

Locking Down School Safety and Access Control

"In addition to the faster lockdown times, schools of all sizes are finding the other notable benefit of electronic access control is being able to manage the building better." by Gordon Holmes

According to a recent CNN article, in the first 20 weeks of 2018 there have been 22 school shootings where someone was hurt or killed. This averages out to more than one shooting a week, so it's no surprise that school security is a growing focus of today's world.

Since 1999 when the Columbine shooting happened, towns such as Sandy Hook, Connecticut, Blacksburg, Virginia and more recently Parkland, Florida - are forever etched in our minds because of the senseless violence that occurred there. While we recognize we cannot entirely prevent violence, campuses across America are learning that they can proactively seek solutions to greatly reduce the likelihood of it.

As door and hardware industry experts, it is our responsibility to educate those who make decisions on access points - from school teachers to officials, and from general contractors to architects who make the design and material decisions. It's our goal to be at the table as early as possible to educate decision makers on their options - and the impact of those options.

Lockdown with Access Control

Lockdown is the ability to prevent access to a segment or segments of a building or the entire facility for security measures. In the school environment, the lockdown can be as small as a classroom or as broad as the entire campus. In addition, the speed of the lockdown is critical and how quickly lockdown is achieved depends on the system installed.

"In the case of access control in a school environment, the first question you should ask is, 'How do you want your lockdown to work?'" advised James Stokes, Vice-President of Access Controls for Hager Companies.

There are a variety of ways lockdown can be achieved - classroom, corridor, multi-wing and perimeter- and there are also various options.

- **Mechanical:** This involves someone taking a physical action to lock a door.
 - With a traditional classroom function lock, when a disturbance is heard outside of the classroom the teacher must step into the hallway and use a key to mechanically (manually) lock the door.
 - After the Columbine school shooting, an intruder classroom function lock was developed. This allowed the teacher to mechanically lock the lockset from the *interior* using a key or mechanism on the inside escutcheon of the lock.



- **Electronic:** A valid credential, usually a card or fob, is placed at a reader on the inside of the escutcheon to lock down the doors. While it is faster than mechanical means, it still requires a person to take action.
- **Remote:** This is the fastest and most efficient option of achieving lockdown. Locks are communicating wirelessly through gateways with the main server, and the principal, police, or other persons with administrative credentials can trigger a remote lockdown to any locks connected to the system.

When an electronic lockdown occurs, it can trigger other events automatically, depending on how the system is set up, such as:

- Notification of police and other emergency services.
- Distribution of emails or text messages to a pre-determined list. For instance, teachers can be alerted that a lockdown has been initiated via their cell phones.
- The trigger of silent alarms to the classroom can be in the form of a strobe light, to notify the teacher of a potential threat.

Benefits of Electronic Access Control

Technology has helped the industry to advance electronic access control in the last few years. Online locks no longer need to be hardwired and they can communicate via Wi-Fi or Bluetooth. This allows for greater flexibility in choosing the right locking mechanisms for both retrofit and new construction projects.

In addition to the faster lockdown times - some systems achieve lockdown in as little as one second to a maximum of eight - schools of all sizes are finding the other notable benefit of electronic access control is being able to manage the building better. Credentials can be set up to only give people access to the areas they need, at the time they need it. This allows administrators to monitor who may be trying to access areas

of the building or who's coming in after hours. The data collected by the system can also help with analysis, such as changing access routes based on usage and time of day.

Case Study: Wylie I.S.D. Installs Electronic Access Control

Control The Wylie Independent School District (near Abilene, Texas) recently completed the construction of a new \$11.6 million dollar performance arts center. Hager distributor, Texoma Builders Supply, was awarded the bid for doors, frames and mechanical hardware, but during the project, the school district decided to install an electronic access control system.

"Like most school districts across the country, Wylie is concerned with safety and was looking at electronic access control as a means of increasing security," explains Aaron Mahurin, Access Control Manager for Texoma Builders Supply.

Texoma installed Hager's HS4 electronic access control on nearly every interior and exterior door of the building. According to Mahurin, the school district likes this particular system because of the way it functions wirelessly, and the price-point matches their budget. "You can install electronic access control on a lot of doors that would normally not be in the budget with another system," he said. "They like the system and are moving forward with installing it at other facilities."

Determine the Best System for Your School

Not all wireless electronic access control systems are built the same, so it's important to compare specifications to select the right one for your school project.

- **How long does it take the lock to communicate back to the server?** Achieving lockdown quickly is dependent on your equipment. "Look at how frequently the wireless lock communicates with the gateway to determine how fast lockdown can occur," recommends Stokes. "Some systems can be as swift as one to eight seconds from remote initiation to the locks responding and locking down."
- **Batteries: What type and what's the lock's battery life?** Some systems take D batteries while others take AA. While this may not seem important initially, D batteries are bulkier than AAs - requiring larger inside escutcheons. Additionally, Stokes suggests, "When considering electronic access systems, look at the number of times that your batteries allow your lock to cycle - while also staying alert for the all-important lockdown message." If the batteries must be changed every month or so, the reliability of the system is compromised.

Is the technology scalable to meet your future needs? "Your system could be a mix of offline and wireless technology working together - depending on your needs and budget," advises Stokes.

When considering access control for your school projects, keep in mind that electronic access control encompasses more departments, such as IT.

"All stakeholders should map out the electronic access control system together and design access rights and lockdown points early in the project," notes Stokes.

"And while I think most people realize that nothing is going to be 100 percent secure," Mahurin concludes, "adding electronic security measures will definitely make a building much more secure than it would be otherwise."



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