



WHY MOST SCHOOLS ARE NOT FULLY PREPARED FOR A LOCKDOWN

When it comes to campus safety, schools must effectively address two main components with their plans pertaining to lockdowns and active shooter events.

Firstly, procedures – those steps in sequence that a school follows when there is an event that warrants a lockdown. What would be considered a ‘procedure’? For example, a teacher in a classroom might close and lock the classroom door, turn lights off, and lead students into a hunker-down area.

The second component (and most critical to minimize damage and prevent loss of life in catastrophic situations) is rapid communication. The ability to quickly communicate the danger to everyone on school grounds using emergency notification technology is of the utmost importance. This ensures everyone can be taken to a safe place fast and remain there until the threat is neutralized.

Eastern DataComm has worked with hundreds of schools in various districts over the last 20+ years to bring them technological solutions that make their campuses safer places for the students, faculty, and staff. From our experience, we’ve often seen schools focus concertedly on the first component - procedures. Each state requires emergency plans, and many require districts to practice regularly emergency lockdown drills.

This second component, unfortunately, is where most schools fall short - utilizing adequate, reliable technology

that notifies everyone of a lockdown in seconds. A disconnect exists where even with proper procedures, if rapid, uniform, and blanketing communication isn’t deployed, it then becomes nearly impossible for all to follow the protocol they’ve learned and rehearsed. By investing in high-performance technology, both first responders and all on school grounds can be notified simultaneously of a threat within seconds of it occurring.

Many school districts use a phone or PA system to disseminate notifications to everyone on grounds. Let’s explore an active shooter scenario:

A teacher in a classroom on the far end of the building looking out the window sees an intruder approaching with a gun. When asked what that teacher would do, the response is either one of two paths.

One - The teacher calls the main office so they can get the notification out across campus, or

Two - The teacher makes a lockdown announcement over the PA system if he/she had that capability in the classroom.

In either case, typically someone from the main office will then pick up a phone to call the police. Finally, when asked about students and teachers outside the building, some schools explain that a third person will get on a walk-talkie to notify them.



What can be gleaned from this example? Two main areas of concern that can add risk to an equation where it shouldn't be a factor at all – A.) delays in timing to issue a response because of all the players involved and B.) the potential for communication failure, which could have a tragic impact in this life-or-death situation.

Let's explore further. The first problem requires multiple people in the building to act expediently (and heroically) in the face of danger. Can you trust everyone in the building to be able to make a coherent, actionable lockdown announcement over the PA system when there is an impending danger? A safe bet would be: Probably not. The margin of error widens as we continue to drill down into each step of this sequence.

If the school is relying on handheld radios to notify everyone outside of the building, it obviously requires someone to remember to issue notification over the radio. It also requires people outside of the building to remember to have the radio within reach, have it turned on, with volume up and fully charged.

Technology systems, although very important, are not always upgraded in a timely manner. Here enters the second major problem. For example, many schools have invested in placing phones in classrooms. Yet all rooms may not have a phone, and may rely on an intercom system instead. For a classroom teacher, the intercom system is not always an ideal way of getting the notification out when in danger. Another option is the overhead PA system. Within districts, many schools have auditory dead zones in their buildings, bathrooms, stairwells, and other locations. A PA speaker may not be effective enough to cut through loud noise areas such as gyms, cafeterias, and music rooms. For obvious reasons, these areas would require accompaniment of visual emergency cues like LED beacons (strobe lights) and/or LED signboards – but not all schools are equipped with such technology.

“Hope” won't save lives in an active shooter event. In the advent of technological advances, schools can remove the chance for human error, power shortages or battery outages by automating the entire emergency notification system.

It is now as easy as pressing a button – where communication and response time can be taken down to a fraction of what was formerly possible. To activate the system, large accessible lockdown buttons are

essential. Alternate methods for activation – be they by phone system or smart device – are also crucial to allow for the best fitting method to be enacted depending on the situation the school is facing. This rapid-response system should integrate with the school's PA system, allowing an automated lockdown announcement to be played across all speakers with the ability to extend both inside and outside of the building. In conjunction with audible announcements, the system should include visual elements like LED beacons and signboards, preferably by active entranceways.

Once activated, notification deployment to everyone on school grounds, inside and outside of campus buildings, as well as to police and other emergency services ensures fast-response times. To complement audible announcements, phone calls, flashing LED beacons and signboards, an expansive alert on PC screen pops, through emails, and text messages furthers the reach of emergency notifications, leading to a faster return to safety.

Ensure your school district is ready across all fronts when it comes to an emergency notification. With sophisticated technologies and monitoring systems, emergency notifications can run smoothly, eliminating room for error and minimizing potential for tragedy.

