

# LOCKDOWN FOR EDUCATORS

Ted Hayes, CSP, MSE

## ***What Does Lockdown Actually Mean?***

Last year's school shooting tragedy at Virginia Tech dramatically emphasized the importance of developing an effective lockdown program. Lockdown of school buildings during a violent incident saves lives; immediate lockdown and barricading of doors saves more lives.

The chance of having an active shooter or a violent incident in your school which would require lockdown is quite low. But if a violent incident takes place in your school, your entire staff needs to know what to do immediately.

## ***Definition of Lockdown***

*If there is a potentially dangerous situation taking place in or around your school, an armed intruder, an active shooter, or any ongoing threat of injury or death, lock it down, right now.*

The goal of a lockdown is to isolate the intruder, whether it is in the hallway or completely out of your school (lockout). Do not give the intruder the opportunity to enter your school or move freely from room to room and have easy access to students/staff. Lockdown and wait for the police.

## ***Law Enforcement Response***

Take a moment to put yourself in the responding police officer's shoes. In a crisis situation, there will be immediate response from law enforcement. Upon entering the school, any individual in the hallways is a potential suspect. Proper lockdown procedures can minimize this exposure.

Now consider a school where no lockdown procedures exist. Upon responding, the police officer may walk into hundreds of frantic students and staff - every one of them a concern. Just imagine the carnage that would take place if the intruder had such easy access to your students and staff.

## ***Practice Rapid Response Lockdown***

Simply discussing your lockdown procedures during a teacher in-service or 'walking' through the procedure is not enough. Lockdown practice must be full force, rapid response – teachers must learn to 'act not react' when a lockdown has been initiated. Valuable time is often wasted when a teacher feels the need to confirm that the lockdown is indeed real. When the lockdown code is initiated – rapid response is needed. Safely behind a locked classroom door is where a teacher can determine if the lockdown is real.

Teachers need to be visual and verbal in their actions to their students in the classroom once the lockdown begins. Secure students in your classroom, then visually sweep the hallway and gather any students not secured in a classroom. It's important for staff to understand that they may need to get physical when implementing the lockdown. A student walking down the hallway may hesitate or disregard a teacher's request to get in to a classroom. Time is of the essence – grab that student by the arm and pull them in the classroom.

## ***Classroom Concerns***

Should blinds/shades be closed in the classroom? There is the opinion that blinds/shades should not be closed; this may be your only contact (visual) with the outside world. Your local police department needs every advantage - don't cut them off from visual communication.

Consider placing a brightly colored clipboard and a wax pencil in every classroom. When in lockdown, the teacher can use the clipboard/wax pencil to communicate messages; when held up against the window, communication can be maintained with law enforcement outside of the school building.

A teacher initiating the lockdown must be calm yet decisive with his/her actions. In a crisis situation, students may regress into childlike behaviors - in stress, children regress. Students will more readily follow a teacher's visual signals rather than their audible commands - its human nature. If the teacher becomes frantic and begins screaming wildly, you can expect the students to do the same. If the teacher's actions portray calmness, the chance of their audible commands being followed increase significantly.

Once the lockdown procedure is initiated, the classroom door is secured and barricaded. During the review of your lockdown procedures, identify those objects in each classroom – a desk, a cabinet, a bookshelf, etc., which will be used to barricade the door. Make sure these objects are sturdy enough to block the entrance of an intruder, yet are easily maneuverable by students and staff.

Place the students in the safest area of the room, away from doors and windows and out of the direct site of the intruder. Shut off the lights. Remember, the hallway lights will probably remain on - the teacher should be able to see out of the classroom door (if un-barricaded), and the intruder probably cannot see in. No one is to leave the room, not even to use the restroom.

Develop an “all clear” code. Do not use something as simple as having a staff member knock on your door, stating it is all clear and you can come out. You never know, this could be a dangerous trap set by an intruder. Rather, consider developing a verbal code with law enforcement or an all clear card that can be slid under the door.

### **Lockdown Tips**

- Develop/practice your lockdown procedure
- Develop a PA message/bell code using words to identify a high risk event, i.e.: “paging Mrs. Lockman” or simply “we are in lockdown”
- Students must be instructed to go to the nearest classroom. Repeat the code at intervals of 15 seconds.
- Calmly inform students as to what is happening - they may panic if they don't know.
- Always have a contingency plan, never “lock” yourself into one plan
- Secure the classroom doors. Staff will gather any students in the hallway prior to securing their door. Barricade the doors if possible.
- Turn off the lights, seat students on the floor in the safest area of the room, away from doors/windows.
- If teachers and their class are in transition in the hallway, they will enter the nearest classroom.
- Take attendance.
- Do not call the office for general information.
- Call the office only with vital information, such as reporting the number and severity of injuries. Never identify your room number unless asked to do so.
- No restroom breaks allowed.
- Do not allow the use of a radio/TV within the classroom.
- Do not use cell phones - history shows that these calls may be aired live on TV and intruders may find where you are.
- Be patient as possible. Law enforcement should be equipped with master keys to unlock classroom doors when it is safe.
- Staff should never make the determination it is safe and they can exit the classroom.

Remember, in an intense crisis situation such as an active shooter, classrooms may be locked down for hours before the school can be cleared by law enforcement. Patience and strictly following your school's rapid response lockdown procedures will save lives.