

Issue brief

The American Institute of Architects

Support safe school design for new and existing schools

THE PROBLEM

Most of the nation's 122,000 public and private k-12 school buildings are not designed to deter school violence. Education officials lack funding and credible information about how school violence can be mitigated through architecture and design.

THE ASK

AIA urges Congress to make design services eligible for existing federal grant funding and create a clearinghouse to provide all school officials with a "one-stop shop" repository of credible best practices to make schools more secure by design.

FOR MORE INFORMATION OR TO WORK WITH AIA ON THIS ISSUE CONTACT

Jim Brewer
(202) 213 0931
jimbrewer@aia.org

The American Institute of Architects
1735 New York Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20006-5292

ANALYSIS

Since 9/11, a central focus in the terrorism mitigation strategy of America's local, state, and federal governments has been the design or redesign of new or existing buildings and structures. From airports to sports stadiums and public/private office buildings to mass transit hubs, the design of buildings and structures has been rethought. In summary, architecture and design has been a key tactic in the fight against terrorism. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for the collective response to school mass shootings.

2019 will mark the 20th anniversary of the Columbine shootings. Since then, more than 220,000 students have experienced gun violence at school. Despite this, a systematic approach, like the one seen since 9/11, focusing on safe school design has not occurred. Yet, after a school shooting occurs, the one solution that is consistently called for and agreed upon by all sides of the political spectrum is "we need to design our schools to be safe learning environments." However, most of the nation's 122,000 public and private K-12 school buildings are still not designed to deter these violent acts.

Funding is one of the main parts of implementing a design-centered strategy. Information is too. Currently, local and state education officials lack a central repository of credible best practices, resources, and overall safe school design information. This is a huge deterrent to them estimating, and potentially securing, funding to retrofit existing schools or to build new ones. It also greatly inhibits many of them from considering how architecture and design can help ensure a school is a secure and positive learning environment, not a fortress.

THE SOLUTION

Authorize the creation of a federally funded and housed information clearinghouse for local and state officials. This entity would serve as an unbiased resource for them to constantly access. It would provide a reliable forum to disseminate relevant information from the numerous stakeholders necessary to ensuring a school safe design such as architects, engineers, first responders, building security experts, and mental health advocates. In addition, design services should be an eligible use of funding in any existing federal grants that support school security.

AIA advocates for the profession

The American Institute of Architects (AIA) has been championing the essential role of architects—and architecture—in designing a better world. Our work, and the work of our members, turns houses into homes and makes the places where we live, work, and play more beautiful, healthy, and safe. As a professional membership organization, AIA advocates for the value of architecture and provides our 94,000 members with the community, advocacy, and knowledge they need to drive positive change through the power of design.

Why do you need an architect?

People need places to live, work, play, learn, worship, meet, govern, shop, and eat. An architect is responsible for designing these places—whether private or public; indoors or out; rooms, buildings, or complexes.

Architects are professionals licensed by their state and trained in the art and science of building design who work closely with their clients to develop concepts for structures and turn those concepts into plans.

Architects create the overall look of buildings and other structures. But the design of a building involves far more than its appearance; buildings must also be functional, safe, and economical. Architects consider all these factors and more when designing.

What does an architect do?

Architects are the lead in terms of the design of a building or structure. The architect will develop a design based on extensive conversations with the client and future occupants, taking into consideration issues such as appropriate adjacencies, emergency evacuation requirements and user comfort and productivity.

Throughout this process, the architect will work closely with a variety of specialists, including engineering and construction professionals, to identify suitable materials, explore modifications and alterations, and evaluate structural integrity.

Architects are often involved in all phases of a construction project, from an initial conversation with the client through construction administration and commissioning, through completion of the final structure. This work requires a team of individuals with specific skills—designing, engineering, managing, supervising, and communicating with clients, builders, and contractors. Architects work closely with their clients to understand their goals for the project and spend a significant amount of time working with engineers and other consultants to explain the client’s ideas and ensure that the final building meets their needs.

Policy issues that architects impact

Sustainability	Housing
Procurement	School Safety
Diversity/equity	Building codes
Disaster preparedness and recovery resilience	Business and tax

AIA: A policy resource for Congress

If it impacts buildings or communities, architects are an invaluable resource to members of Congress to address it. Please don’t hesitate to contact AIA’s federal relations team by emailing jimbrewer@aia.org.



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