



Wisconsin School Safety Coordinators Association *November 2013 Newsletter [Reprinted with Permission]*

WSSCA, founded in 1968, is an association of professionals dedicated to the task of improving security, safety, and health in Wisconsin schools. WSSCA is a non-profit and non-government organization that includes administrators, supervisors, teachers, building and grounds personnel, health and nursing personnel, safety coordinators, school districts as well as private/public businesses through district, corporate and student memberships. The business of the association is conducted by a thirteen member Board of Directors and an executive director. This group is further guided by several technical advisors with professional backgrounds in a variety of school safety and security related fields. For more information go to www.WSSCA.org

Can ALICE Training Save Lives In School? Yes, yes it can.

You may have read my recent ranting about the flawed guidance some school districts and some police officers are supporting in which they direct all students and staff, at the first sound of a gunshot in a school, to run. Run always. Run every time, without regard for other options or the directions of school leaders, teachers, etc. Just run. I have been speaking out against this practice since I first heard of it over a year ago. Now, comes some support. In FEMA's June 2013 "Guide for Developing High-Quality School Emergency Operations Plans" it states, "No single response fits all active shooter situations." At this point I would normally say, "I rest my case," but I can't. I know these same officers and districts are not reading or listening so I will continue to speak about this flawed dangerous approach.

I was impressed with much of the ALICE training but the one point that stood out for me was this: ALICE provides OPTIONS. In this scenario you may opt to do this, and in this scenario you may opt to do that - just as it should be. I believe that the most important resource in an active school shooting situation is the mind of the individual adults directly involved in the incident.

In search of other options that I could suggest to our readers and our members, I attended a full day of ALICE Training as a guest of the Green Bay Area Public School District. ALICE (Alert, Lock down, Inform, Counter, and Evacuate) is an acronym intended to help people take the appropriate action during an active school shooting incident. The order of words does not mandate the order of action, because only the scenario can do that. In a perfect world, the order might be best, but we do not live in a perfect world. The fact is, you may have to evacuate first – not last. The operative word is "may."

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decisions of people who have experienced the most terrible school event imaginable have saved lives, and if given the flexibility to do, they will save lives again in future incidents. Some have ordered immediate evacuation, and lives were saved. Others have ordered a lock down, and lives were saved.

I have been a fan of the Green Bay Area Public School District for many years. One of the reasons for this is that the senior district leaders allow and even encourage the school adults to make decisions. This takes a great deal of courage by the District leadership – but it also makes a great deal of sense. The district leaders are giving the school leaders the option of choices, and they actually encourage the use of the most effective tool available in a crisis: a trained human mind.

OPTIONS. Give our adults options and we increase the chances of saving lives. I am aware that many schools do not give teachers options in an active shooting situation. The only option they have is to lock down. That may be as dangerous as the RUN ONLY message. In this time of so many active shooter incidents, we have to do better. (Note: In a recent study of 84 active shooter incidents in the U.S. between 2000 and 2010, 1/3 were school related, so don't take this threat lightly.)

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Until recently, the teacher's first duty in a crisis was student accountability. Now, it is student survival. Shocking to some, perhaps, but at the end of the day, isn't that what is most important to us?

ALICE is not perfect. However, the few things that I did not understand are probably due to my not participating in the first day of training. The instructor in this session, Shawn Slezak, was simply outstanding. As any student (young or old) will tell you, it is hard to beat a combination of great substance coupled with great delivery. Mr. Slezak had both.

To be clear, WSSCA does not generally endorse products/services (some long-proven organizations such as EMC, CIC, etc. excluded) and we will not start now, but we cannot ignore anything that saves lives in school. Can ALICE training save lives in school? Yes, yes it can.

My thanks to Barb Dorff, Ed Dorff, and the entire Green Bay APSD for their continued leadership in school safety in Wisconsin. Over 1,000 of its school leaders are now better prepared to survive an active school shooting incident. And the parents of their students can sleep a bit easier at night.

Written by: *Pete Pochowski – Executive Director of WSSCA
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