

School Security Personnel in Pennsylvania:

A Practical Guide for School District Leaders Evaluating Security Officer Programs



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Executive Summary

School safety remains one of the most significant responsibilities facing Pennsylvania school leaders. While highly publicized acts of violence often dominate public discussion, administrators confront a much broader range of security concerns every day, including unauthorized visitors, student altercations, behavioral health crises, threats communicated through social media, vandalism, theft, and emergency preparedness.

Parents, staff members, students, and community stakeholders increasingly expect schools to provide secure learning environments while maintaining a welcoming and supportive atmosphere. As a result, many districts are evaluating whether security personnel should play a larger role in their overall safety strategy.

The decision to implement or expand a school security program is not simply a staffing decision. It requires careful consideration of legal requirements, operational objectives, budgetary constraints, school culture, and community expectations.

Pennsylvania school districts have several options available, including School Resource Officers (SROs), School Police Officers (SPOs), and School Security Guards (SSGs). Each model offers distinct advantages and limitations. Selecting the appropriate solution requires a clear understanding of the district's needs and desired outcomes.

This whitepaper provides school leaders with a practical framework for evaluating school security personnel, selecting qualified providers, and developing programs that support both safety and educational objectives.



Pennsylvania's New School Security Requirement

In 2024, Pennsylvania enacted Act 55, which established a new requirement that every school district maintain at least one full-time trained school security professional on duty during the school day, unless the district receives a waiver from the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD).

The legislation reflects the Commonwealth's recognition that school safety is no longer solely an administrative responsibility. Dedicated security personnel have become an important component of a comprehensive school safety strategy.

While the law establishes a minimum requirement, it does not prescribe a single solution. School districts may satisfy the requirement through a School Resource Officer (SRO), School Police Officer (SPO), School Security Guard (SSG), or a combination of these resources, depending on their operational needs and available resources.

As a result, school leaders are increasingly faced with important questions:

- What type of security personnel is most appropriate for our district?
- How do we balance security, school culture, and budget?
- What qualifications and training should we require?
- How do we ensure compliance while minimizing liability?
- How do we select a provider capable of supporting our long-term safety objectives?

The answers will vary from district to district. However, every district must now make informed decisions regarding security personnel, training, supervision, and program management.

This whitepaper is intended to assist school leaders in navigating those decisions.



The Evolving School Safety Environment

The role of school security has changed dramatically over the past two decades.

Historically, school security efforts focused primarily on preventing vandalism, theft, trespassing, and occasional disciplinary issues. Today's school administrators face a far more complex risk environment.

Modern school safety concerns often include:

- Unauthorized access to school buildings;
- Threats communicated through social media platforms;
- Student behavioral and mental health crises;
- Parent and visitor confrontations;
- Bullying and harassment;
- Emergency response coordination;
- Community concerns regarding school violence; and
- Increased public scrutiny following incidents occurring anywhere in the country.

While the likelihood of a major critical incident remains relatively low, districts must prepare for a broad range of events that could impact students, staff, and operations.

At the same time, schools must balance security measures with their educational mission. Effective security programs enhance safety without creating an environment that feels restrictive or intimidating.

The most successful districts recognize school safety is not defined by the presence of security personnel alone. Rather, it is the result of a comprehensive strategy that combines people, policies, procedures, training, technology, and community partnerships.



Why School Districts Are Expanding Security Programs

School districts cite several reasons for implementing or expanding security officer programs.

Legislative Requirements and Community Expectations

While community expectations have contributed to the expansion of school security programs, Pennsylvania's recent legislative changes have also accelerated the conversation. School districts must now ensure compliance with state requirements while addressing growing expectations from parents, staff, and community stakeholders regarding school safety.

Many districts are using this opportunity not only to meet minimum requirements but also to evaluate how security personnel can support broader safety, preparedness, and risk management objectives.

Staffing Challenges

Teachers and administrators already carry significant responsibilities. Many districts recognize assigning security-related responsibilities to educational staff may not be the most effective use of their time or expertise.

Dedicated security personnel can provide focused attention to access control, visitor management, patrol functions, and emergency response activities.

Emergency Preparedness

Security personnel can assist districts with:

- Lockdown procedures;
- Evacuations;
- Reunification operations;
- Emergency communications;
- Incident documentation; and
- Coordination with first responders.

Deterrence and Prevention

One of the most valuable functions of security personnel is often prevention. A trained and visible security presence may discourage inappropriate behavior, identify suspicious activity, and intervene before minor issues escalate into significant incidents.

Understanding School Security Personnel Options

Pennsylvania school districts generally utilize one or more of the following models.

School Resource Officers (SROs)

School Resource Officers are sworn law enforcement officers assigned to schools through partnerships with local police agencies.

In addition to law enforcement responsibilities, SROs often serve as mentors, educators, and liaisons between schools and the criminal justice system.

Required School-Specific Training

Pennsylvania requires school security personnel to complete prescribed school-specific training before working in a school setting. For School Security Guards, applicable training must meet standards established by the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD), including required school-security subject matter. Districts should verify that all personnel assigned to their schools have completed current PCCD-approved training and any other applicable certification requirements before beginning their assignments.

Advantages include:

- Full law enforcement authority;
- Criminal investigative capability;
- Direct access to law enforcement resources; and
- Established relationships with local agencies.

Potential considerations include:

- Availability of local law enforcement resources;
- Cost-sharing arrangements;
- Competing law enforcement priorities; and
- Limited administrative control by the district.

While School Resource Officers offer significant advantages, districts should recognize SRO availability varies considerably across Pennsylvania. Rural districts served primarily by the Pennsylvania State Police or smaller municipal agencies may have limited access to dedicated SRO programs.

School Police Officers (SPOs)

School Police Officers are commissioned law enforcement officers employed directly by school entities.

Advantages include:

- Full police authority within their jurisdiction;
- Dedicated assignment to district operations;
- Greater administrative control; and
- Consistent availability.

Potential considerations include:

- Increased administrative responsibilities;
- Recruitment challenges;
- Policy development requirements; and
- Additional liability considerations.

School Security Guards (SSGs)

School Security Guards are non-sworn security professionals who may be employed directly by the district or contracted through a qualified security services provider.

Unlike SROs and SPOs, School Security Guards do not possess law enforcement authority. Their primary role is to support safety, security, and emergency preparedness efforts through prevention, observation, and response.

Advantages include:

- Lower overall cost;
- Flexible staffing models;
- Focused security responsibilities;
- Enhanced access control and visitor management; and
- Ability to provide coverage across multiple buildings or events.

Potential considerations include:

- No arrest authority;
- Dependence on local law enforcement for criminal investigations; and
- Significant variation in training, experience, supervision, and quality among providers beyond minimum state requirements.

The Rural Pennsylvania Challenge

While School Resource Officers are often viewed as an attractive option for school districts, they may not be available in many parts of Pennsylvania.

A significant portion of the Commonwealth is served by the Pennsylvania State Police (PSP) rather than local municipal police departments. Due to staffing limitations, resource constraints, and the broad geographic areas they patrol, PSP generally does not provide School Resource Officers to school districts.

Even in communities served by local police departments, many agencies face recruitment and retention challenges that limit their ability to dedicate officers exclusively to school assignments.

As a result, many rural and smaller school districts have limited options when seeking to comply with Pennsylvania's school security requirements. In these environments, School Police Officers and School Security Guards often represent the most practical and sustainable solutions.

This reality highlights the importance of evaluating security personnel based not only on authority and capabilities, but also on availability, cost, staffing sustainability, and the unique needs of the district. The most effective security program is not necessarily the one with the greatest authority, but the one that can be consistently staffed, properly trained, effectively supervised, and successfully integrated into the district's overall safety strategy.

What School Security Guards Do Best

When properly selected, trained, and supervised, School Security Guards can serve as valuable members of the educational team.

Their responsibilities often include:

- Visitor management;
- Access control;
- Monitoring building entrances;
- Security patrols;
- Parking lot and traffic management;
- Surveillance monitoring;
- Event security;
- Emergency response support; and
- Incident reporting.

Beyond these operational responsibilities, effective security officers frequently develop positive relationships with students and staff.

Many districts report that trusted security officers become important sources of situational awareness. Students may be more willing to report concerns to a familiar security officer than through formal reporting channels.

As a result, security officers often contribute to early intervention efforts and help identify potential concerns before they escalate.



Common Mistakes When Implementing Security Programs

Selecting Based Primarily on Cost

School districts naturally have budget constraints. However, selecting a provider solely because they submitted the lowest proposal may create significant long-term risks. Security personnel represent the most visible component of a district's security program. High turnover, inadequate supervision, and insufficient training can undermine program effectiveness and increase liability.

Assuming All Security Providers Are Equal

The qualifications, experience, training standards, and supervisory practices of security providers vary significantly.

Districts should carefully evaluate:

- Experience in educational environments;
- Officer selection standards;
- Compliance with Pennsylvania school-security training requirements and additional school-specific training provided by the company
- Supervision practices; and
- Quality assurance processes.

Failing to Define Expectations

Successful programs require clear expectations regarding:

- Officer responsibilities;
- Emergency response duties;
- Reporting requirements;
- Communication protocols; and
- Performance standards.

Treating Security as a Stand-Alone Function

Security officers should be integrated into broader school safety efforts, including emergency planning, drills, threat assessment processes, and communication initiatives.

Building a Culture of Safety

No single security measure can eliminate risk.

The safest schools develop a culture in which students, staff, administrators, parents, and security personnel share responsibility for safety and security.

Effective school security programs combine:

- Strong leadership;
- Positive school climate;
- Physical security measures;
- Emergency preparedness;
- Behavioral threat assessment;
- Security personnel;
- Technology; and
- Partnerships with first responders.

Security officers should be viewed as one component of a comprehensive safety strategy rather than a standalone solution.



Selecting a Security Partner

When evaluating security providers, school districts should look beyond hourly rates and staffing levels. INA considers NASRO training an important baseline for personnel assigned to school environments, and all INA School Security Guards complete NASRO training before assignment.

Questions worth asking include:

- How long has the company been providing security services?
- Does the company have experience working in educational environments?
- What background investigations are conducted?
- Have all officers assigned to the district completed applicable PCCD-approved school-security training before beginning their assignments?
- What additional school-specific training does the company provide beyond minimum state requirements?
- How are officers supervised?
- What emergency response capabilities exist?
- What insurance coverage does the company maintain?
- How are performance concerns addressed?

A provider's ability to recruit, train, supervise, and retain qualified personnel often has a greater impact on program success than cost alone.

Training Note: Pennsylvania's school-security training standards incorporate subject areas associated with school-based security and law enforcement training. Districts should confirm current PCCD requirements, approved training providers, and any applicable equivalency standards when evaluating personnel or contractors.



Conclusion

School security is not simply about responding to emergencies. It is about creating an environment where students can learn, educators can teach, and families can feel confident reasonable measures have been taken to protect those entrusted to the district's care.

Pennsylvania's recent school security requirements have created an important opportunity for districts to evaluate and strengthen their overall safety programs. While compliance with state law is essential, the most effective security programs go beyond minimum requirements. They incorporate prevention, preparedness, communication, training, and community engagement into a comprehensive approach to school safety.

There is no one-size-fits-all solution. Whether a district utilizes School Resource Officers, School Police Officers, School Security Guards, or a combination of these resources, the decision should be guided by a thoughtful assessment of risk, operational needs, available resources, school culture, and community expectations. Regardless of the staffing model selected, districts should ensure that personnel meet all applicable Pennsylvania training and qualification requirements

The goal should not be simply to satisfy a legislative mandate. Rather, it should be to develop a security program that supports educational objectives, enhances emergency preparedness, reduces organizational risk, and strengthens public confidence in the district's ability to protect students, staff, and visitors.

By taking a structured and informed approach, Pennsylvania school districts can implement security programs that not only improve safety but also support a positive learning environment and reinforce the trust placed in them by the communities they serve.

Key Takeaway: Pennsylvania law now requires school districts to provide dedicated school security personnel. The most successful districts will view this requirement not as a compliance obligation, but as an opportunity to strengthen their overall school safety strategy.

Disclaimer

This whitepaper is provided for general informational and educational purposes only. It is intended to assist Pennsylvania school districts in understanding considerations related to school security personnel and security program development. It is not intended to serve as legal advice, nor should it be relied upon as a substitute for consultation with legal counsel or other qualified professionals regarding the application of federal, state, or local laws, regulations, or policies.

Although every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the information presented, laws, regulations, guidance, and best practices may change over time. School districts should consult with legal counsel, insurance representatives, and appropriate governmental agencies when developing or modifying security policies and programs.

The opinions and recommendations contained in this publication are based on Information Network Associates, Inc.'s professional experience and industry best practices and are intended to support informed decision-making by school administrators and governing boards.





About Our Company

We protect people, property, and data.

Information Network Associates, Inc. (INA) is a Pennsylvania-based security and risk management firm that has been serving public and private sector clients for more than 40 years. Founded in 1982 by a former FBI Special Agent, INA provides security services, investigations, intelligence, and consulting solutions throughout the Commonwealth and beyond.

INA currently provides School Security Guards (SSGs) to public and private educational institutions across Pennsylvania. Our officers support school safety efforts through access control, visitor management, patrol operations, emergency response support, event security, and daily interaction with students, staff, and visitors.

INA is an approved School Security Personnel provider through the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD) and understands the unique legal, operational, and training requirements associated with school security programs in the Commonwealth. All INA School Security Guards assigned to Pennsylvania schools complete NASRO school security training, along with all other applicable state-required training and qualification requirements before assignment. INA also provides additional school-specific training designed to prepare officers for the unique responsibilities associated with protecting students, staff, visitors and school communities.

In addition to providing security personnel, INA assists schools with security assessments, emergency preparedness planning, active assailant preparedness, policy development, training, and school safety consulting. This broader perspective allows us to help school leaders develop security programs that support both safety objectives and the educational mission of their institutions.

For more information about school security services, school safety assessments, or security program development, please contact Information Network Associates, Inc.

For More Information



CONTACT US!

For additional information regarding school security personnel, security assessments, emergency preparedness planning, or school safety consulting services, please contact:

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Information Network Associates, Inc. has been helping organizations identify risks, enhance security, and protect people, assets, and operations since 1982.

Appendix A

Pennsylvania School Security Personnel Comparison Matrix

Category	School Resource Officer (SRO)	School Police Officer (SPO)	School Security Guard (SSG)
Employment	Municipal, County, State, or Local Law Enforcement Agency	School District Employee	School District Employee or Contracted Security
Sworn Law Enforcement Officer	Yes	Yes	No
Arrest Authority	Yes	Yes	No
Criminal Investigations	Yes	Yes	No
Authority to File Charges	Yes	Yes	No
Pennsylvania School-Security Training	Required	Required	Required
Patrol Functions	Yes	Yes	Yes
Access Control	District Dependent	District Dependent	District Dependent
Visitor Management	District Dependent	District Dependent	District Dependent
Monitoring Surveillance Systems	Yes	Yes	Yes
Emergency Response	Yes	Yes	Support Role
Emergency Planning Participation	Yes	Yes	Yes
Student Mentorship	Yes	Limited	Often Informal
Classroom Instruction	District Dependent	District Dependent	District Dependent
District Administrative Control	Limited	High	High
Staffing Flexibility	Limited	Moderate	High
Relative Cost	Highest	Moderate to High	Lowest
Primary Function	Law Enforcement	School-Based Law Enforcement	Security and Prevention

Training requirements vary by personnel classification. Districts should consult current PCCD and other applicable Commonwealth requirements when determining required courses, certifications and approved training providers.

General Considerations

School Resource Officers (SROs) provide the highest level of law enforcement capability and are often viewed as a bridge between schools and local law enforcement agencies.

School Police Officers (SPOs) provide dedicated law enforcement resources that operate under the direct control of the school district.

School Security Guards (SSGs) provide a visible security presence, access control, visitor management, patrol functions, and emergency support, but do not possess police powers.

No single model is appropriate for every district. Many school entities utilize a combination of these resources based on their size, risk profile, budget, and operational needs.

Appendix B

School Security Provider Evaluation Checklist

The following questions may assist school districts when evaluating security providers.

Company Qualifications

- ☐ How long has the company been in business?
- ☐ Is the company licensed and insured?
- ☐ Does the company have experience providing security services in K-12 environments?
- ☐ Can the company provide references from other school districts?
- ☐ Does the company maintain a local management presence?
- ☐ Has the company experienced significant litigation or regulatory actions?

Officer Selection and Hiring

- ☐ What minimum qualifications are required for officers?
- ☐ What background investigations are conducted?
- ☐ Are officers screened for prior criminal convictions?
- ☐ Are child abuse clearances obtained?
- ☐ Are references verified?
- ☐ Are officers interviewed specifically for suitability in educational environments?
- ☐ Are psychological evaluations conducted for armed personnel?

Training Standards

- ☐ Are armed officers certified under Pennsylvania Act 235?
- ☐ How frequently are armed officers required to qualify with their firearms?
- ☐ Does the provider require firearms qualification beyond Act 235 recertification requirements?
- ☐ Are firearms qualifications documented and available for review?
- ☐ Is remedial training provided when officers fail to meet qualification standards?
- ☐ Do officers receive school-specific orientation training?
- ☐ Is de-escalation training provided?
- ☐ Are officers trained in adolescent behavior and communication?
- ☐ Are officers trained in emergency response procedures?
- ☐ Are officers trained in First Aid, CPR, AED, and Stop the Bleed?
- ☐ Is scenario-based training conducted?
- ☐ How frequently is refresher training provided?
- ☐ Verify that personnel meet all applicable Pennsylvania school-security training and qualification requirements.
- ☐ Determine whether the provider offers additional school-specific training beyond minimum requirements.
- ☐ Request documentation demonstrating completion of required training before officers are assigned.

Supervision and Quality Assurance

- ☐ What supervisory structure is in place?
- ☐ How often are supervisors present on site?
- ☐ Is management available after normal business hours?
- ☐ Are officer performance evaluations conducted?
- ☐ Is there a formal corrective action process?
- ☐ How are complaints investigated and documented?

Emergency Preparedness

- ☐ Are officers familiar with the district's Emergency Operations Plan?
- ☐ Do officers participate in drills?
- ☐ Are officers trained in reunification procedures?
- ☐ Are officers trained in active assailant response protocols?
- ☐ Are officers trained in threat reporting procedures?

Insurance and Liability

- ☐ What levels of General Liability insurance are maintained?
- ☐ What levels of Professional Liability insurance are maintained?
- ☐ Does the company maintain Workers' Compensation coverage?
- ☐ Does the district receive certificates of insurance annually?
- ☐ Does the contract contain indemnification provisions?

Operational Performance

- ☐ What is the company's employee turnover rate?
- ☐ What is the average tenure of assigned officers?
- ☐ What contingency plans exist for absences and vacancies?
- ☐ What reporting systems are utilized?
- ☐ How are incidents communicated to district leadership?

Red Flags

School districts should exercise caution when providers:

- Compete primarily on price;
- Cannot provide school-specific references;
- Have limited supervisory resources;
- Cannot document training standards;
- Have high employee turnover; or
- Lack experience working in educational environments.

Ongoing Training and Firearms Proficiency

For armed School Security Guards, initial certification is only the starting point. School districts should evaluate whether providers maintain ongoing training programs that reinforce critical skills throughout the year.

Appendix C

Pennsylvania Compliance Requirements for School Security Personnel

Important Notice

This appendix is intended as a general reference guide. School districts should consult legal counsel and applicable Pennsylvania statutes to ensure compliance with current requirements.

Armed Security Personnel Requirements

Armed security personnel assigned to Pennsylvania schools must possess:

Pennsylvania Act 235 Certification

The Lethal Weapons Training Act (Act 235) requires armed security personnel to successfully complete:

- Background investigation;
- Psychological evaluation;
- Medical screening;
- Firearms training; and
- Firearms qualification.

Recertification is required every 5 years. Districts should establish procedures to verify certification status and monitor expiration dates.

Required School Clearances

Security personnel assigned to school environments should possess current clearances consistent with Pennsylvania law and district policy.

These may include:

- Act 34
 - Pennsylvania State Police Criminal History Record Check
- Act 114
 - Federal Bureau of Investigation Fingerprint-Based Criminal History Record Check
- Act 151
 - Pennsylvania Child Abuse History Clearance
- Act 168
 - Sexual Misconduct / Abuse Disclosure Release
- Act 24
 - Arrest or Conviction Reporting Requirements
- Act 31
 - Mandated Reporter Training

Additional Recommended Screening

Districts should consider requiring:

- National Sex Offender Registry Search;
- Multi-state criminal history searches;
- Employment verification;
- Reference checks;
- Motor vehicle record review (when applicable); and
- Social media screening where legally permissible.

School-Specific Policies

Districts should ensure security personnel receive training on:

- Emergency Operations Plans;
- Lockdown procedures;
- Evacuation procedures;
- Reunification procedures;
- Visitor management protocols;
- Student privacy considerations;
- Reporting requirements; and
- District-specific policies and procedures.

Armed Security Program Governance

Districts should establish written policies addressing:

- Firearms authorization;
- Use of force;
- Weapon retention;
- Incident reporting;
- Evidence preservation;
- Coordination with local law enforcement;
- Medical emergencies;
- Student interactions; and
- Parent and visitor interactions.

Annual Program Review

School districts should consider conducting annual reviews of their security programs that include:

- Training records;
- Certification compliance;
- Incident trends;
- Drill performance;
- Officer evaluations;
- Policy updates; and
- Stakeholder feedback.

A documented annual review process helps demonstrate due diligence, supports continuous improvement, and may reduce organizational liability.