ESSENTIALS IN SCHOOL FACILITIES SAFETY

Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design

The California Department of Education provides guidance on keeping students safe while they attend school through safe schools planning, including comprehensive school safety plans.[1] There is no single solution that fits every school; however, there are sound principles that can be used to increase the safety of your existing school campuses and when designing new schools.

Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) is a multi-disciplinary approach to deterring criminal behavior through environmental design[2] and consists of four basic principles.

Natural Surveillance

The first principle of CPTED is to design the spaces in such a way that everyone entering a school site can be easily observed by the school community. School design can influence behaviors because crimes are usually less likely to occur if offenses are more noticeable to others. This concept works well with crimes that are more likely to occur on school sites because it provides extensive views of high traffic areas in schools, such as cafeterias, lobbies, parking lots, and common areas.

Natural surveillance can be achieved through the use of lighting, landscaping, site layout, building placement, and artificial or natural barriers.

Natural surveillance allows school staff, neighbors, and security personnel to observe what is happening and to react appropriately to the incident area, including notification of law enforcement or security. This principle may include electronic surveillance equipment, which can enhance the effectiveness of CPTED. Clear lines of visibility allow security cameras to focus on an incident more effectively.

Photo by John Edward Linden

Natural Access Control

Utilizing elements and natural features such as shrubs, fences, gates, and doors may help school administrators and security personnel channel visitors and have greater control over entry and movement in the school site.

Campus gates may be opened when children arrive to allow them to enter quickly. Once the school day has started, gates may be closed and locked and visitors can be directed to enter through the office and sign in with identification. School designs should locate common areas in central locations or near high-circulation areas, rather than in remote areas.

Maintenance

How well a facility is maintained affects the sense of pride and belonging of students, teachers, and community members, which can effect academic outcomes.[3] Well-maintained spaces make students and staff feel safe and valued.

Crimes, such as vandalism, are more likely to be committed when facilities are not maintained properly. Schools with better building conditions show up to fourteen percent lower student suspension rates.[4]

For more information, contact the California Department of Education, School Facilities and Transportation Services Division, at 916-322-2470.

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Territorial Reinforcement

Territorial reinforcement establishes a safe environment using barriers like walls, fences, and gates, and also creates a sense of ownership. The use of signage, pavement treatments, and landscaping help to appropriately direct visitors and make it clear where they should be and the spaces that are off limits.

Schools that feel like neighborhood assets encourage residents and students to share responsibility to monitor their community, watch out for improper activities, and help maintain safe and clean school campuses.

Second-Generation CPTED

There is a social dimension to CPTED through Defensible Space theory.[5] Concepts that involve social and community dimensions expand CPTED beyond physical design. The four key concepts to second-generation CPTED include social cohesion, community connectivity, community culture, and threshold capacity.[6]

Social cohesion consists of communities that value members' similarities and differences through positive relationships and mutual respect between people from different backgrounds. This central concept to second-generation CPTED recognizes, supports, and celebrates community diversity to share a common vision and a sense of belonging that promotes involvement in safe environments for students and residents.

Community connectivity includes partnerships such as coordinating activities between government and non-government organizations. This theory includes the belief that a more empowered and integrated community will facilitate community self-policing.

Community culture is demonstrated by residents sharing a sense of place and is related to participation in youth clubs, festivals, cultural events, and celebrating community events and people. When residents have a strong sense of community, it may encourage positive outlooks and behaviors in local neighborhoods.

Threshold capacity refers to a neighborhood's finite ability for activities and land uses that help maintain the local community ecosystem. Pedestrian-oriented and human-scale uses of land should be encouraged so communities do not exceed their capacity, which can negatively affect functionality and may result in increased levels of crime. For example, tipping points of threshold capacity may include concentrated numbers of certain businesses, lack of maintenance, or residents migrating to the suburbs.

The combination of first- and second-generation CPTED concepts include community participation for safe and inclusive neighborhoods and schools. Residents and students who have equal access to amenities and services through local engagement are vital to the process of making schools and communities safer for all.

1. California Department of Education. 2018. *Compliance Checklist for a Comprehensive School Safety Plan.* Sacramento: California Department of Education.
2. City of Virginia Beach. 2000. *Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design: General Guidelines for Designing Safer Communities.* City of Virginia Beach.
3. Earthman, Glen. 2004. *Prioritization of 31 Criteria for School Building Adequacy.* Baltimore: American Civil Liberties Union Foundation of Maryland.
4. Healthy Schools Network. 2005. *New York State School Facilities and Student Health, Achievement, and Attendance: A Data Analysis Report.* New York: Healthy Schools Network.
5. Cozens, Paul, and Terence Love. 2015. "A Review and Current Status of Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED)." *Journal of Planning Literature.* v30 (4).
6. Ibid.

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