

Prioritizing School Security at Onslow County Schools

A CASE STUDY



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A joint project with [Rice Security & Consulting](#)

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Onslow County runs along the east coast of North Carolina, with the county seat in Jacksonville, roughly 100 miles from Fayetteville. The school district has 62 K-12 schools. When tragedy struck at a high school, the superintendent formed a cross-functional team at the district level. Their mission was to identify and resolve vulnerabilities by conducting an onsite security assessment at every school.

Phase I



Rice Security and Foxhole Consulting began the engagement by working with the district team. As had been suggested, the group's representation was broad, from SROs to faculty, janitorial to transportation. Diverse views from inside the system hierarchy are essential to securing the schools, students, and staff.

At the kickoff meeting, project objectives were outlined, as well as the methodology, and timeline. We introduced Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) as the preferred process to evaluate the current security environment and identify the necessary steps for increasing security within the school district.

Our consultants met with the team as a group to facilitate discussion on known issues, concerns, and constraints. The next step was interviews with individuals or small groups to better understand the current state of the system. Lastly, we were provided policies, procedures, and plans relevant to safety and security for review, including emergency plans for multiple scenarios. Critical tasks were as follows:

1. Create a cohesive district-wide plan that includes Security and Safety as an integral part of the overall development and employee onboarding.
2. Increase basic and intermediate safety and security policies universally applied across each school.
3. Advise and assist district leadership with developing a District Strategic Plan & Safety Process.
4. Advise and assist in the development of the District School Crisis Plan.
5. District-Wide Emergency Action Plan Development and Analysis (Community Approach and Coordination)
6. Provide recommendations and technical support for security operations and implementation.

The project duration was six months.

Phase II

Armed with a macro vision from the district team, the individual school assessments begin. The approach is two-pronged: assess the alignment against district objectives and find any security gaps and vulnerabilities in the building. It's important to clarify what we're doing and why. When insufficient information is provided, rumors create anxiety and staff may be uncomfortable sharing what they know.



SCHOOL WALK-THROUGH

We send a two-person team to conduct the walk-through at each of the 62 schools. The decision-maker at each school is the principal, but the assessment team is composed of faculty members, SROs, janitorial staff, and transportation staff. This team will lead us around the building and the grounds.

The value of a security assessment is its 360 ° view. From the parking lot to the bus garage to the entry/exit points and into the classrooms, an outside team brings fresh eyes. Employees get comfortable in their workspace and can normalize potential security risks. An experienced consultant will notice minute details that get overlooked in the day-to-day.

Examples would be doors that are propped open, a sticky deadbolt on a classroom door, or blind spots in the camera coverage. It's not unusual for high-traffic areas like auditoriums or cafeterias to lack cameras, despite being a large gathering space for students and staff.

Moving out of the main building and onto the grounds, we see the potential for new security hazards. Sports fields are rarely covered by cameras, yet subject to large, publicly scheduled events. In the bus garage, tools are openly accessible with little control over visitors or deliveries. Typically, there is no connection to systems used in the main building, creating a blind spot should an incident occur.



The school assessment team shares any specific concerns and relevant history of incidents, if any. They provide documentation for review, including an emergency plan, lockdown procedures, and evacuation protocols. The school resource officers are an excellent source for discussion on response times, engagement with the community, and first responders. They are the onsite security force should a shooter approach or enter the building.

SYSTEM REVIEWS

Though all schools are different in design, geolocation, and age, there are some common denominators that we use for gap analysis. Schools may place different values on each, depending on their capabilities, priorities, and budgets. For example, IT connectivity can be an issue in rural environments. Focus on these areas will quickly identify gaps and vulnerabilities that need immediate attention.

- Technology: cameras, a visitor management and emergency alert system, badge access, and alarms
- Communications: public address system, two-way radios, internal call lists
- Crisis Management Plan: Prevention, Protection, Mitigation, Response, Recovery
- Quality Management Systems: External areas and systems connected to school grounds

Phase III



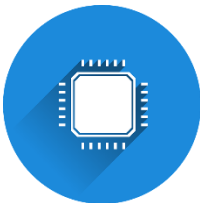
The deliverables were presented in a concise final report presented to the district team. It included prioritized responses and actions, as well as recommendations and insights on maintaining a security culture in each facility. The assessment team identified and listed trending gaps observed at more than 50% of OCS schools and Facilities

Deliverables included the following:

1. Provide analysis for individual school Crisis Management Plans and provide recommendations.
2. Increase basic and intermediate safety and security policies at each school by teaching professional terms and techniques.
3. Create a cohesive district-wide plan that includes Safety and Security as an integral part of the overall development and employee onboarding.
4. Increase basic and intermediate safety and security policies applied universally across each school.

Each of the investigative focus areas was evaluated.

TECHNOLOGY



Decisions about technology are made at the district level and implemented at the school level. We assess surveillance cameras, visitor management, and emergency alert systems to verify effectiveness, connectivity issues, and training schedules. Every platform and application is reviewed for gaps. High-priority vulnerabilities are highlighted as actionable insights.

COMMUNICATIONS



Communication infrastructure is often supported by technology. Public address systems and the use of two-way radios were well supported. The PACE method (short for Primary, Alternate, Contingency, and Emergency) assesses gaps at each location based on scenarios the school may encounter. Inconsistencies between classroom comms and a lack of a dedicated phone matrix are typical.

CRISIS MANAGEMENT PLAN



These documents are developed at the district level and passed to the schools. Inconsistent document formats, no heading to identify each school, and no formal MOUs on emergency evacuation locations are common gaps. Document management is not coordinated and there are typically inconsistencies in the documents that range from minor to major.

QUALITY MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS (QMS)



The QMS deals with the security of third-party systems and external elements that integrate with the school. Examples include improperly secured storage buildings on campus grounds or dormant inaccurate volunteer accounts still in the system. Another common area of vulnerability is the carpool pick-up and entry point.

Summary



Though NC schools have not experienced an active shooter incident, the number of threats continues to rise. Multiple students have been caught bringing guns to various schools, including a nine-year-old who brought a loaded gun to an elementary school.

Our team was able to identify vulnerabilities in roughly half of the schools. Some were minor, and others required immediate attention and were presented to leadership in real time. Collaboration is the key component in the success of an assessment. District and school leadership provided invaluable insights and candid feedback essential to improving the safety and security of the schools and the community. The majority of high-priority security gaps were addressed immediately or a solution was set in motion in response.

The gap analysis enlightened both the district team and school teams of the potential jeopardy schools are facing. That awareness increased their commitment to security practices and protocols.

ASSESSMENT OUTCOMES

- Teachers and staff were generally very receptive to changes which enabled accountability from a security standpoint by the students, especially during a real-time emergency.
- When recognizing a potential threat, faculty, SROs, and staff will alert the office immediately.
- All schools embodied a well-rehearsed proper lockdown procedure. Announcement: “Students and Staff LOCKDOWN, LOCKDOWN, LOCKDOWN”
- Stakeholders and County officials better understand their environment and enforce policies and procedures based on lessons learned.
- "Training and the understanding of the safety systems are the school's leadership's responsibility.
- School Safety is the number one priority of the school’s faculty and staff.
- Every school security system possessed a different challenge and was examined and tested to enable Now, Next, and Future actions to analyze plans and procedures.
- Each school received a documented copy of the report/gap once completed.
- An SRO is a considerable resource that was used in the determent of any unsuspecting activity, this implementation could be a vital source of security.
- Operational contingency plans, layouts, and camera systems were all checked for effectiveness during real-time emergencies.