

Creating the position of “School Security Director”

1- Reasons to have a Security Director:

The modern threats that face every school in America make it clear that security can no longer be seen as a luxury, an add on, or an afterthought. Instead, security must be part and parcel of every school districts everyday activities, policies, protocols and plans.

Many school districts assign an administrator such as an assistant principal, counselor, or teacher to be in charge of school security. While this is better than not having anyone paying attention to security, it is certainly not the best practice as these individuals will be pulled in various directions competing for their time and attention.

Having a person with the proper qualifications, skills, experience and temperament assigned as a full time Director of Security, charged with ensuring the school(s) in the district are as prepared to prevent or respond to violence, is essential to having a safe campus.

Currently only 38% of school districts in America have a full-time person exclusively assigned to security concerns. Many districts cite the cost as a reason they do not have a full time Director of Security. A full-time security director can cost anywhere from \$30,000 to \$130,000 in salary plus the cost of benefits so it is not an insignificant expense, but it is one that must be recognized as necessary and budgeted for.

Relying on staff members, no matter how capable, to handle all of the unique aspects of school security as well as covering their normal non-security related duties creates a security gap and can lead to failures in the school security profile which places everyone at risk.

Investing in a highly skilled and experienced individual to oversee all of the district's security concerns as their primary duty is the best practice for school safety and something every district should strive for.

2- Qualities of a Security Director

When asked, many people will say a retired police officer is the best choice for a security director since they have many years of training in safety issues and they are accustomed to taking action during dangerous or violent situations. There is some truth to this belief, but there is another level of concern beyond simply finding a retired officer to act as your Director of Security.

Police officers, like every other member of our society come with unique sets of positive skills and gifts, but they can also come with uniquely negative qualities that would not make them suited for working in a school environment. It is here that we have to determine what qualities are best suited for working in the school environment.

To quantify those qualities, we need to define the working environment more specifically. There is a big difference between working in a high school environment and working in a PreK to-grade 5 environment.

Some of the things we should look at include, but are not limited to:

- Age of the students
- Location of the school- urban, suburban, rural
- Crime trends in the surrounding areas of the school(s)
- Crime trends inside the school(s)
- Staff to student ratio
- Community expectations

These different factors will help you define the qualities needed in a security director as well as what specific skill sets the director will need to properly interact and serve the school population and district needs.

Not every police officer has the same career experience, training and knowledge, although many non-police officers believe every officer is well versed in every aspect of investigation and skill. This is not true and can lead a district to hire someone who may have been a great narcotics detective with an impressive 25 years of police experience and accomplishments, but no real experience in the needs of a school or how a school actually functions. This is why identifying the specific skills sets is vital to bring the best possible candidate into the school.

Some of these personal qualities and skill sets we need to look for in a potential School Security Director include, but are not limited to:

- Age
- Physical ability
- Career experience
- Personality and temperament
- Experience working with children and young adults
- Knowledge of school security issues and training
- Intelligence (intellect)
- Emotional intelligence
- History of compassion and empathy
- Communication skills (Public speaking and presenting)
- Writing ability
- Stress tolerance
- Investigative experience

These qualities should be identified in any candidate for the position of security director and used as a barometer for the vetting process and pre-employment questions used in the hiring process.

3- Skills and experience of the Security Director

A school security director will be called on to handle many professional tasks such as public speaking, writing and reviewing policy and protocols, conducting investigations, interviewing students, staff, and parents, intervening in potential danger, calming upset people, investigating and comparing electronic security equipment, interacting with special needs students and parents, interacting with administrators and board members, planning events, running drills, leading other security personnel and training students and staff.

These are a wide range of skills sets that a district should consider when choosing a security director. To help in the vetting process the district should look for the candidate to have the following skills, experience and training to include but not be limited to:

- Investigative training and experience
- Public speaking experience
- Policy writing and review experience
- Leadership, supervisory experience
- Interview experience
- De-escalation training
- School security training from a state, local or federal agency
- Training experience and certification
- Planning and running drills and other security events such as evacuation, re-unification, bomb threat response and active shooter response training.

- Interacting with youth of all ages and experience in the concern's students have.
- An understanding of security equipment (Cameras, visitor management, security badges and fobs, emergency notification systems, radios)
- An understanding of the dynamics of bullying, harassment and suicidal ideation.

These skills sets are essential for the success of the security director and the school district as the security profile is upgraded or changed.

4- Vetting the Security Director

In order to choose the best possible candidate and district must be prepared to properly evaluate the skills, abilities and experience of a candidate.

The vetting process should include a written response to the job opportunity that asks for experience in the skills and abilities cited above. This will help in the screening process and weed out unqualified candidates early on in the process.

A list of questions should also be prepared for the district interviewers of the potential candidates to use in qualifying the candidates.

A background investigation, not a simple "Check" should be required of any candidate and should include a waiver form so the district can get specific previous job information and performance information from previous employers of the candidates as per local law.

A set of scenarios should be used in the interview process that require the candidate to consider and provide a complete answer on how a scenario could be handled, this will help gauge experience.

The interviewers should assign a score to all answers to narrow the field of candidates further until you have 3 qualified applicants. The conduct an interview with the superintendent or board to make the final choice.

Reality: Not every good candidate will have every skill, experience and training listed, but the district should attempt to find the most qualified candidate available. The district may decide to re-post the position if a quality candidate is not identified or the district can choose the best candidate and send him/ her for training in areas they are not fully qualified for before beginning employment.

A good candidate does not have to be a person with a law enforcement background, but experience shows these candidates are often best suited to deal with the realities and rigors of security work and they accustomed to acting under dangerous conditions of great stress.

5- Questions for the director:

Asking the right questions will help you evaluate the candidates experience and skill level. The questions can include but not be limited to:

- What is your experience in law enforcement or a security related field?
- How long were you in that position?
- What were your specific assignments?
- Why are you no longer employed by your previous employer?
- Have you ever worked in a school environment?
- Have you ever worked with youth?

- What specific school security training and experience do you have?
- Are you a certified trainer?
- Have you ever run a lock down drill?
- Have you ever created and presented a training program?
- What is your investigative experience?
- Do you understand the unique working environment of a school?
- How well do you handle stress?
- Describe a dangerous situation you were in and how you handled it.
- What is your experience with electronic security equipment?

Conclusion:

Choosing a school security director is an important decision. The person you choose will lead your efforts to keep everyone in your school(s) safe and secure in an emergency.

Getting the most qualified candidate requires diligent effort to identify that candidate. Your best candidate will be a person with the proper temperament for working in a school, with the requisite knowledge of school security issues and experience conducting diverse and unique investigations. Planning security drills and activities that will enhance security and are easily understood by students and staff.

The best candidate has experience with schools and students and is a good investigator with the personnel qualities of patience, compassion and empathy. The best candidate will be able to function without a great deal of oversight and will be able communicate effectively to students, staff and parents.

