

BULLETIN NO. 5

School Security Visitor Program



Schools are very busy, active places. In order to protect the occupants of schools, security measures need to be addressed and enforced. In addition to students, staff and faculty members, schools regularly receive parents, outside specialists, vendors and other visitors into their buildings. From a security standpoint, it is important that these visitors are screened, documented and monitored while inside the school buildings or on the school grounds. Without the implementation of a comprehensive visitor program, a variety of serious security incidents (such as kidnapping, sexual assault, arson, murder, etc.) can occur.

The following elements should be included in a comprehensive visitor program:

Written program—Develop a document that outlines the district’s position on authorized and unauthorized visitors. It should address staff responsibilities and present step-by-step guidelines for staff to use when they observe an unauthorized visitor on school grounds. The program should be implemented throughout the district, and annual refresher training should be conducted prior to the beginning of each school year.

Signage—All doors should display clearly visible and easy-to-read signs that describe the district’s visitor procedures. Signs should also direct visitors to the approved entrance location for that particular building.

Visitor sign-in documents—All visitors should be required to sign-in and show photo identification that confirms the individual’s identity. Validate the reason for the visit (parent picking up a sick child, vendor meeting with the maintenance manager, etc.) and issue the visitor a reusable, easily identifiable badge. This should be worn at all times while the visitor is on school property and returned when the visit is complete.

An exchange program— requiring that visitors leave car keys or a driver’s license in exchange for the badge — can help ensure that visitors return to the office to sign out and return their visitor badges.

Undocumented visitors—If staff members observe an individual without a visitor badge, they should approach that visitor and follow the steps outlined in the district’s visitor policy. During this customer service-type interaction, staff members should inquire about the visitor’s business on school grounds, provide assistance and directions and inform the visitor of the school’s visitor program and requirements. Visitors who have not signed in should be escorted to the administrative office to sign in and receive a badge. If a staff member is uncomfortable approaching an unknown individual, they should notify the building administration immediately and observe the individual from a distance until assistance arrives.

Emergency announcement—All emergency announcements should be communicated to staff and faculty using easily understood language. No coded messages should be used. The announcements, if appropriate, should provide detailed instructions on what duties the staff are expected to perform. For example: “There is an emergency situation in the gymnasium. Go immediately to lockdown.” This message should be repeated at least twice initially and periodically throughout the incident until safety clearance has been issued. All faculty, staff and students should receive training, and practice drills should be conducted to make sure everyone knows how to respond to common emergency announcements.

The Iowa School Safety Coalition was formed in December 2012. Participating organizations include Iowa Homeland Security & Emergency Management, Iowa State Fire Marshal, Iowa Division of Intelligence and Fusion Center, Iowa Department of Education, Iowa Emergency Management Association, Des Moines Police Department, Iowa State Education Association, Iowa Association of School Boards, School Administrators of Iowa, American Institute of Architects – Iowa Chapter, EMC Insurance Companies.

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Unauthorized visitors—Undocumented individuals should be reported to the administrative office immediately if the visitor:

- Does not follow visitor guidelines as requested by staff
- Is visibly upset
- Is acting violently or displaying a weapon

This reporting procedure should be communicated to all faculty and staff as part of their annual training. Extra procedures should be followed in these situations:

If visitor is uncooperative:

- Disengage from the individual as soon as possible.
- Contact the administrative office immediately, report the individual's name (if known), physical description, location and last known movement direction.

If visitor is violent or armed:

- Disengage from individual as soon as safely possible.
- Communicate a LOCKDOWN announcement immediately thereafter and call 911.
- Perform LOCKDOWN.
- If possible, contact the administrative office to report the individual's name (if known), physical description, location and last known movement direction. Report if the individual is armed.
- Remain in lockdown until released by administration or law enforcement.

For Additional Information:

U.S. Department of Justice: www.ncjrs.gov

National School Safety Center: www.schoolsafety.us

National School Safety and Security Services: www.schoolsecurity.org

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