

# Frequently Asked Questions for ACPS Staff

## Changes to Lockdown Procedures

### What is changing?

Beginning this fall, ACPS will be expanding the options for action that staff and students may take during a lockdown. Previously, a lockdown required the door to be closed, the blinds pulled, lights turned off and students to sit facing a wall away from a window. The new procedures will empower staff and students to choose other options during a lockdown. These may include evacuating the building, barricading a door or distracting a violent intruder.

Remember, a lockdown is declared when a violent intruder is known to be *INSIDE* a building.

### Are 'Lock-in' procedures changing too?

Emergency guidelines regarding the procedure formerly known as 'lock-in' – when the risk is *OUTSIDE* the building - will also change slightly. Staff members on the ground are now able to take appropriate action to keep students safe who may be around or near their building at the time an emergency is called. This may include keeping a building open for a few minutes while students who are in the immediate vicinity enter.

Beginning the first week of school in September, a 'lock-in' will now be called 'secure the building'. Both 'secure the building' and lock-in will be used until June 2018 when the new processes will have been fully integrated.

All other emergency procedures will remain the same.

### Does this mean I can enter or leave a building as I wish during a situation when the building has been secured?

The same procedures apply as before regarding leaving a building once it has been secured. Once inside a building, you may not leave the building until security has deemed the emergency over.

### Why is the name change needed for a lock-in?

The word lock-in is too close to the word lockdown and often causes confusion. The two words mean very different things. Lock-in, which will now be called secure the building, refers to a threat *outside* the building. Lockdown refers to a threat *inside* the building. The Federal Government refers to a threat outside the building as 'secure the building'. To keep things simple and ensure ACPS is in line with all federal emergency guidelines, we are switching to 'secure the building'.

### How can I remember this change in language?

There is no need to memorize the new language. ACPS will use the phrase secure the building, formerly known as lock-in for all relevant situations from September onward, even before the new drills have been fully integrated.

### Why are we changing procedures?

Research into violent encounters has shown that when those at the scene are empowered to take actions appropriate to the situation, fewer lives are lost. Research has shown that following a single instruction and sitting still in a dark room in the event of a violent encounter can decrease the odds of survival. In these types of incidents, police may arrive after the incident is over. These new procedures empower staff and students to take actions appropriate to each individual situation and act as they think best.

### Will this mean that everyone will be safe if there is a violent intruder from now on?

These procedures are designed to make a school as safe as it possibly can be during such an incident. While no action can guarantee safety for all, there is evidence to show that had these procedures been adopted during the Columbine High School, Sandy Hook Elementary and Virginia Tech incidents, fewer lives may have been lost.

### Does this mean the old procedures were not safe?

ACPS is constantly reviewing ways to make our schools safer. ACPS always ensures our schools are as safe as we possibly can make them with the information available at the time. Traditional lockdown procedures, however, were designed to address drive-by shootings in the mid-1980s. Absent other proposed approaches over the years, schools gradually applied these procedures to all violent encounters, even threats *inside* a building. Recently, federal guidelines regarding violent encounters have changed. ACPS is updating its emergency procedures in line with these federal guidelines.

### Other school divisions don't use these lockdown procedures. Why are we changing?

ACPS is one of the first school divisions in Northern Virginia to introduce a more flexible and active approach to lockdown procedures. However, we are not the first to adopt this approach in Virginia. In addition, many schools across the U.S are now implementing these procedures for lockdowns.

### Does the State endorse these procedures?

Virginia has yet to formally endorse these particular procedures. Seven states (Massachusetts, Vermont, Alabama, Ohio, Maryland, Alaska and Pennsylvania) have already made them the official procedures in their schools.

### **Why aren't we introducing these new lockdown procedures immediately?**

It takes time to fully implement and integrate the changes. ACPS is implementing the new procedures as quickly as possible, but we cannot implement the procedures until all staff members have been trained. Only then can we begin to run full drills with students. ACPS will also have to coordinate the changes with the City emergency response organizations and ensure that all families, including those who may need individualized plans, are fully informed before implementation.

That said, ACPS already practices evacuation, which is at the core of the new lockdown procedures, with students through other drills (fire drills, bus evacuation drills, etc.).

### **What happens if there is an incident before the new procedures have been implemented?**

Evacuation is at the core of the new procedures. This is already part of some of our emergency procedures, such as fire drills. Students can practice how to evacuate a building throughout the fall.

Staff can use their new knowledge as soon as they have been trained. Policy changes reflecting this flexible decision-making will go before the School Board in September for approval.

### **Are we teaching staff and students to fight a violent intruder?**

All training is age-appropriate and no child is taught to fight a violent intruder. Videos explaining the training process for students will be made available to parents.

Staff will receive different training than students, which involves options on how to address a violent encounter.

### **How do we let staff know there is a threat inside the building?**

ACPS is introducing a new opt-in emergency text notification service for staff and middle- and high-school students. ACPS will only send alerts to these numbers during a genuine emergency. The idea is to be able to alert staff and older students to the exact location of an incident so that those who are able to may evacuate to safety. These numbers will not be used for weather alerts. Elementary students will continue to receive notifications through staff or parents in the usual way.

Staff members need to sign up for alerts using a cell phone. To sign up, please visit the website at [www.acps.k12.va.us/domain/93](http://www.acps.k12.va.us/domain/93).

All other notification procedures that are currently in use, including the PA system, will continue.

### **Does this mean there will be policy changes?**

**Yes. Policy changes reflecting the new practices will go to the School Board for approval in September. The proposed policy changes will empower a person facing a violent encounter to take the action they deem most appropriate in that situation. Staff will be sent a link to the updated policies once they have been approved.**

### **What are we doing for students/staff with special needs?**

**All families with a student that has special needs will be notified about differentiated emergency procedures.**

**All staff with special requirements should contact a staff member who has been trained as a violent encounter instructor in their building and/or supervisor and work with them to devise a suitable plan.**

### **What if parents say they cannot wait until full implementation and are instructing their child what to do now?**

**No staff member or student will face disciplinary action for utilizing the new procedures before they have been fully implemented. There are only positive benefits from understanding the new procedures.**

### **How are we communicating this to parents?**

**There will be considerable communication around these changes to families as well as to staff and the wider community (including private pre-K's who are guided in their decisions by ACPS' decisions in an emergency). We will work with each school/building to determine how best to communicate these changes to your community. Options will include Q&A sessions, fliers, letters, FAQs, videos, newsletters, emails and texts regarding emergency communication sign-up options. All communication will be translated into the four main languages used by ACPS.**

**We anticipate questions from parents, particularly about the procedures. Please reach out to the Office of Communications for assistance. We will assist with this communication for principals/schools.**

### **I am going to have a lot of concerned parents – how do I address that?**

**All school administrators will be provided with a FAQ sheet for parents. In addition, please encourage parents to come to Q&A sessions at your school. If they have additional questions that are not on the FAQ or a comment to offer, please direct them to the Office of Communications at 703-619-8003 or [news@acps.k12.va.us](mailto:news@acps.k12.va.us). The communication of these emergency changes is our responsibility and we will happily assist in answering questions.**

**If you have additional communication needs for your building, please reach out to the Office of Communications and we will do our best to resolve them.**

### Do I need to train too?

Ultimately, *ALL* staff need to be trained in these procedures, but not necessarily at the same level.

Building administrators, the Superintendent's Leadership Team and security staff need to train as instructors so that they can then train other staff. Instructor training takes multiple days. Instructor training dates are tentatively scheduled for early fall for four to five people from each school.

All staff members need to complete an online learning session that can be completed on their own time. Staff must complete the online learning before they can participate in the practical training session. This will take place in the building in which you work.

### How are we communicating this to students?

There will be a video for parents to watch with students that explains the new procedures from a child's point of view.

We will also include tips on how to talk to children in the parent FAQ.

### What happens if we face a violent encounter during a field trip?

These new lockdown procedures are adaptable to any situation. They are not specifically designed for a school. The same drills that students and staff will learn in a classroom, can also be used anywhere, including on a field trip.

### Who can raise the alarm?

Anyone can raise the alarm or call 911. It does not have to be the principal or the Superintendent.

### If ACPS is setting up an emergency text message system, are you still asking parents not to call or text during an emergency? What is the difference?

In the case of an emergency, ACPS will *ONLY* use the text message service to alert staff and middle- and high-school students to the location of the danger. This will allow for better emergency communication with students who may be near a school building, but not actually inside the building. Elementary students will continue to receive alerts in the usual way through communication with staff or their parents.

We still ask that parents do *NOT* call their child's school or cell phone during an emergency. The first priority for staff is to address the danger and ensure that all students are safe. Phone calls can distract from this priority and may potentially alert an intruder to the location of a student. The ACPS Office of Communications will communicate with families as soon as possible. Staff, students and parents can sign up for alerts at [www.acps.k12.va.us/domain/93](http://www.acps.k12.va.us/domain/93).

Emergency announcements will continue to be made over the PA system at all schools.

**Remember: Your role as staff is to *TAKE ACTION to make a situation safe* and then *COMMUNICATE with Security/The Office of Communications*.**

### **Are these changes legally required?**

School divisions are increasingly being required to incorporate this kind of staff training program into their emergency planning to reduce liability and to ensure they are in line with federal standards. Training records and records of drills are essential. Jamie Bartlett, Assistant Director of Health and Safety, will be working with you to ensure our records are in compliance.

### **What happens if I am unable to keep track of all students during an evacuation because some had to evacuate on their own?**

Accountability measures will be implemented at the rally/reunification points. Students and staff are encouraged to make decisions that keep them safe in the moment. This does not always mean everyone will be able to evacuate in an orderly manner with their teacher.

### **What is the process for training new employees? How do you integrate them?**

There will be ongoing training for all staff. New employees will be required to complete training on these procedures.

### **Can I post photos on social media from the training sessions, drills or an actual incident?**

No. No photos or posts from any drills or trainings may be posted online without approval from the Office of Communications. We do not wish a potential violent intruder to have access to material that may help them to commit a crime. Photos are also a form of communication. Policy KBC details appropriate communications during an emergency. However, all official ACPS tweets/posts/messages during an emergency can be retweeted, shared or reposted.