





Assessing Door Hardware for Classrooms

The builders hardware industry partners with fire marshals to highlight the importance of proper hardware in schools.

BY RALPH VASAMI

Discussions are taking place around the United States about how to keep students and teachers safe from the coronavirus and other potential health risks as schools continue to open up following COVID-19 lockdowns.

While stakeholders are giving attention to pandemic-related classroom modifications, it is also an ideal time to ensure physical safety from other types of emergencies by ensuring that classrooms are protected with proper door hardware. Students, teachers and administrators need to be protected from assaults, bomb threats, bullying, harassment, fires and severe weather incidents, or any other potential threats that could occur within school walls.

The Builders Hardware Manufacturers Association (BHMA) has prioritized public safety at the forefront of the builders' hardware industry since 1925. BHMA recognizes that between varied requirements in building code jurisdictions and the wide array of hardware available for classroom doors, door hardware priorities may need to be reassessed to maintain current requirements.

BHMA standards for builders hardware are revised at least every five years, ensuring ongoing awareness of how door hardware can meet public safety needs. BHMA participates in the building code development process with the International Code Council (ICC) and National Fire Protection Agency (NFPA), among others, to aid in the building code development processes for building, fire and life safety codes and standards related to door hardware. BHMA uses this knowledge of door hardware and building codes to further the cause of school safety and security.



As fire marshals are entrusted with school safety inspections and are public safety figures within their communities, BHMA partnered with the National Association of State Fire Marshals (NASFM) to educate key stakeholders on the door hardware best suited for schools and classrooms to keep students safe.

Benefits of a Proper Lockset

Building codes highlight the importance of egress to account for the many possible emergency situations that can arise. A simple, single-motion action is the quickest means of egress for any individual, as it requires no specialized knowledge or obstacle to open the door.

A classroom lockset should always allow for a single motion to exit and provide a way to unlock a classroom door from the outside. This permits students to exit quickly in the event of an emergency and allows school personnel and first responders to quickly enter if aid is needed inside the classroom. These codes also stipulate that one should never be locked inside a classroom without a way out.

A proper classroom lockset allows for safe egress, which is an integral part of any school security plan. With many emergency drills focused on proper

steps for a safe evacuation, the means to exit a door must be simple and obvious with no specialized knowledge or ability needed to leave the room. If leaving a room is not an intuitive process, there are likely too many steps involved to be considered safe. This is especially important as school districts open their school doors as a meeting place for community meetings, PTO and PTA meetings, night school classes and recreational purposes outside of typical school hours. These outside groups may not have practiced the school's evacuation drills and may rely on intuition to get to safety in the event of an emergency.

Conventional classroom locksets are code approved as they meet the fire, life safety and accessibility code requirements for occupants to exit without obstruction. As a general overview, code-compliant locksets are mandated to meet operation, mounting height and means of authorized access requirements in order to maximize the safety of any occupants.

Along with code compliance, recommended classroom locksets are designed according to performance standards established by BHMA as the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) accredited standards development organization for builders'

hardware. These standards entail specific development and tests to be certified for classroom installation. Between certification programs and testing protocols to help assure the hardware will work properly for a significant period of time, schools can be assured the door hardware in use has been tested for quality performance.

Appropriate Locksets

Some classrooms may have a door that always locks automatically when closed or may follow school protocol to lock classroom doors from the inside. In instances like these, or general emergency situations, a key that is only accessible to proper authorities (such as school officials or first responders) is essential for granting access to a classroom. This should be considered in planning for evacuation and/or promptly responding to emergencies within the classroom.

In an emergency, a locked classroom door should be able to be unlocked by first responders or school personnel with a key, card or fob. Exiting the classroom should be as simple as turning a handle or pressing a panic bar for a quick exit. Locking a classroom from the inside should be done by using a key, pressing a

pushbutton, using a thumbturn or having the door automatically lock when closed.

Examples of locksets that meet these functionalities include the bored and mortise entry locks, bored intruder classroom locks, and the bored and mortise storeroom locks. These locksets are either always locked and require a key to unlock the door or require a key to lock and unlock the door from the outside. From the inside, one can always turn the lever to exit and have the means to easily lock the door from the inside. There are two ANSI/BHMA standards for certifying this particular hardware: *A156.2 Standard for Bored and Preassembled Locks and Latches* and *A156.13 Standard for Mortise Locks*.

Certain locksets once recommended may no longer meet today's classroom security requirements. These include locksets that are not able to lock from the inside of a room or simply do not lock at all. Locksets like these may potentially expose classroom occupants to danger by allowing easy access to any potential intruders. If a school is able to replace the current locksets entirely, the bored and mortise entry locks, bored intruder classroom locks, and the bored and mortise storeroom locks are the best fit for classroom use. An alternative solution is to use a conversion kit or retrofit the locksets. Existing locks can be retrofitted by contacting the lockset manufacturer for specific retrofit options for that lock.

In addition to a proper classroom lockset, a school can consider adding a code-compliant lockdown system to existing locks, adding locked status indicators to doors and locking systems, and maintaining an updated fire rating for fire doors.

Barricade Dangers

It may be tempting and seem appropriate to also employ a barricade device on a classroom door, but there are many dangers to this course of action. Standards and

testing have not been established for door barricades, so their strength and durability are unknown. They also may not be code approved, and performance issues could lead to serious delays in evacuation. As they add an additional step to the egress of a room, barricade devices may also lead to opportunities for hostage or captive situations to occur and do not easily allow access to first responders. In a crowded classroom setting, there is also the possibility of a student unintentionally triggering the barricade, which would lock everyone inside and impede a quick exit.

One caveat: Department of Homeland Security guidelines do recommend barricading a classroom in certain instances. However, this refers to barricading a door with furniture or other objects if the door does not lock from the inside and is not a recommendation for the use of mechanical barricade devices.

Keeping Safety Top of Mind

School security experts know that locking classroom doors is the best way for a teacher to secure the room against potential emergencies – and that having a simple way to exit is best if an emergency occurs.

Overall, the safest measure for ensuring classroom safety is to use recommended door hardware in a way that adheres to building codes.

More information about door hardware and school security can be found at www.buildershardware.com. +



RALPH VASAMI, ESQ., is Executive Director of the Builders Hardware Manufacturers Association. Email: rvasami@kellencompany.com.

kellencompany.com.

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