



10 Proven Tips for Implementing Key Control in K-12 Schools



At their most basic level, key control systems are designed to securely protect keys in an electronic key cabinet. At their most complex, key control systems are an integral piece of the larger security puzzle – helping schools of all sizes to manage security and operations effectively during both emergencies and daily operations. Consider the following tips for successful key control deployment and ensure your K-12 school gets the most out of its new key control system from day one.

- 1. Include key control (and keys) in the school’s larger security plan** – Almost every school has a security plan, but not every school outlines the policies for managing its keys within this plan. Formally defining the processes and procedures related to key control not only helps to reduce confusion, but helps to ensure there are no security gaps relating to their access, usage, location, etc.
- 2. Appoint a key control administrator** – The appointed key control administrator should be a single person (or more depending on school size) charged with managing the school’s key control system and related policies. This person could be a front office administrator, maintenance team lead, or secretary, but needs to be someone who is readily available throughout the day and during emergency scenarios. This generally excludes principals and school resource officers (SROs).
- 3. Consider the various scenarios regarding the who, where, when, why of key access** – It is likely that your school has hundreds of keys in use right now by potentially hundreds of staff and potentially even non-staff. Consider those who need access to keys only on weekends (contracted workers), year-round (maintenance teams), and in emergency scenarios (first responders). Consider also where access is needed (offices, supply closets, classrooms, etc.). It is almost guaranteed that not every individual needs 24/7/365 access to every key. These considerations will help guide your key access policies.
- 4. Include emergency key provisioning** – As hard as it is to imagine, plans for active shooter and intruder scenarios are common in schools with key control playing an essential role. With a key control system in place, there is now a controlled, known location for master keys that first responders can access in case of an emergency. Consider administering whole-building key access to local police and SROs via unique PIN codes. In this way, first responders save critical time when responding to emergency events.



5. Choose key control cabinet location carefully – Key control systems can be as large or small as they need to be based on the school’s needs. A single key control cabinet may work for a small school where emergency, master, and maintenance keys can reside in one cabinet. Larger schools with multiple buildings will likely require networked systems where maintenance has access to multiple, local key cabinets while designated first responder cabinets are located near central entry/egress points. Key control systems are designed to scale as needs change.

6. Educate staff appropriately – Like any security tool, key control systems require training for those responsible for using it. Maintenance teams that were once accustomed to taking their keys home with them will now need to learn how to access and return keys in their care. Educating staff on the importance and reasoning behind key control policies helps gain buy-in and increase adoption for more secure, safer schools.

7. Practice key control policies during lockdown drills – With key control as a central feature of school security, it is essential to practice the emergency procedures put into place. Not only does this allow key administrators to witness the practical application of their policies and identify any potential issues, but also helps improve a school’s emergency preparedness.

8. Color code your key rings – Color coding key rings within a key cabinet can reduce confusion and streamline processes. For example, a red key ring may denote master building keys for use by first responders only while a black key ring specificities maintenance keys, yellow for contracted workers, and so on. Colors can also be used to indicate location, day to day vs. emergency keys, individual access level, and more.

9. Have a backup for your backup – What is the plan for first responder key access if the designated key cabinet is unreachable? Consider installing a small, wall-mounted safe outside that houses a master key to access the administration area and larger key control system. What happens if the key administrator is on vacation during an emergency? Designate a second key administrator who has localized access to emergency keys only. Make a plan for every possible scenario related to the management of your school’s keys and include these written plans in the school’s overall security plan.

10. Don’t forget asset management – Modern key control cabinets can be configured to control access to more than just keys. Consider asset management units to augment the security functions of your key control system. Create controlled access to emergency radios, panic buttons, and even weapons.

The tips and best practices outlined above serve as a starting point for building thoughtful, effective key control policies within your school. Visit morsewatchmans.com/markets/education or contact us for more information.