

Emergency Drills: Changing to Meet Today's Needs

Today's emergency drills must go beyond preparing for a fire or bad weather.

By Brian N. Moore, RSBS



Ask your older staff members what it was like when they went to school. What were the drills like? Many will explain that occasionally, students were required to crawl beneath the desk and put their heads between their knees. What was this drill for, you may ask? In the event the Soviet Union detonated a nuclear device in the area of a school. Now, share that with your younger staff members and they will ask you what the Soviet Union was!

We have all performed fire drills as part of our monthly schedule in schools. Now think about this statistic: the last significant incident in which students were killed in a school due to fire was 92 students in the Our Lady of Angels school fire in Chicago, Illinois, on December 1, 1958.

When the last time students were killed in acts of violence? One only has to look back to Newtown last year to see their story. Yet we still hold more fire drills than

we do lockdown drills don't we? Have you ever asked yourself why?

Changing Needs, Changing Views

Many people will tell you that holding lockdown or active shooting drills would “scare” the students. But don't you think that students were scared during nuclear bomb drills? Of course! Isn't it our job to address reality?

We no longer have nuclear bomb drills because the overall threat of a nuclear conflict is well past. The threat that an act of violence would occur in a school is not past—it is very much present each and every day. That means we have an obligation to ensure that our staff and students practice what to do during a possible event.

I recently was invited to watch a commercial company hold an active shooter response drill. It was at a bank office and the staff did a great job of preparing for and responding to the threat. I spoke to some staff members who said that they had never thought about what they would do if they heard a shot or shots, but started to think about it after the Navy Yard shooting a few months ago. At least they and their company did not bury their heads; they met the need by adding training.

If you are in doubt, ask the parents in your district. I am willing to bet that parents from Sandy Hook or Columbine would tell you that these drills would be welcome additions to the drill schedule in their schools. Police departments around the country use what is called crime mapping and data analysis to see what the current trends in crime are and how they can better respond to these issues. As educators, we need to do the same analysis and find a way to respond.

Public Opinion

There are many opportunities to use these types of drills to make a positive statement to parents and the community. Far too many times schools are accused of being dinosaurs that do not stay current with trends in education. We must frequently remind the public that we take educating children seriously and that we constantly update professional development and training needs to make sure students are prepared for college or the work force.

The number of active shooter incidents has tripled in the past three years.

Presenting the public with the fact that we strive to protect their students from any emergency can only be seen as a good thing. We always say that we are hopeful that bad things will not occur in school, but we always must prepare for the very worst. We owe it to the parents and the students that we serve to be prepared for any type of emergency, including an act of violence.

Rolling Out a Drill

If you decide to hold an emergency lockdown drill, consider these steps.

First, make sure that you and your staff know the established emergency plan procedure. How will you respond and what do you expect students to do? Review these procedures with the experts from your local police agency. Is there anything they would have your staff do differently? It's always good to get other input.

Now take advantage of an opportunity to involve parents as well. The number of active shooter incidents has tripled in the past three years, according to the U. S. Department of Justice. Many of these incidents have occurred in places like shopping malls and movie theaters. Invite your local police agency to join you in talking with the community about your schools' plan in the event of an act of violence and use it as a platform to help parents prepare for how to respond if they face a situation when they are with their children outside school. It is a good opportunity to help them prepare as well as address why you think it is imperative for your school to practice for such a horrifying event.

Discuss what teachers should do with their kids during this time.

Next, have police meet with your staff prior to the drill to explain what will happen when law enforcement arrives on the scene of an emergency. Many people believe that the police will enter a building immediately and help people right away. This is not at all the case. In fact, police are taught now to enter the school or area where the violence is occurring and not stop until they have eliminated the threat or ensured that the threat no longer exists. They will walk right past people begging for help or classrooms with students locked inside.

This is important for staff members to understand; the police will come back to help, but only after they are positive that there is no longer a threat of continuing violence.

Discuss what teachers should do with their kids during this time. Where in the room should they locate students? Should they turn lights on or off? Should they open their outside blinds or keep them closed? In our district the procedure is to keep outside blinds open so law enforcement officers on the outside can see into classrooms and see if a threat exists.

And Now the Students

Our students know there are bad people in the world. Have you ever watched the video games that students play? Many include acts of violence that make grown adults feel faint! Today's young people are being raised



in a culture where violence is constantly in the media and in the entertainment industry. If students ask us why we are having a lockdown drill, we must respond that there are bad people in the world and we need to know what to do if a bad person comes into the school and tries to hurt someone.

Students should know that the purpose of any drill is to ensure their safety. Focus on the fact that the drill is an opportunity for their classmates and their teacher to practice what to do if something bad happens. If police are involved in the drill, explain that the police are there because they, too, would come to help the school

and protect the students if there were a threat. Obviously we have to tailor that message to the grade-level audience.

High school students are well aware of these issues and usually thank us when we hold an unannounced lockdown drill and they see how effectively we respond. One of the best suggestions I ever received about how we should respond during a lockdown came from an 11th grade student who noticed an area of the school that was particularly vulnerable—an area the adults had not noticed. Make sure we are having a dialog with students, not just a lesson!

Face the Challenge

Districts and schools have a real opportunity to create an effective and positive emergency drill procedure that would save lives during an act of violence. Drills are an opportunity to bring parents, teachers, students, and the rest of the community together to talk about a critical issue like violence in our society. More important, it is an opportunity to be clear about our dedication to the belief that we must protect the students in our care.

Brian N. Moore, RSBS, is supervisor of security and public safety for the Red Clay Consolidated School District, Wilmington, Delaware, and a member of ASBO's Editorial Advisory Committee. Email: Brian.moore@redclay.k12.de.us

2014 Eagle Institute

THE LEADER AS AN INNOVATOR

SAVE *the* DATE

July 15 – 18, 2014
Washington, D.C.
Hamilton Crowne Plaza

asbointl.org/EagleInstitute



Proudly sponsored by

