# PROTECTING WHAT MATTERS MOST

EXECUTIVE PROFILE

An Executive Perspective on School Safety, Technology, and Building Strong Security Partnerships

## ADAM OSTMEYER • MATT MCKINNON

How Adam Ostmeyer and Matt McKinnon Are Helping School Districts Build Safer, More Resilient Learning Environments

Interview conducted by Mylène Yaw

IN THIS PROFILE

- Staying Ahead of Emerging Threats
- Building a Culture of Preparedness
- The Critical Role of I.T. and Security Collaboration
- Leveraging Technology Without Losing the Human Element

# CREATING A CULTURE OF SAFETY

School safety has become one of the most significant responsibilities facing educational leaders today. As physical security, cybersecurity, operational resilience, and emergency preparedness continue to converge, school districts are being challenged to think differently about how they protect students, staff, and communities. While technology continues to advance, the experts interviewed for this article agree that creating truly safe schools begins with people, relationships, and a shared commitment to proactive planning.

*For Adam Ostmeyer and Matt McKinnon, effective school security extends far beyond cameras, access control systems, and emergency plans. It begins with culture.*

**How do you define a truly safe school environment?**

**Adam:** "A safe school is one where students and staff can focus on learning and teaching without constantly thinking about security. Students should have the freedom to be kids and educators should have the ability to focus on education. If safety is working as intended, it becomes part of the environment rather than something everyone worries about every day."

**Pictured**
Adam Ostmeyer
Matt McKinnon

## MATT:

"I agree. School safety is about creating a culture where everyone understands they have a role to play. When security, administration, teachers, and support staff work together, students can focus on their development and education instead of potential risks."

For both leaders, the ultimate goal is creating an environment where learning thrives because safety is already embedded into the district's daily operations.

# FROM REACTIVE SECURITY TO PROACTIVE PLANNING

One of the common themes throughout the discussion was the need for security teams to shift from reacting to incidents toward anticipating potential risks before they occur.

*The question is no longer if a challenge will arise but when. Preparation makes all the difference.*

MATT MCKINNON

MARANA UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

### How do districts stay ahead of evolving threats?

**Adam:** "We constantly evaluate trends, review data, examine crime statistics, and engage with industry experts. School safety is never finished. We look for opportunities to identify risks before they become incidents and work collaboratively to address vulnerabilities proactively."

That proactive approach requires ongoing assessment, continuous learning, and strong partnerships both inside and outside the organization.

**Matt:** "The most successful security programs are always looking forward. Threats continue to evolve, and districts need to prepare for what's coming next. The question is no longer if a challenge will arise but when. Preparation makes all the difference."

As school environments become increasingly connected through technology, maintaining that forward-looking mindset has become essential.

This shift toward proactive security also requires an ongoing commitment to continuous improvement. Both leaders emphasized that effective school safety programs can never become static.

Security teams must continually assess risks, review emerging trends, evaluate technology performance, and learn from both exercises and real-world events. As educational environments evolve, districts that regularly evaluate their preparedness are better positioned to identify vulnerabilities before they become incidents.

For Adam and Matt, security is not a project with a finish line but an ongoing process of assessment, adaptation, and refinement. The goal is to create a culture where improvement is expected, and collaboration drives better outcomes across the organization.

# BREAKING DOWN THE BARRIERS BETWEEN SECURITY AND I.T.

Modern school security systems rely heavily on networked technologies. From video surveillance and access control to analytics and emergency communications, security infrastructure now depends on close coordination with I.T. teams.

### Why is the relationship between Security and I.T. so important today?

**Adam:** "I.T. touches almost every aspect of modern school security. Cameras, access control systems, visitor management platforms, analytics tools, all rely on the network. Effective school safety simply isn't possible without strong I.T. involvement."

**Matt:** "Security systems are no longer standalone solutions. Everything lives on the network. Success requires security and I.T. teams to work together, communicate regularly, and understand each other's priorities."

This collaboration, however, doesn't happen automatically. The conversation highlighted that true collaboration extends far beyond technology management.

**Adam:** "Too often departments operate in silos. The more we learn from each other, the stronger the overall program becomes. Even when a conversation doesn't directly impact security, it helps build understanding and improve future decision-making."

As security systems become increasingly connected to network infrastructure, cloud applications, analytics platforms, and communication tools, the relationship between Security and I.T. has become a strategic partnership rather than an operational convenience.

Both leaders noted that stronger relationships between departments create benefits that extend well beyond individual projects. By increasing communication and developing a better understanding of each team's priorities, organizations improve decision-making, accelerate problem-solving, and strengthen overall preparedness.

The result is not simply better technology integration but a more resilient security program capable of adapting to evolving challenges.

> *Security systems are no longer standalone solutions. Everything lives on the network.*
>
> MATT MCKINNON

PHOTO COURTESY OF ARIZONA COMMUNICATION EXPERTS

# THE POWER OF STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

Technology providers play an increasingly important role in helping school districts navigate emerging security challenges. But according to both Adam and Matt, there is a significant difference between a vendor and a partner.

### What defines a true technology partner?

**Adam:** "A true partner stays engaged after the purchase. They answer questions, provide guidance, follow up regularly, and help solve problems. They earn trust by being transparent and consistent."

He believes honesty and accountability are among the most important qualities districts should look for.

**Adam:** "Don't tell me everything is perfect. Tell me the truth. Help me understand the strengths, weaknesses, and challenges of a solution so we can make the best decisions together."

**Matt:** "Being a partner means helping organizations find the right solution, even if it isn't something you sell. School safety is too important to be driven strictly by our products. Our responsibility is helping clients achieve the best possible outcome."

MUSD PARENT PARTNERSHIP · PHOTO: MARANA UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

# MAKING SMARTER SECURITY INVESTMENTS

With limited budgets and competing priorities, school leaders must carefully evaluate how and where they invest in security technology.

### What advice would you give to districts planning future security initiatives?

**Adam:** "Start by understanding your risks and vulnerabilities. Conduct assessments, collect data, and identify areas that need improvement. Technology should address specific challenges, not simply be implemented because it's new."

**Matt:** "One of the biggest mistakes organizations make is underutilizing technology they already own. Before purchasing something new, take a close look at your current systems. Often there's additional value that hasn't been fully realized."

Both leaders emphasized the importance of interoperability and long-term planning when adopting new technologies.

**Adam:** "The goal is creating systems that work together. When technologies operate independently and can't share information, it creates unnecessary complexity and limits effectiveness."

Centralized monitoring · Image: i3 International

# LEADERSHIP LESSONS FROM THE FRONT LINES

Technology remains a critical component of modern school safety, but both Adam and Matt believe leadership ultimately determines long-term success.

### What defines an effective security leader today?

**Adam:** "Servant leadership. Security is a team effort. Strong leaders support their teams, remove obstacles, and help people succeed. No individual has all the answers."

**Matt:** "The best leaders are listeners. They gather information, consider different perspectives, and collaborate with the people around them. People want to work alongside leaders who value input and encourage participation."

For Adam and Matt, developing future leaders is not simply about transferring knowledge. It is about encouraging curiosity, collaboration, and a willingness to learn from diverse perspectives.

Organizations that invest in cultivating those qualities today will be better prepared for the evolving security challenges of tomorrow.

# LOOKING AHEAD: THE FUTURE OF SCHOOL SECURITY

As emerging technologies continue changing the security landscape, both leaders see tremendous opportunity, particularly with artificial intelligence and advanced analytics.

**How will technology shape the future of school security?**

**Adam:** "AI will continue transforming the industry. The ability to identify patterns, improve situational awareness, and support decision-making creates exciting opportunities. But technology should enhance human judgment, not replace it."

**Matt:** "Threats are becoming more sophisticated, and security professionals must continue evolving alongside them. Technology will play an increasingly important role, but collaboration, training, and preparedness will always remain critical."

AZ DPS S.T.A.R. PUBLIC SAFETY PROGRAM · PHOTO: MARANA UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

# BEYOND THE JOB: FINDING BALANCE IN A DEMANDING PROFESSION

While much of the conversation focused on school safety, technology, and leadership, both leaders acknowledged the importance of maintaining perspective outside of work. In a profession where responsibilities can extend far beyond the traditional workday, balance is essential for long-term success.

## ADAM OSTMEYER

For Adam, that balance begins with trust in the people around him.

**Adam:** "What helps me is knowing that I have a team. If I take a day off or I leave early, I'm not stressed knowing that something's not getting done because we have a great team."

That trust allows him to focus on what matters most when he leaves the office.

**Adam:** "At the end of the day, that's why I'm doing all this. Like my family, right? I have kids. I can keep them safe at school, but if I'm not present at home, then I might as well not even work."

When it's time to recharge, he finds himself drawn to the outdoors.

**Adam:** "I'm an outdoors guy. When I'm not at school, either I'm running outside. I like to run a lot. I have a dirt bike. I go out and just get to nature. I want to turn my brain off, whether it's riding my dirt bike, running, or out in nature."

His curiosity, a trait that has served him well throughout his career, extends well beyond the workplace.

**Adam:** "I am such a curious person. I just like going out and learning new things and teaching my kids' stuff."

MARANA VISTA ACADEMY · PHOTO: MARANA UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

PHOTO: MARANA UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

## MATT MCKINNON

For Matt, maintaining that balance starts with preparation and confidence in the systems and support structures his team has established.

**Matt:** "As an integrator, we set up layers of response personnel. So, I'm not laying in bed going, what happens if something happens and I miss the phone call? There's layers of response."

Like Adam, Matt also enjoys spending time outdoors whenever possible.

**Matt:** "Same here with the outdoors, hunting, fishing, being outside. Knowing that I've set up layers of response so I can turn my phone off and be somewhere where I don't have service

He also has a passion that reflects the precision and attention to detail that security professionals often share.

**Matt:** "I'm a watch collector. Watching a video of a watch being put together is very hypnotic for me."

# FINAL THOUGHTS

Throughout the discussion, a consistent message emerged: effective school safety is ultimately a shared responsibility.

Whether discussing proactive planning, technology integration, leadership development, or strategic decision-making, both leaders repeatedly returned to the importance of communication and collaboration. No single technology platform, department, or individual can create a safe learning environment alone.

The strongest programs are built on trusted relationships, informed decision-making, continuous improvement, and a collective commitment to protecting students and staff.

When asked what message they would share with school leaders across North America, both professionals returned to a common theme: collaboration.

**Adam:** "Avoid silos. Invest in relationships. School safety is too complex for a single department or individual to solve alone. The strongest programs are built through teamwork and communication."

**Matt:** "Everyone brings unique expertise to the table. Security, I.T., administration, facilities, and trusted partners all contribute to safer schools. When everyone works toward the same goal, students and staff benefit."

As schools continue to navigate an increasingly complex threat landscape, technology remains a vital part of the security equation. What Adam and Matt's experience shows, safer schools are created when technology and teamwork work hand in hand. The most successful security programs combine innovative solutions with people united around a common goal: protecting their school community.

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH