

Closers on Classroom Doors

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From the well-known blog idighardware.com by Lori Greene, D&H is pleased to bring you a new column on codes—DECODED!

I had heard the rumors about a change to the Life Safety Code that would exempt classroom doors from needing closers, but I finally had time to track it down. Here's the scoop.

According to the 2009 edition of NFPA 101, corridor walls must have a 1-hour fire resistance rating, with certain exceptions:

- If all of the classrooms have an egress door leading to the outside, the corridor walls don't need to be rated.
- In fully-sprinklered buildings, the corridor walls don't need to be rated, but they must be smoke partitions.
- If the corridor has a 1-hour rated ceiling, the walls can terminate at the ceiling.

- Bathrooms don't require a 1-hour separation from the corridor, as long as there are 1-hour walls between the bathrooms and other spaces.
- In fully-sprinklered buildings, bathrooms don't require a 1-hour separation.

The elusive exemption for closers on classroom doors is in section 14.3.6(2)(b), which says, "*The provisions of 8.4.3.5 shall not apply to normally occupied classrooms.*" If you're skimming too fast, you could skim right over this reference to section 8.4.3.5, which is the section that says the doors have to be self-closing or automatic-closing. By exempting normally occupied classrooms from this requirement, the 2009 edition of the Life Safety Code no longer requires closers on classroom doors.



Classroom doors equipped with closers are often held open with creative (and non-code-compliant) methods.

Photo courtesy of Eyal Bedrik of Entry Systems, Ltd.

One question remains: How is “normally occupied” defined? It’s not defined in NFPA 101, so it would be up to the AHJ to decide whether a classroom meets the requirements for this exemption. My guess is that most classrooms in a school would be considered normally occupied.

Here’s the text from NFPA 101–2009 for new educational occupancies:

14.3.6 Corridors. *Corridors shall be separated from other parts of the story by walls having a 1-hour fire resistance rating in accordance with Section 8.3, unless otherwise permitted by the following:*

1. Corridor protection shall not be required where all spaces normally subject to student occupancy have not less than one door opening directly to the outside or to an exterior exit access balcony or corridor in accordance with 7.5.3.
2. The following shall apply to buildings protected throughout by an approved, supervised automatic sprinkler system in accordance with Section 9.7:
 - (a) Corridor walls shall not be required to be rated, provided that such walls form smoke partitions in accordance with Section 8.4.
 - (b) The provisions of 8.4.3.5 shall not apply to normally occupied classrooms.
3. Where the corridor ceiling is an assembly having a 1-hour fire resistance rating where tested as a wall, the corridor walls shall be permitted to terminate at the corridor ceiling.
4. Lavatories shall not be required to be separated from corridors, provided that they are separated from all other spaces by walls having not less than a 1-hour fire resistance rating in accordance with Section 8.3.
5. Lavatories shall not be required to be separated from corridors, provided that the building is protected throughout by an approved, supervised automatic sprinkler system in accordance with Section 9.7.

Here’s section 8.4.3, which is referenced above:

8.4.3 *Opening Protectives*

8.4.3.1 *Doors in smoke partitions shall comply with 8.4.3.2 through 8.4.3.5.*

8.4.3.2 *Doors shall comply with the provisions of 7.2.1.*

8.4.3.3 *Doors shall not include louvers.*

8.4.3.4 *Door clearances shall be in accordance with NFPA 80, Standard for Fire Doors and Other Opening Protectives.*

8.4.3.5 *Doors shall be self-closing or automatic-closing in accordance with 7.2.1.8.*

And here’s the corresponding section from NFPA 101—2009 for existing educational occupancies:

15.3.6 Corridors. *Corridors shall be separated from other parts of the story by walls having a minimum 1/2-hour fire resistance rating in accordance with Section 8.3, unless otherwise permitted by the following:*

1. Corridor protection shall not be required where all spaces normally subject to student occupancy have not less than one door opening directly to the outside or to an exterior exit access balcony or corridor in accordance with 7.5.3.
2. **The following shall apply to buildings protected throughout by an approved automatic sprinkler system with valve supervision in accordance with Section 9.7:**
 - (a) **Corridor walls shall not be required to be rated, provided that such walls form smoke partitions in accordance with Section 8.4.**
 - (b) **The provisions of 8.4.3.5 shall not apply to normally occupied classrooms.**
3. Where the corridor ceiling is an assembly having a minimum 1/2-hour fire resistance rating where tested as a wall, the corridor wall shall be permitted to terminate at the corridor ceiling.
4. Lavatories shall not be required to be separated from corridors, provided that they are separated from all other spaces by walls having a minimum 1/2-hour fire resistance rating in accordance with Section 8.3.
5. Lavatories shall not be required to be separated from corridors, provided that the building is protected throughout by an approved, supervised automatic sprinkler system in accordance with Section 9.7.

Note: *The International Building Code (IBC) does not require rated corridor walls in fully sprinklered schools, so closers are not required per the IBC. However, existing schools may be subject to the codes that were in effect when the school was built/renovated. Keep in mind that the code that applies to your project may differ from the requirements discussed here, and the AHJ has the final say. *