

Integrated Solutions

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Why Advanced Duress Notification Matters in K-12

Discussing the evolution and value of wearable panic devices.

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Acts of violence and disruptive behavior in K–12 schools continue to be a serious problem. During the 2021–22 school year, 67% of U.S. public schools recorded at least one violent incident, with approximately 857,500 violent incidents recorded nationwide.

After years of [continued violence in K–12 schools](#), New Jersey became the first state to enact Alyssa's Law in 2019. The legislation required public elementary and secondary school buildings in New Jersey to be equipped with silent panic alarms linked directly to local law enforcement. With the primary intent of reducing response times and improving overall preparedness for emergencies, Alyssa's Law also launched a new era of compliance-driven security for K–12 schools.

A New Mindset for K-12 Security

The early adoption of Alyssa's Law focused on fixed and wearable panic notification solutions to instantly notify school administrators, SROs and law enforcement personnel that an incident was actively taking place. Even though panic buttons are a reactionary solution, they dramatically reduce emergency response times during threatening situations. A faster response reduces potential harm to students, teachers and anyone on the premises.

The early deployment of [panic notification solutions](#) proved effective in helping to deter, stop and minimize threatening situations, making these devices practical security solutions for K–12 schools. And although these panic devices helped to resolve event notification challenges, they failed to address response accuracy and information challenges to better assist first responders.

The Evolution of Better Wearable Panic Devices

Pinpointing Events with Performance and Accuracy

To be truly effective in K-12 schools with multiple rooms, common areas, hallways, athletic fields and surrounding grounds, wearable panic buttons need to be able to deliver several critical operations.

- The ability to activate multiple types of alarm conditions (e.g., violent incident, medical emergency, fire, or intruder), enabling first responders to respond quickly and appropriately
- Location services to indicate where an alarm has been activated within the school, making it faster and easier for first responders to pinpoint where the event is in progress.
- Response affirmation indicators such as LEDs and/or vibration to confirm that an alarm has been sent and alert the wearer to possible accidental activations.
- Proven wireless transmission technology that uses multichannel signaling across multiple frequencies and over long distances while minimizing interference and helping ensure alarms get through.
- Waterproof casings that allow devices to be worn in any setting.
- Long battery life to ensure continuous operation at times when it's needed most.

As this next generation of duress cards now comes to market, it is already evolving further to include expanded functionality and integration with intrusion, access control, video surveillance, and various communication platforms.



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Personal Ergonomics and the Comfort Factor

Early panic buttons were heavy and bulky, making them cumbersome and uncomfortable to wear. Yet school personnel need to always wear their wearable panic devices when on the premises. In many emergencies, a fixed or portable panic device that is out of physical reach may be difficult, if not impossible, to activate, defeating the purpose of wearable technology. Modern duress cards — panic buttons that are thinner and lighter, similar to access cards — address this challenge with a comfortable, unobtrusive form factor. Likewise, waterproof casings allow devices to be worn in a variety of environments where they may be exposed to water or moisture, which would otherwise incapacitate most electronic devices.

Why Advanced Duress Notification Matters

Comprehensive Campus Coverage

Schools require layered protection to ensure the safety and security of students, staff and visitors. This requires reliable monitoring across interior and exterior campus areas, including facilities constructed with heavy materials that can interfere with signal transmission. Using proven 900 MHz wireless-first technology ensures better situational awareness and faster responses.

Rapid Lockdown and Emergency Notification

Imminent [exterior threats](#) either directed at a K-12 school or in the surrounding neighborhood often demand an immediate lockdown. This requires reliable wireless-first system infrastructure and some degree of automation to effectively secure every entry/egress location.

Discreet Staff Emergency Communications

K-12 schools strive to maintain nurturing environments conducive to learning. This requires that school personnel have non-disruptive ways to call for help when needed. The ability to issue silent alerts can help keep situations from escalating, giving first responders a bit more time to arrive during incidents where seconds can save lives. Wearable devices with multiple functions can provide those few extra seconds during emergencies.

Perimeter and Outdoor Security

The same wireless-first infrastructure used for panic and duress notification devices can be cost-effectively used for high-performance sensors to effectively monitor large open exterior areas and entry/egress points to a K-12 school.

Visitor Awareness and Access Visibility

K-12 schools with robust wireless-first integrated security systems provide a strong deterrent to external threats without being obtrusive. This also provides better means of tracking visitors, providing better overall visibility as to who is walking through the halls of a K-12 school.

Flexible & Temporary Security Needs

K-12 schools typically host numerous special events and meetings as well as public elections over the course of the year. Wireless-first security and safety systems provide flexibility to scale and relocate devices quickly and with minimal impact on physical structures, including temporary buildings and classrooms, tents, outdoor staging areas and more.

The Intangible Stress Factor

School officials can also take comfort knowing that help is available at the push of a button wherever they are within the school — inside classrooms, outdoor play areas, hallways, or sports fields.

Balancing Form vs. Function

New wearable duress cards and wireless-first infrastructure combine both modern notification capabilities and user comfort using advanced and reliable transmission technologies. Although it's unfortunate that the need exists for these advanced security and safety solutions, it's fortunate they exist to provide better ways to protect children, their teachers, school staff, and everyone else who enters our K-12 schools.

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