



The Current State Of School Security

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Protecting students, teachers and staff is an important design consideration. How is school security changing? How can schools balance occupant safety while providing access to the right people? Ken Cook answers these questions and more in the following interview excerpts.

Ken Cook, BSME, MBA, CPD, is Director of National School Safety and Advocacy at Allegion (US). In addition to leading Allegion's efforts in assisting school districts, Cook serves on the Advisory Council for the Partner Alliance for Safer Schools' (PASS) Technical Committee and chaired the Outreach Committee. He is also on the Security Industry Association (SIA) school safety committee.

Security Today: Can you tell me a little bit about yourself and Allegion?

Cook: I've been in this industry for about 25 years now. I really became interested in school safety around 2007.

I'm a Virginia Tech grad, so when the shooting occurred there, it really changed my perspective and the direction of my life. I actually had classes in some of the rooms that the shooter entered in Norris Hall—it was emotional.

At the time, I was working with a lot of architects in Indiana. I spent a lot of time researching school shootings, understanding them, and then sharing that information, which allowed me to become an expert within the community here. I helped work on some legislation that went through on school safety. And now I'm a director of education for Allegion. Allegion is a great company.

For people who don't know who Allegion is, I'll go a little bit deeper on the products. You may recognize those more than the (Allegion) name: Schlage Lock, Von Duprin and LCN. Von Duprin Exit devices and LCN door closers are in most schools today. We work closely with schools to help schools educate students.

Security Today: What are you seeing as a state of school security today?

Cook: There's a lot that's going on with school security today. It's good to just back up and take up a holistic view.

There's Safe and Sound Schools, which is a nonprofit started by Michelle Gay and Alyssa Parker. Both had daughters who were impacted by the Sandy Hook shooting, and they've done a great job of pulling groups together to improve school safety. They have a state of school safety report that they publish every year, which has a lot of good information.

One of the questions in the report is, "What do you feel is the preparedness for school events?" And they polled students and educators.

The students felt they were most prepared for the active shooter. 72% felt that way—the intruder was actually a little bit higher at 74%. But then you start looking at some of the other safety things that students deal with: bullying, cyberbullying, aggression, sexual assault. Those were 60% (bullying and cyberbullying), 54% (sexual assault). And then you look at gang activity, food insecurity, digital threats, that actually dropped into the 50% range.

So, if you look at it from that perspective, you see that there's a wide variety of things students are really dealing with. And even though they said that the active shooter was one, they felt they were most prepared for it. The students also said that was their top concern. So, you know, it's heartbreaking to know that is what students are fearing when they're in their classrooms.

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Security Today: What are some of the better approaches schools are taking to improve security?

Cook: I think what really makes the difference is having strong leadership at the top, the superintendent level. That really drives it, because it's a type of culture. Most schools have door locks. They have most of the equipment they need. But if safety is not everybody's responsibility and it's just over in one department, then you see a culture of propping doors and things of that nature. So to me, leadership is most important, and it doesn't require investments in door locks and cameras. I think that's



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(culture of safety) the starting point—not to say those others aren't needed. But that's the first step.

The other is bringing in experts from all different areas. You have to make sure that the cross functional teams that are working within the school collaborate. Because when they do, they're making the best decisions each time.

Another one of the best practices that I've seen is including students in the conversation. I'm not saying they need to be in every meeting, but making sure their voice is heard. Because they see it from a different lens—probably the lens we all should be looking through when assessing school security.

Security Today: How can schools make sure their doors are secure?

Cook: That's important. In the Sandy Hook report, locked doors are the number one recommendation for effective school security.

In the Robb Elementary shooting, the assailant was able to walk right in because it was left in the unlocked position.

One of the classroom doors wasn't locked, so the shooter walked in. So that's definitely something really important from a physical security side.

We can break it down into two areas. If you look at the exterior of a school, there really shouldn't be an unlocked door. Maybe one door by the office, but every other door needs to be such that it can't be left in the unlocked position. I'm not talking about a door prop or rock or things like that, but physically on the door.

If you take that key out of the door, it's locked, so the only time I can get in through that door is with a key in hand. Turn it, I can get in, I take the key out, it's locked. Many schools today can leave an exterior door unlocked. Because prior to Columbine, it was probably okay to leave an exterior door unlocked. That was just the common practice. If you look at the number of schools built prior to Columbine, it's probably between 80 and 90% ([estimated from National Center for Education Statistics \(NCES\)](#)).

We also see rocks on exterior doors, which is the same type of problem. So it goes back to the culture. We really need to make sure that people aren't propping doors open. If the door is being held open or propped open, it should

be attended, because if something were to happen, they could real easily take care of it to make sure the door is secure.

We're seeing similar things on classroom doors. Some recommendations say to keep classroom doors locked at all times, which can be a problem with teaching. It's not only an inconvenience, but it disrupts class when there's a knock on the door. But propping is not a work around. We see this as a major problem.

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Security Today: How do you create the balance with a solution that meets codes, keeps people safe and still provides access to the right people while alleviating some of the stress for students, teachers and administrators?

Cook: If the doors (are) set up, used properly and locked, then it's safe. But you've got all these other things that come in: people propping doors and going in and out of them a lot. Electronic access control actually provides a higher level of security—not that you need it on every door. But if a door is being propped open often enough, that means people are going in and out of that door.

I think looking at solutions that address the situation and the way the doors are being used gives you a higher probability of that door being secure. Another one is indication, knowing the status of that door. Because if a door is propped and you don't know it, you really don't have the ability to do anything about it. But if the exterior doors of a school were (electronically) monitored, and people would have seen that the door was propped open or that it's not in the locked position, then action can be taken. Those are the things that can be done to keep people safe.

But to your question, you can alleviate some of the stress associated with security. When people know a door is locked, then they don't have to worry about that.

Indication (for mechanical locks) is one of the things we've invested heavily in recently around the classroom door. Being able to see if the door is locked reduces the stress. It allows students and teachers to focus on what they need to focus on while they're in the classroom.

Security Today: Are there any other tools out there to help schools?

Cook: I think we at Allegion have tried to provide a lot of educational resources for schools to use. We've taken a lot of information that's out there in different incident reports, PASS recommendations and the Federal Commission Report on School Safety. [We've compiled it and grouped it as it relates to the exterior door, the office, and visitor entrance door.](#)

School districts can reference that and see what those entities have said. It gives them confidence. It's education. And then, our experts around the country are available to assist schools, because we're familiar with the reports and can provide consultation for schools to help them make the right decision for their unique situation. So visit the [Allegion website](#) and you can find the information there.



About Allegion

Allegion (NYSE: ALLE) is a global pioneer in seamless access, with leading brands like CISA®, Interflex®, LCN®, Schlage®, SimonsVoss® and Von Duprin®. Focusing on security around the door and adjacent areas, Allegion secures people and assets with a range of solutions for homes, businesses, schools and institutions.

For more, visit www.allegion.com

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