

APPA Standards & Codes Action Update



Latest Update from NFPA

New resource highlights safe door locking requirements and guidelines for schools

NFPA Blog

Can classroom doors be locked to prevent an intruder from entering? Can a fire alarm system be disabled to prevent it from being used to draw people outside? These are among the more frequently asked questions we've received from school administrators and community officials working to protect their schools from acts of targeted violence.

While the response to these types of questions is fairly straightforward and direct from the code perspective, the answers don't easily translate to those who aren't familiar with fire and life safety codes. The approach to retrofitting a class room door with a lock, for example, is more complex and nuanced. This can be particularly frustrating to school administrators who are reaching beyond their traditional roles to ensure the safety and security of students, faculty, and staff.

In an effort to give schools the guidance and direction they need and help clarify the challenges around these issues, we developed a new resource to help them effectively, reasonably, and cost-effectively move forward. This document also works to keep schools from making well-intentioned but misguided decisions, particularly as they continue to receive calls from businesses and organizations selling products, resources, and strategies for keeping everyone safe.

We'll be doing our best to get this document directly into the hands of schools, but your support in distributing it will help ensure that it gets to the people who need it most. Please share this document with school administrators and local officials in your communities and jurisdictions to help them make informed decisions.



SCHOOL SAFETY AND SECURITY UPDATE

Current requirements and guidelines around door locking and fire alarm systems from the National Fire Protection Association® (NFPA®) help ensure the safety of students, teachers, and staff in the event of targeted violence threats. While many of these features are easy to address in new school construction, school administrators and fire officials have asked questions about implementing some of them in existing schools, as they can present challenges. The following questions and answers explain NFPA's current provisions and how they can be safely applied. This document also offers information to help strengthen school safety when local officials determine that alternative design options might work equally well.

HOW CAN I KEEP MY SCHOOL SAFE?

Can classroom doors be locked to prevent an intruder from entering?

Yes, the 2018 edition of NFPA 101®, *Life Safety Code*®, contains new rules that allow safe door locking to prevent intruders from gaining access while ensuring that people can still readily evacuate in an emergency. Doors need to have the ability to be unlocked from outside the classroom to permit entry by staff or first responders.

Can classroom doors be barricaded to prevent intruders from entering a classroom?

No. NFPA 101 requires doors to be readily opened from the classroom side. Makeshift devices such as after-market locking and barricades, wedges, rope, and chains not only violate this rule, but can either slow down or prevent first responders from quickly entering a classroom, or they can be used by an intruder to trap people inside and keep first responders from getting in.

Can exterior exit doors be locked to prevent unauthorized people from entering a school?

NFPA 101 permits exterior exit doors (those that lead directly to the outside) to be locked from the outside to control who can enter the building. From the inside, those same doors need to allow people to leave during emergencies. All occupants must be able to exit the building without needing a key, tool, or special knowledge or effort to open the door.

Can a fire alarm system be disabled to prevent it from being used to draw people out into a school's common areas and outside?

NFPA 101 requires schools to have fire alarm systems. There are no allowances in the codes to disable them. These systems need to be maintained and operable to alert the occupants and protect people from the effects of fire. Schools, fire departments, and law enforcement agencies should coordinate to develop protocols for occupant response to fire alarms during targeted violence incidents.

Are manual fire alarm boxes (pull stations) allowed to be removed?

Yes. NFPA 101 permits manual systems to be removed if the school is equipped with either an automatic sprinkler system or an automatic smoke detection system.

NFPA 101, *LIFE SAFETY CODE*: A KEY ELEMENT OF SCHOOL SAFETY AND SECURITY

Used or applied by every state in the U.S., the *Life Safety Code* provisions require that virtually all types of buildings are designed and built so that people can safely escape in the event of a fire or other emergency. Visit [nfpa.org/101](https://www.nfpa.org/101) for more information and free access.

SCHOOL SAFETY AND SECURITY UPDATE *CONTINUED*

SAFE DOOR LOCKING

What is code-compliant door locking?

There are many misconceptions around what constitutes safe door locking in schools. In the most recent edition of NFPA 101, *Life Safety Code*, there is one option provided for locking classroom doors from the inside.

The hardware for this option is sometimes called an interconnected latch or lock and is similar to what you might see in a hotel room.



In some cases, it has been reported that retrofitting classroom doors with this type of device and meeting its installation requirements can be cost-prohibitive for local jurisdictions.

What are alternate options for existing doors?

If your jurisdiction has determined that a retrofit to NFPA 101 compliant locking is prohibitive, they should work with local code officials (also called the authority having jurisdiction, or AHJ) to identify other acceptable, alternative locking arrangements. The following should be considered when evaluating such arrangements:

- Having doors that can be locked without opening them.
- Having locks that do not require special knowledge, a key, or tool to engage or disengage from the classroom side of the door.
- Installing locks at an acceptable height.
- Having doors that have the ability to be unlocked and opened from outside the classroom with the necessary key.
- Ensuring that staff has been drilled in the engagement and release of locks.

Here is one example of an alternate door locking option; it's called a dead bolt lock with a thumb turn.



Your Voice Matters

Like all NFPA codes and standards, NFPA 101 is developed with the help of a volunteer technical committee that reviews and considers input from all interested groups and individuals.

Teachers, school administrators, and faculty can play a critical role in determining the door locking requirements for the next edition of NFPA 101, which is now in process.



Share your insights and perspectives, and make sure the NFPA 101 technical committee hears from you! Visit nfpa.org/101 and click on the Next Edition tab to learn how.



For more information on NFPA's ongoing efforts to address school safety and security, visit nfpa.org/security.

This material contains some basic information about NFPA 101®, *Life Safety Code*®. It identifies some of the requirements in NFPA 101 as of the date of publication. This material is not the official position of any NFPA Technical Committee on any referenced topic which is represented solely by the NFPA documents on such topic in their entirety. For free access to the complete and most current version of all NFPA documents, please go to nfpa.org/docinfo. References to "Related Regulations" are not intended to be a comprehensive list. The NFPA makes no warranty or guaranty of the completeness of the information in this material and disclaims liability for personal injury, property, and other damages of any nature whatsoever, from the use of or reliance on this information. In using this information, you should rely on your independent judgment and, when appropriate, consult a competent professional.

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The ASCC will be doing a webinar on this topic later this year. Please keep checking our webinar page (https://www.appa.org/Webinars/series/appa_monthly_webinars.cfm) for all upcoming webinars.

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