



# Classroom Security *Risk Transfer*

By Paul Timm, PSP

**On a fairly regular basis, someone** sends me a video clip or a link to a news story, asking, “Have you seen this classroom lockdown device?” After I respond in the affirmative, the inevitable follow-up question is, “It’s good, right?” When I respond in the negative, people are startled.

As a security consultant, I want to like the classroom security after-market product that costs less than a classroom security lock, is made in America, is endorsed by some local authority figure, and has lots of people buzzing. Unfortunately, that magnet, barricade, or door contraption poses more risks than it addresses. To improve classroom security, keep the doors closed and locked at all times. If you are unwilling to do that, consider purchasing classroom security locks that enable teachers to lock the door from the inside with a key.

This article will address the emotional appeals and code violations that accompany classroom security after-market devices. To address any remaining doubts, we will also present an ultimate litmus test.

The typically inescapable and unchanging rule of security is that “effective loss prevention is always

preceded by extensive losses.” (Saul Astor, *Loss Prevention*) This rule, however, can encourage people who have a responsibility to address security vulnerabilities to take risks on unproven or downright dangerous products. Fear, as it turns out, is always an excellent motivator. The problem is that advertisers know this and use fear as the main ingredient in their emotional appeals. This can lead well-meaning, but uneducated, individuals to make potentially big mistakes when attempting to address actual problems.

The good news is that with the help of some simple guidelines, and by checking with experts (e.g. a legitimate fire marshal), these dangerous mistakes can often be avoided. The hardest part is having the patience to take a step back and determine the best course of action rather than rushing in and throwing the first product you hear about into your school to demonstrate that you are making progress.

Begin by immunizing yourself against emotional appeals. Concern is good but, generally, fear is not. Take a measured and collaborative approach to decision making. Next, watch out for the patriotic appeal. Classroom security after-market devices will often tout that they are proudly made in the

United States. Is that a real reason to purchase this kind of product? Finally, beware of the startup appeal. Some device websites relate stories about how the product’s inventor survived a school shooting and now wants to help protect your students. With all due respect, experience is not the same thing as expertise.

In general, classroom security devices do not consider the bigger picture. There is no doubt that some of them are effective in keeping an active assailant from entering a classroom, but they typically violate fire/disability codes and fail to consider the additional risks that they present.

Keep in mind that fires and criminal acts (e.g. theft, sexual abuse) are far more likely to occur than an active shooter incident. Since after-market devices are designed with only one risk in mind, they often infringe on National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) codes and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards. They also run the risk of unauthorized deployment.

Let’s consider two types of after-market devices:

1. **Magnets that cover strike plates**—The least expensive after-market option, these

magnets cover the strike plate in the door frame. The door is already locked, but the magnet prevents the strike from latching. Advocates of magnets tout the affordability of the product and the simplicity of no longer needing a key to secure the door.

However, magnets prevent the automatic latching of fire-rated doors (e.g. Science Labs) as required by the International Fire Code (703.2). Individuals with no credential (key), such as intruders, special needs students, and students with malevolent intent, can enter the room, remove the magnet, and lock the door. To make matters worse, teachers typically cease carrying classroom door keys. A facilities professional recently sent me this inquiry, "(Our existing magnets) only work on metal frame doors. Do you know of a similar solution for non-metallic door frames?"

2. **Barricades**—These products block or prohibit intruder access from the hallway. The teacher places a device that drops bolts into the threshold, deploys a widget that hooks onto the door frame/handle, or slides a metal sleeve over the door closer arm. Advocates of these products primarily rely on cost comparisons between their devices and classroom security locks.

Be careful. Many of these products violate ADA standards. Can those with disabilities deploy/remove them? Also, once deployed, the devices can prevent an unobstructed "means of egress" from the classroom.

Once deployed, these products violate *NFPA 101—The Life Safety Code* for single motion egress. (The releasing mechanism) "shall open the door leaf with not more than one releasing operation." (7.2.1.5.10.2) The after-market device presents, at a minimum, a second motion.

After-market devices also require "special knowledge" to operate. All individuals must be able to egress without "the use of a key, a tool, or special knowledge or effort for operation from the egress side" (NFPA Life Safety Code 101—7.2.1.5.2). Assuming teachers receive good instruction in product deployment and/or removal, how would the school account for students, substitutes, or visitors?

Please understand that the NFPA is working diligently to incorporate classroom security. The 2018 edition of NFPA 101 will reflect those efforts. In the January/February 2017 issue of the *NFPA Journal*, Ron Cote' states, "The provisions of NFPA 101 for classroom door locking against unwanted entry present a carefully engineered package that combines hardware dos and don'ts with performance, training and operational procedures. The package can serve as a model to other standards development organizations and to school jurisdictions that have developed homegrown, but in many cases

deficient, solutions to their security concerns."

In the meantime, consider the following litmus test. If you are certain that an after-market solution is acceptable for your students and staff, simply ask the authority having jurisdiction (AHJ), such as your local fire marshal, to state as much on the AHJ letterhead. That simple act will move my transfer of risk concern to a transfer of liability issue. And, if you get that approval on AHJ letterhead, please drop me a note at [www.retasecurity.com](http://www.retasecurity.com). ■



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