School Security and our Built Environment

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Since the horrible and ghastly tragedy in Newtown, CT, schools across the nation are engaged in one of our country's most important conversations – school safety and security. For the sake of our children (and I have two in school), it's paramount that we get it right.

Today at our USGBC offices, the Council of Educational Facility Planners International (CEFPI) hosted an important event, the School Security Summit, to help the school community understand the key issues of school security as it relates to the built environment.

The event brought a diverse set of stakeholders together, including educators, administrators, government agencies, elected officials, NGOs and security experts, with the goal of creating a best practices document addressing school security as it relates to the planning, design and operational protocol of the physical environment. The driving question was how do we better support safer school objectives through better, more thoughtful planning and design on existing campuses as well as new K-12 construction.

In an emotional testimonial connecting his first-hand accounts of hostage situations, John Cohen, Senior Advisor to the Secretary, Department of Homeland Security, kicked off the event by stressing the importance of the summit. Cohen reminded the audience that "there are a lot of people in Aurora, Oak Creek and Newtown who are continuing to suffer," comments that were then echoed by his colleague David Esquith, Director of the Office of Safe and Healthy Schools at the U.S. Department of Education. This charge became the basis for a discussion about school design strategies to prevent future tragedies.

Other attendees pointed out potential synergies between existing efforts around the country to make our schools more sustainable and deploying security best practices. The new challenge is to ensure that any upgrade, retrofit, or operational improvement of a school considers and implements appropriate security strategies.

Thanks to CEFPI, the best practices discussed today will quickly reach its membership, our nation's school facility planners who strive every day to make the places where our children learn safer and more secure.

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