



## Becker Morgan Group Emphasizes Student-Focused Safety & Security in School Design

### Security vs Safety in School Design, and How it Relates to Students

Design's role in educational facilities is most often focused on providing learning environments that enrich and inspire the students that occupy those spaces. Unfortunately, all too often, we hear about those same facilities becoming the backdrop for stories of shock and grief as another incident unfolds in places meant for learning. One need only peruse the headlines to see school and student safety continues to be an issue we grapple with as a society. Safety, being free from harm or danger, is a state of mind students should be granted daily while in school. Security covers the efforts undertaken to make a person or place safe.

How can we make student safety inherent in schools without creating educational spaces that feel more like institutions than the inspiring spaces we desire to provide? Let's examine some of the issues and opportunities under the guise of Safety and Security that should be kept at the forefront of design thinking.

Perceived security provides for safety, and those perceptions of a secure environment are crucial to providing an environment conducive to the emotional experience of learning. A preventative approach to safety through security measures reduces bullying-related behaviors, fear, and other unwelcomed activities.

## Design Measures Supporting a Student's Perception of Safety

### Transparent Design

**The National Bullying Prevention Center** cites one in five students report being bullied while at school. Historically, stairwells were secluded areas of the school and often the targeted location of bullying. Maximizing the use of windows and clear sightlines reduces bullying opportunities by increasing the number of adult eyes monitoring these areas. By introducing natural light, stairwell spaces are put on display, bullying can be reduced, and circulation within the school is improved.



### Design for Connection

**The Federal Commission** on School Safety cites student connectivity as their top recommendation to create positive school climates. Open collaboration and communal spaces, such as the learning commons featured here, promote and foster connectivity amongst students and teachers, while also providing options for breakout learning. Incorporating centrally located spaces for active, student-owned learning, increases emotional and social learning experiences.



### Incorporating School Culture

**When students are proud** of their environment, they are less likely to disrespect spaces or act out. Blending school colors, mascots, and slogans into the design gives students a sense of belonging and pride. A National Federation of High Schools survey noted, "School spirit is a powerful reflection of pride, achievement, and determination. It goes hand in hand with positivity and is a benchmark of a school's holistic success."





### Wayfinding

**Wayfinding is crucial** for younger learners. The overall design should help students navigate their school. The use of colors, shapes, and themes associated with specific areas or grade levels allows students to know where they are and feel safe in knowing their surroundings.



### Defining Spaces

**Creating areas** for the school community and areas where the public can be welcomed allow security protocols to be in place and keep students safe. Community guests such as family and friends understand they are welcomed into the school's public gathering areas but access to classroom wings and other areas of the school may be restricted.

The National Center on Safe Supportive learning environments acknowledges the levels of crime schools experience are strongly correlated to school-wide testing scores, graduation rates, and attendance rates. By incorporating various security design elements into each school, safer learning environments are created. When students feel safe in their learning environment, they can flourish personally and academically.

Stay tuned for our next segments on school safety and security, where we will address site development, secondary perimeters, emergency planning, and how they impact student safety.