

## **AN OVERVIEW OF COMPREHENSIVE SAFETY AUDITS FOR SCHOOLS**

### **INTRODUCTION**

It is a leading practice for K-12 schools to regularly commission a comprehensive and objective audit of their safety, security, and emergency preparedness. 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 should 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**

The *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, often they do not translate them into written procedures that are measurable, or into defined processes that drive compliance and consistency across all sites and departments.

The auditors should receive and analyze your school's existing policies, procedures, rules, and written processes, then summarize the apparent strengths and vulnerabilities. Since some policies may have an indirect bearing on safety concerns, all policies should receive at least a cursory review. Finally, the auditors should informally review the findings with your school's leadership, prior to issuing a final report. Some of the documents an auditor might analyze include:

- Current safety-related policies adopted by the board and pending policies
- Missing safety-related policies
- 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
- Building, grounds, vehicle and equipment 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 serving as the foundation for other safety improvements, one practical benefit of the *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 a *Document Audit*, alone, allows the school to begin making some of the least expensive changes in the shortest time.



## **KEY STAFF INTERVIEWS**

*Key Staff Interviews* can help the auditor know how well staff understand the school's safety requirements and emergency plans; how well they might execute them; what safety concerns the school is not addressing; and how staff is likely to react to a new situation or threat (i.e., "think on their feet").

Some of the topics the auditors might discuss with **key staff at individual schools**, include:

- Neighborhood risks/crimes and controlling access to your campus and buildings
- Visitor processing and management
- What security sweeps and safety inspections staff perform daily
- Your safety team's strengths, challenges, and needs
- How the school briefs or onboard staff about security procedures
- How the school uses drills and other exercises to help employees think on their feet
- Which drills receive the greatest emphasis and which do not
- What emergency supplies and equipment the school maintains
- How the school mitigates known campus/building blind spots
- How the school mitigates student activity hot spots
- How the school maintains staff safety skills
- How the school onboard substitutes and late hires on safety
- How the school conducts daily safety communication (e.g., 2-way radios, cell phones)
- How are local public safety officials used to evaluate drills and other procedures?
- How the school evaluates and improves supervision skills
- How the school controls risk during daily student transition times
- 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 student threats

Some topics the auditors might discussed with **key staff at the district office** 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
- Defined 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



### **THE ON-SITE AUDIT**

The *On-Site Audit* should provide an in-depth physical examination of each campus and the district office. It identifies how well the facilities support the school's existing or recommended 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.

### **THE 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 (i.e., practices or conditions that should remain)
- Opportunities for Improvement (i.e., 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 STRATEGIES**

Besides conducting comprehensive safety audits, R.L. Nichols & Associates can assist your school to evaluate, bid or negotiate third-party, specialized safety and security systems not normally managed by local architects and engineers, such as:

- Bus camera systems
- Student threat assessment programs
- Emergency notification and management programs
- Emergency mapping programs
- Event management programs
- Staff safety training programs
- Visitor management systems
- Staff and volunteer screening processes
- SRO management programs

