

AN OVERVIEW OF COMPREHENSIVE SAFETY AUDITS FOR SCHOOLS

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INTRODUCTION

It is a leading practice for K-12 schools to conduct a comprehensive and objective audit of their safety, security, and emergency preparedness every three to five years. Such an audit (sometimes called a “risk audit” or “vulnerability audit”) should serve as a predictive tool to identify a wide range of external and internal risks, hazards and threats that your school might encounter. The audit also should identify the likelihood that the school would successfully recognize, respond to, and resolve any such incident. Below are some of the types of incidents any school might face:

- Acts of terrorism (explosive, biological and chemical threats)
- Armed intruders or youth with covert weapons
- Workplace violence directed against staff
- Street crimes (auto theft, robbery, assault, rape, gang violence)
- Fighting, bullying, harassment, and sexual misconduct
- Sexual molestation by staff or students
- Abducted and runaway youth
- Suicide
- Vehicular-pedestrian injuries
- Violence at sports and special events
- Malicious food tampering
- Access to roofs and mechanical equipment
- Access to chemical hazards
- Trespassing and loitering on campus
- Staff failing to understand or execute emergency response plans
- Non-compliance with life-safety regulations

When conducting a comprehensive school audit, the auditors integrate three types of information to provide them with a unique view into the school’s strengths and vulnerabilities:

1. A Document Audit
2. Key Staff Interviews
3. On-Site Safety Audit



THE DOCUMENT AUDIT

A *Document Audit* compares your school's safety policies, procedures and processes against applicable regulations, industry standards and leading practices. Although all schools have some written safety policies, those policies are not typically translated into written procedures that can be measured, or into defined processes that ensure compliance across all sites and departments.

The auditors should receive and analyze the schools existing policies, procedures, rules, and written processes, then summarize the apparent strengths and vulnerabilities. Finally, the findings should be reviewed with school leaders. Some of the documents an auditor might review include:

- Current policies adopted by the board and pending policies
- Policies that may be missing
- Codes of conduct for staff, volunteers, youth, and guests
- Emergency response procedures
- Crisis communication procedures (i.e., how leadership manages a crisis)
- Student/youth threat audit procedures
- Child abuse reporting procedures
- Complaint and resolution procedures
- Accident and incident reporting forms
- Safety inspection forms
- Staff and volunteer screening and selection procedures
- Visitor management procedures
- Transportation procedures
- Corrective measures for staff, volunteers, and youth
- Staff, youth, and parent handbooks
- Workplace violence and sexual harassment prevention program
- Bullying prevention program
- Child sexual abuse prevention program
- Defined safety roles and responsibilities for staff and leadership
- Safety oversight committee roles and responsibilities

Besides being the foundation for other safety improvements, a practical benefit of a *Document Audit* is that most changes can be made at no cost or low cost to the school. Therefore, if a school has limited resources to undergo a full Safety Audit a *Document Audit* allows the school to begin making some of the least expensive changes in the shortest time.



KEY STAFF INTERVIEWS

Key Staff Interviews are valuable because they help the auditors know how well school staff understand their own safety requirements and emergency plans; how well they might follow or execute them; what safety concerns are not being adequately addressed; and how staff is likely to react to a new situation or threat. Some of the topics the auditors might discuss with key staff at the school level include:

- Neighborhood risks/crimes and controlling access to your campus and buildings
- Visitor processing and management
- What security sweeps and safety inspections are performed daily
- Your safety team's strengths, challenges, and needs
- How employees are briefed or onboarded about security procedures
- How drills and other exercises are used to help employees think on their feet
- Which drills receive the greatest emphasis
- What emergency supplies and equipment are maintained
- Campus/building blind spots and how they are mitigated
- Student hot spots and how they are mitigated
- How employees' safety skills are maintained, and new safety skills learned
- How substitute teachers and late hires are brought up to speed on safety
- How daily safety communication is conducted (e.g., 2-way radios, cell phones)
- How are local public safety officials used to evaluate drills and other procedures?
- How supervision skills are evaluated and improved
- How arrivals, dismissals, class changes, recess and lunch are managed to control risks
- Lock, keycard, camera, and intruder alarm management concerns
- Building-wide, campus-wide, and parent emergency notification concerns
- Resolving bus-related incidents involving your students
- Resolving actual or possible student threats

Some topics that might be discussed with key staff at the district level include:

- Coordinating safety efforts across all departments and locations
- Recognizing successful safety practices by staff and students
- Staff and volunteer screening processes
- Confidential reporting mechanisms for concerns, complaints, and allegations
- Programs to minimize bullying, sexual abuse, and workplace violence
- Defined student threat audit and resolution process
- Transportation safety and security program
- Setting safety objectives, outcomes, and metrics to drive continuous improvement



ON-SITE SAFETY AUDIT

An On-Site Safety *Audit* is an in-depth physical examination of each campus (grounds and buildings). It identifies how well the facilities support the school's policies and daily safety practices. The process should follow a logical progression, such as:

1. Gather current campus and building plans from the school or its architects/engineers.
2. Schedule on-site audits in the most efficient and useful sequence.
3. Document each campus using checklists, photographs, and field notes.
4. Develop recommendations and general cost projections.
5. Review findings with the school's leadership by video or in person.

SAFETY MASTER PLAN

The *Safety Master Plan* integrates all findings and recommendations into one, comprehensive, actionable document that charts a multi-year strategy for the continuous improvement of safety, security, and emergency preparedness. A typical *Safety Master Plan* includes:

- Executive Summary
- Introduction and Process Employed by the Audit Team
- Positive Safety Findings (the practices or conditions that should remain)
- Opportunities for Improvement (the practices or conditions that should change)
- Summary and Timeline
- Master Audit Guide (a summary of all improvements and costs)
- Individual Site Reports (detailed recommendations for each campus)

PROCUREMENT

Besides conducting safety audits, R.L. Nichols & Associates can assist your school to bid safety systems and solutions that do not normally fall under the jurisdiction of architects and engineers, such as:

- Bus camera systems
- Student threat audit management platforms
- Emergency management platforms
- Emergency mapping systems
- Safety training programs
- Visitor Management Systems
- Staff Screening Programs
- SRO Management Programs

