incident that occurred on December 14, 2012. A 48-page Sandy Hook Report that came almost a year later details the chilling account of the incident, but it's purpose was not to reflect on why or how Adam Lanza took the lives of 27 people.

According to security analysts, Lanza entered the school through a path of least resistance. In common man's terms, this is the easiest entry point for someone intent on harming occupants of a facility.

"The path of least resistance for Lanza on Dec. 14, 2012 was the unavailability of an SRO at the elementary school," says Quinn. On that fateful day, SROs were

stationed at both the middle and high schools at the Newton School District in Connecticut.

"The public never realized the role of SRO's until an unforgettable event like Sandy Hook happened. Until then, we kept talking about SROs as a good idea," he says.

Since Sandy Hook, there have been over 72 school shootings in the United States and the tide of killings has not slowed down.

This worrisome trend keeps individuals like Dan Demland, R.A., architect at Arizona's School Facilities Board, constantly on his toes. Demland gets very emotional when he talks about Sandy Hook, and this reflects on his passion to help others and to do everything possible to prevent future incidents.

"Every day there are 900,000 children who attend schools in Arizona and three are my own," he says, adding to his sense of responsibility in securing the built facility that houses students and staff.

Demland has conducted extensive research using the Sandy Hook report findings and other sources to find out the causes for the incident and their relation to the built environment. He has revised the Arizona School Facilities Board's guidelines on creating safe schools and now provides resources for school district officials at the local and national level on common sense ideas to

enhance school security.

Demland encourages school districts to use the Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles, which include: 1) natural access control, 2) natural surveillance and 3) territorial reinforcement.

According to Demland, once school starts, the administration must have control over all entry points and all class rooms must be locked from the inside.

The Arizona School Facilities Board guidelines recommends that all schools have to include perimeter fencing and doors should have sidelights at doors so that "you are able to see what's happening inside the classroom."

Architects like Demland recommend an "onion layered" approach to school security, beginning from the school's exterior and entering into the core of the school.

He advises that entry to the school should be through a sally port that is hardened against attack, meaning not to use just glass. A panic button connected to the school's emergency management system should lock down all points of entry.

While several measures can be recommended, "no one action can solve the problem and what we need is an integrated approach."

Meanwhile, following Sandy Hook, there has been a surge in demand for security protection devices in schools.

Senior Security Consultant, Jim Jensen at Allegion says that in the post-Sandy Hook era, "Schools have become more focused on security. All school districts have dramatically increased security and have purchased more equipment. Schools don't have much funding and manufacturers are creating solutions that are affordable."

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"We have seen a huge demand in devices like these as they offer a localized solution," Jensen says.

Schools have also started hiring private security personnel. According to Dan Swindall, President & CEO of Blackstone Security Services, Inc., a business that provides private security personnel, "properly trained private security officers can actually enhance school safety."



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Swindall emphasizes “properly trained” because “you can take someone off the street and put them in a school. The school environment is different than standing a post at an office building or other commercial site. With proper training, private security can help make schools safer without negatively impacting the education process.”

**Talking to kids and relationship building is the most important thing. Kids share a lot of information ahead of time especially through social media and other channels. They report stuff that they think may not be good for the school.**

Alongside, there has been a call to create more psychological profiles of individuals like Lanza. A recent interview with Peter Lanza, the father of Adam Lanza in *The New Yorker* describes in detail the “terror of unknowable children.”

Adam Lanza had a host of mental health problems growing up.

His parents included a father who had no contact with his son for at least two years prior to the incident and an overprotective mom who lived in perennial paranoia just next door.



IMAGE © LITTLE WHALE

Until, one day, Adam decided to do the heinous killings. Society erupted with talk of gun violence, stricter enforcement, psychological profiling and anxious parents started lobbying for more security at schools.

Despite the call for larger psychological profiles of potential shooters, officers like Quinn believe that this doesn't fit the mold anymore. “Talking to kids and relationship building is the most important thing. Kids share a lot of information ahead of time especially through social media and other channels. They report stuff that they think may not be good for the school,” he says.

School Resource Officers serve as positive adult influences for students and help them stay at school. Some kids may not have the best home life and sometimes an SRO can be a great influence in their lives. These uniformed police officers now number between 10,000 and 14,000 nationwide. Since Sandy Hook, NASRO, National Association of School Resource Officers, has seen requests for training double in a short span of time. “This shows that there is greater demand for SROs in school districts,” he says.

Demland also highlights the importance of SROs as an effective crime deterrent. An armed police officer and a vehicle parked on campus clearly instill a sense of security.

Demland adds that with proper facility planning, some of the “paths of least resistance” can effectively be controlled. For instance, a vestibule at Sandy Hook could have provided controlled access and wouldn't have let the shooter in. The school had great day lighting with most windows facing the parking lot. On a security perspective, this gave Lanza a great view of what was happening inside.

“We need to balance day lighting with security. The shooter breached through the side window bypassing the vestibule. The second set of doors were clearly visible offering information to the shooter how

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to breach campus security. Eight shots were fired and did not touch the vestibule. He could see in and got in through a big hole he created on the glass. He saw everything because of the glass. The shooter took the quicker path of least resistance entering next to the vestibule and this took just a single breach. Case hard-

ened resistance must be created to prevent these breaches," says Demland.

The glazing on the glass was breached with shots and schools should consider an alternative material than glazing next to secured or potential breaching points.

On the day the incident happened, the

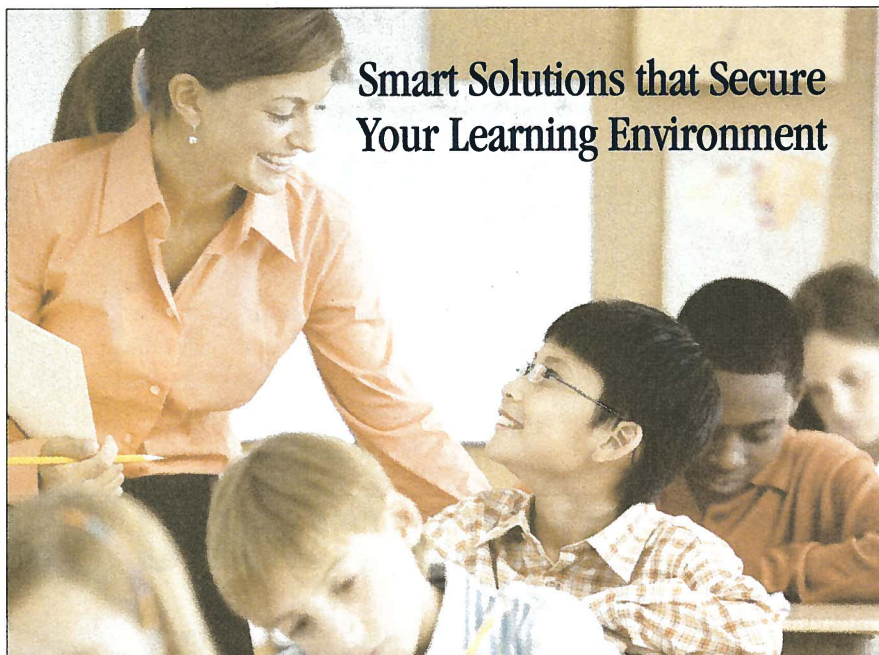
school met the criteria for securing itself. There was just one entry point and all secondary entrances were easily controlled.

Following his meticulous study of the Sandy Hook report and after extensive conversations with security officials, Demland is proposing what he calls an "incursion theory." The basis of this concept is that the perpetrator of an active shooting event in a school will only partially penetrate a building or space out of a sense of speed. This is not an exclusive activity. However, with such short event times in these shootings (only minutes) an incursion area may be a way to control the event and costs could be limited by case hardening of a building.

"This will allow for some costs to be spread over a longer period which may be a cost containment strategy," he says.

Demland also suggests the following security precautions:

- Response time once an incident occurs is paramount. An "incursion area" in front of the school could accelerate a faster response to the incident.
- Schools should opt for an integrated approach towards security as new schools are being built or old ones get renovated.
- High-risk campuses could seek a police substation and this could act as a great deterrent.
- The best protection for a campus is to prohibit entry for potential perpetrators.
- Schools should invest in a complete SRO program that can serve as a great crime deterrent and enhance the confidence of all occupants. We need to remember the old adage "power perceived is power achieved." According to Swindall, private security personnel can also play a role in school security by interacting very positively with school resource officers. The National Association of School Resource Officers offers a training program that prepares private security to act as support for SRO's by teaching them the proper interaction with students, recognizing disciplinary problems versus security



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issues and so forth.

- We should avoid a prison feel in a school as this will instill insecurity in the minds of people who use facilities
- Operations have a huge impact on school security as much or even more than facility design.
- Have an emergency response plan and rehearse it constantly. Do not put plans in the bookshelf — implement them. According to security business owner, Swindall, a major example that carries over into school safety is emergency response preparation. “An emergency response plan should actually be structured to prevent emergencies, not respond to them. You develop an emergency response plan, update it periodically and have everyone participate in practice drills regularly.
- Stakeholder buy-in is imperative — students, teachers, staff, parents and community support is the only way to ensure safety of a campus
- Use vision restricting sally port type of controlled entry with limited potential intruder visual reconnaissance as it will be better than an open vestibule type of control entry point.
- Panic button types of systems may be the best notification systems early in an event situation.
- Cameras work mostly as forensic tools and may have mild deterrent effects.

Sometimes, adding security may not be the answer to all problems. A case in example is the Orchard Gardens pilot school in Roxbury, Mass., that eliminated security and replaced it with a corps of art teachers and has achieved a dramatic turnaround in performance and fall in security incidents.

Or, take the case of the Oak Hills High School in Cincinnati, Ohio, that has invested in a full-time safety dog trained to sniff out drugs and guns. The 7½-month-old, 60-pound Dutch Shepherd named Atticus will monitor the school with security personnel during daytime. At night, Atticus will go home with the principal.

And, several schools in Florida have added counselors, showing higher graduation rates and less violent incidents.

At the end of the day, individuals like Demland encourage school officials to be “creative.” For, preventing another incident is all what we can do. Unlike health-

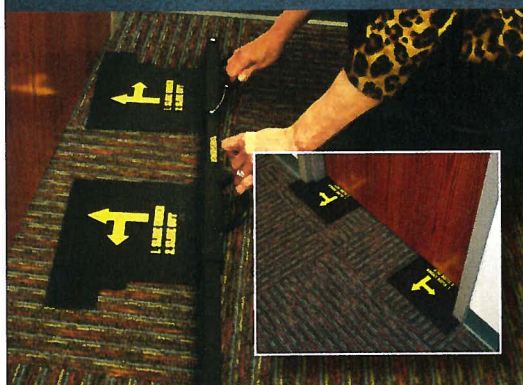
care or any other social determinant, we cannot prevent another weird kid with a dose of medicine or good advice. **SPD**

» **Sarat Pratapchandran** is a writer specializing in education, environment and healthcare. His website is [www.lettersnatcher.com](http://www.lettersnatcher.com).

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