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# Practical, Code-Compliant CLASSROOM LOCKDOWN SOLUTIONS



By Kerby Lecka

**Although the COVID pandemic has dominated our attention in the K-12 environment, school security must still be on our radar.**

If there is a silver lining to the pandemic, it's the fact that remote learning contributed to a reduction in school shootings in 2020. However, 2021 saw a return to the trend.

When school shootings occur, administrators are under extreme pressure to “do something” to satisfy the concerns of parents – especially in private schools funded by tuition from these parents.

Yet, private schools do not have access to public funding to afford comprehensive access control security and safety solutions for their classrooms.

Understandably, administrators look for an affordable solution. Many may choose inexpensive products to address the security concerns.

However, no classroom security solution is complete unless it also addresses life safety. Some products can create more risk to life safety than the chances of an active shooter. For example, fire is statistically more than three times likely to happen than an active shooter situation in a school.

School administrators should consider traditional, tested, locking products that meet the code requirements for providing life safety in addition to security.

## Meeting Code Compliance

Quick fixes that force a door shut clearly do not meet building code requirements, putting lives at risk and escalating the liability for the school. Lockable doors in educational facilities must be capable of being unlocked from the outside with a key or other means approved by local building fire and life safety authorities.

A school classroom lockdown solution should create a balanced approach between providing life safety and security. It is always recommended to use traditional, tested locking

products that comply with building, fire, and life-safety—like NFPA 101 (National Fire Protection Association), the International Building Code, and the International Fire Code—to provide a means of egress to unlatch with one releasing operation.

Sophisticated solutions layered with technology requirements are typically too expensive for smaller schools. Reliance on WiFi, Bluetooth, and other wireless communication technology increases performance risks when lockdown may truly be needed.

Some do not allow re-entry if needed when they are in lockdown mode. This has proved to be life threatening for any students left outside the classroom.

## Unintended Consequences

Well-intentioned products clearly violate life safety standards and create a greater risk than any security they provide. If they are used to barricade a door, a bully or dangerous person could trap someone in a classroom and a teacher or first responder would not be able to enter. This is clearly an unintended consequence of their misapplication.

A good solution should allow the door to be locked from the inside of a classroom without requiring the door to be opened, yet can provide notification and allow authorized access by staff and emergency responders in case someone inside the room intends to cause harm or injury.

Look for solutions that provide specifically designed classroom security locking functions allowing users to quickly lock the door from either side and meet code requirements for free egress, fire protection and accessibility.

These can be the fastest and safest solution for “lockdown” situations and minimize the possibility of an exit being blocked during an emergency.

Private school decision makers need to be educated about the risk and liability involved if they do not provide the proper life safety compliant products.

### Three Simple Guidelines

For life safety and security, ensure that any school classroom lockdown solution addresses these three simple guidelines:

- Opens from inside the room without requiring tight grasping, pinching or twisting of the wrist, and accomplished with one operation.
- Locked and unlocked from the inside of a classroom without requiring the door to be opened, while still allowing staff entry in an emergency.
- Locked automatically or have a simple locking mechanism such as a pushbutton, key, card, fob, fingerprint, etc., that can be locked from inside the classroom without having to open the door.

The National Association of State Fire Marshals (NASFM) has a wealth of school security documents in the resource section of their website, [www.firemarshals.org](http://www.firemarshals.org), including a Suggested Classroom Door Checklist.

### Retrofitting Doors

Primarily, but not always, you will find classroom doors with mortise locks. Replacing traditional mechanical locks

with electrified locks allows for global and local lockdown to secure the safety of the students within the classroom.

Recently, a few select manufacturers have added an additional manual deadbolt to an electrified mortise lockset to increase the security strength opening. This allows the inside thumb turn to project the deadbolt and provides a proven, time tested, high-level of security to a classroom door.

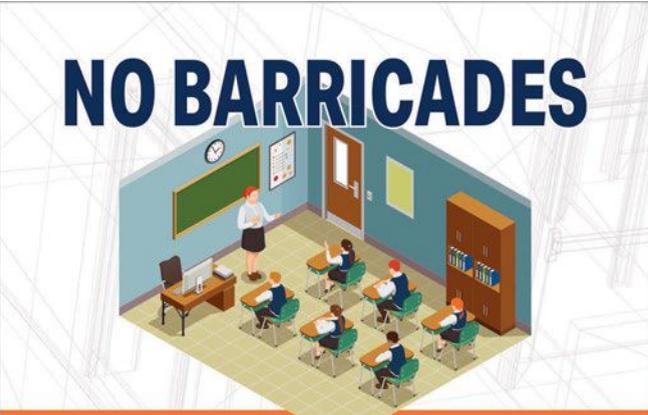
### Conclusion

As always, local jurisdiction approval of any classroom lockdown solution is required. Be aware that many providers push a layered approach (perimeter, offices, classroom) to sell larger solutions that capture more of the public funding being made available.

Addressing the classroom door is a small but important layer of the overall lockdown system protocol. For schools operating on a tight budget, focusing on the last line of defense, the classroom door, may be the most common sense solution.

It should be noted that an active shooter has never breached a locked classroom door in any recorded school security incident. **CSP**

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