

Classroom security: What you should (and should not) do

Classroom security is as critical to the safety of your students and staff as perimeter access into a school. There are a lot of ways to lock a classroom door. Unfortunately, many of the tactics employed today actually put staff and students at risk. It's important to know which methods are effective and which should be avoided. Every school should meet or exceed the baseline of classroom security for products and protocol. There are different options for implementing that baseline, depending on your budget, staffing capabilities and potential risk factors.



Impact of safety on classroom learning

A quality learning environment is one that is safe. After all, students need to feel safe in order to learn. Studies show school climate and school safety as critical elements of educational performance. One study, *On the Importance of a Safe School and Classroom Climate for Student Achievement in Reading Literacy*, reported that variation between classes' reading achievement could be explained by the safety factors—with these factors significantly and positively impacting achievement. Additionally, in the report, *Too Scared to Learn? The Academic Consequences of Feeling Unsafe at School*, it is reported that a safe environment is a prerequisite for productive learning. Findings indicated that when students feel unsafe in the classroom, their ability to concentrate is diminished and performance on assessments is adversely affected. Even more, students who report feeling unsafe in the classroom have higher mean absences and lower scores on math and English language arts standardized tests.

Baseline classroom security

When it comes to classroom security, it's imperative that teachers and staff can lock doors promptly for their protection and that of students. States are beginning to be proactive in defining what it means to provide classroom security. California, for example, established a law in 2011 (AB 211, Article 8.5) that requires classrooms and rooms with an occupant load of more than five people to be equipped with classroom security locks. Available in both mechanical and electronic options, these locks retract via a latchbolt using a knob/lever from either side, unless the outside is locked by key from either side. When locked, the latchbolt retracts by a key outside or the knob/lever inside. An auxiliary latch deadlocks the latchbolt when the door is locked. The inside lever is always free for immediate egress.

According to Lori Greene, AHC/CDC, CCPR, FDAI, a codes expert at Allegion and author of idighardware.com, [classroom security locks](#) are ideal in the school environment because they do not impede egress—the door may be opened from the inside by simply turning the lever, even when the door is locked. The key cylinder on the inside is used to lock the outside lever only. Additionally, because a key is required to lock the door, it prevents students and others who don't have access to the key from locking the door. This is important to classroom safety because there's actually a higher likelihood of student-on-student or student-on-teacher violence than that of an outside intruder. Consider:

- In 2010, there were about 828,000 nonfatal victimizations at schools among students 12 to 18 years of age.*
- Approximately 7% of teachers report that they have been threatened with injury or physically attacked by a student from their school.*
- **In fact, it is about 30,000 times more likely that a student or staff will experience a non-fatal violent or seriously violent crime in school than they will experience a fatal active assailant***

In addition to classroom lockdown, classroom security locks help aid in preventing disturbances in halls from expanding to classes; improving building security during afterhours facility use; securing contents during non-school hours; and providing environmental consistency throughout a building.

Additional classroom safety measures

While classroom security locks provide the first layer of defense, they should not be the only tactic utilized to ensure classroom safety. Additionally, schools should:

- Keep doors closed, except during changing periods
- Keep doors locked while rooms are in use—this enables faster lockdown in emergency situations
- Consider bullet-resistant film/shades
- Develop a safety plan, including staff protocol and places to hide

The right lockdown solution

When selecting security hardware and establishing protocol within a school, there are several aspects that should be considered:

- The severity of the risk
- The probability of the risk
- Effectiveness of mitigating the risk
- Ability of staff to implement lockdown
- Budget

What not to do

There are some measures in use that don't mitigate risk. If anything, they put staff and students in greater danger. The following are unsafe practices:

- Hardware requiring an individual to step out of the room to lock the door, increasing exposure to an intruder or conflict in the hallway
- Hardware with “unrestricted ability” to lock or unlock the door, allowing anyone—including students—to take control of an opening
- Magnets or tape on the door to prevent latching (violation of fire code)
- School doors that don't automatically close, possibly preventing them from being in ready position in an emergency lockdown
- Hardware that is not permanently attached to the door, requiring staff to locate and attach the device in the midst of a lockdown emergency
- Hardware that slows access or egress during an emergency situation
- Deadstop devices or sleeves which clasp around the v-shaped hinge attached to the closer mechanism on doors (violation of fire code)
- Floor bolts or other devices that obstruct the door
- Anything that blocks entrance to emergency responders
- Any option that might be accessed or used by an unauthorized person (student, visitor or another staff member) acting with ill-intent

There are three types of lockdown hardware:

Manual lockdown

- Keys manually lock down a room or space
- Most economical of lockdown solutions

Remote lockdown

- Localized solution for schools that want to upgrade without cost of networked system
- Lockdown activated by remote fob within proximity of door

Centralized lockdown

- Integrated with access control software
- Doors throughout building or campus locked from central location

Many classroom security locks include visual indicators, which provide at-a-glance verification of the locked/unlocked status of the door from inside of the classroom. This is a beneficial feature in everyday use as well as in emergencies. In the K-12 and higher education environments, indicators also should be part of the overall security plan. With indicators on locks or exit devices, an opening can be quickly assessed—from a distance—to determine if it is locked. The convenience of visual indicators to assess a lock saves time and alleviates confusion in the event of an emergency.

More security, less risk

Regardless of a school's available budget, there are always safety measures that can be taken to minimize threats of violence. There are avenues to fund door hardware upgrades that will provide the right type of security for your school today. In addition to state and federal grants, many schools take advantage of the federal government's Cooperative Purchasing program to secure discounted pricing and pre-vetted vendors. These options help you make decisions that will enhance security and mitigate risk.

[Contact an Allegion security consultant](#) to help you assess the level of security at your school. We'll identify gaps and offer recommendations that meet building and budgetary needs.



For more information about classroom security, visit us at us.allegion.com/industries/education or call 866-516-1597.

* National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, and Bureau of Justice Statistics, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. Washington, DC; 2010.

Sources:
[On the Importance of a Safe School and Classroom Climate for Student Achievement in Reading Literacy](#), Elisabeth Frank & Monica Rosén, Sweden
[Too Scared to Learn? The Academic Consequences of Feeling Unsafe at School](#), Johanna R. Lacoe

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