

Classroom Security Fact Sheet

The immediate need to address classroom security—often within tight budgetary constraints—can sometimes lead to rushed decisions like purchasing retrofit security devices that do not comply with current building codes, fire codes and accessibility standards. Often called classroom barricade devices, these products may impede egress and may not be operable by small children or people with certain types of disabilities.

It's crucial to carefully consider all aspects of security products when evaluating potential solutions.

- **Egress.** Evacuation is an important part of every facility's emergency plan, as is the need to keep all options open during an unpredictable active shooter/hostile event. The use of non-code-compliant security devices can delay or prevent building occupants from exiting. In addition, lockdown time may be increased while staff locate and install the devices.
- **Emergency response.** Once put in place, some of these devices cannot be removed from the outside, preventing staff and first responders from entering, and potentially violating current building and fire codes. In several school shootings, assailants have barricaded doors and delayed law enforcement response—which may have increased the number of casualties. After the shootings at Virginia Tech, Platte Canyon High School and the West Nickel Mines Amish Schoolhouse, emergency responders publicly discussed their difficulties in accessing the barricaded areas.
- **Unauthorized use.** Retrofit devices can be used by anyone who has access to them, including someone who wants to barricade himself along with others in a room to commit harm or take hostages.

“The testimony and other evidence presented to the Commission reveals that there has never been an event in which an active shooter breached a locked classroom door.”

—The Final Report of the Sandy Hook Advisory Commission

Planning to use classroom barricade devices during an active shooter event without considering the potential for misuse of the devices poses a risk to students and school staff. Code-compliant locksets are readily available which meet the requirements for egress, accessibility and fire protection and provide the necessary level of security.



Know the risks

Active assailant situations are only one type of hazard that administrators must plan for, and these events are statistically less likely to occur than other types of emergencies such as severe-weather events, fires and bomb threats, incidents with drugs or alcohol, mental health issues, bullying and other non-fatal victimizations.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics: In 2017, students ages 12–18 experienced about 827,000 victimizations at school, including thefts and nonfatal violent victimizations. In 2018, the FBI's report of Active Shooter Incidents in the U.S. identifies five such incidents that took place in schools, resulting in 29 fatalities and 52 injuries.

Codes to know

Most states require code-compliant security devices through adoption of one or more of these recognized model codes: NFPA 101 – The Life Safety Code, the International Building Code or the International Fire Code. States also adopt accessibility standards to ensure compliance with the Americans With Disabilities Act—a federal law that protects the rights of people with disabilities. These codes and standards require classroom door hardware to meet the following requirements:

- Classroom doors must unlatch with one releasing operation (all locks and latches simultaneously) and releasing hardware must be mounted between 34 inches and 48 inches above the floor.
- Hardware must be operable without tight grasping, pinching or twisting of the wrist, and without the use of a key, tool, special knowledge or effort for egress.
- Locked doors must be able to be unlocked from the outside with a key, credential or other approved means to ensure that staff and emergency responders can enter the room.

NFPA 3000 – Standard for an Active Shooter / Hostile Event Response (ASHER) Program was created to help organizations and communities organize, manage and sustain a response program. Guidelines include planning for, responding to and recovering from these events. The standard requires emergency action plans to include evacuation, relocation and secure-in-place procedures and requires security hardware on egress doors to meet the requirements of NFPA 101 – The Life Safety Code.

Additional classroom security considerations

- Ensure teachers and staff—including substitute teachers—have ready access to keys or access-control credentials needed to lock and unlock classroom doors.
- Enable a means of communication between staff and a central station or the main office.
- Deliver immediate notification of a hostile event to provide staff crucial time to secure classrooms, cover door lights and sidelights and move students out of the line of sight.

- Consider impact-resistant glazing or security film on glass adjacent to door hardware to help delay unauthorized access to the classroom.

Potential liability

Property owners have a duty to keep their premises safe for anyone legally allowed to be there, but a higher degree of care is required when dealing with children. If a property owner has violated a code, law or regulation, that violation can usually be taken as proof of negligence and failure to use the required amount of care. A third-party legal opinion concluded that classroom barricade devices—which by their nature do not permit immediate, free egress—don't meet the requirements of the published model codes or federal laws commonly adopted and enforced in the U.S. Even if a state legislature allows districts within its jurisdiction to override certain code requirements, they cannot override federal laws. And when child safety is at stake, jurors might give more weight to established life safety codes than to state legislators.

School safety and security resources:

- [Partner Alliance for Safer Schools—Guidelines for School Security](#)
- [National Association of State Fire Marshals—Classroom Door Security and Locking Hardware](#)
- [National Fire Protection Association—NFPA 3000](#)
- [LockDontBlock.org](#)
- [Safe and Sound Schools](#)
- [National Association of School Resource Officers](#)
- [Security Industry Association](#)
- [iDigHardware.com/schools](#)

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