

Case Study

ALICE: Empowering Preparedness and Survival at West Liberty-Salem Local School District



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ALICE: Empowering and Protecting Students and Staff at West Liberty-Salem Local School District

“I always thought that it would never happen here.”

That is what Kraig Hissong, the superintendent of West Liberty-Salem Local School District, said following an active shooter incident at West Liberty-Salem High School in January 2017. This is a common sentiment felt among school leaders about emergency situations like an active shooter threat. Luckily, Kraig and other administrators at West Liberty-Salem didn't let this attitude prevent them from preparing for the rare — but possible — chance of it happening in their school district.

The district's staff and students were equipped with training on how to handle an active shooter because they had undergone ALICE Training®, a solution of Navigate360. ALICE is the original civilian active shooter response training that can be used by anyone, anywhere, and at any time in the face of violence.

“You just don't plan on it, and I think that obviously goes to show that it's very important for everybody to have some sort of response and training such as ALICE to make sure that you're ready to respond to a dangerous situation,” Hissong says.

Thanks to ALICE, faculty and students were able to make lifesaving decisions on that fateful January day.

Why West Liberty-Salem Chose ALICE

For students to thrive, they need to feel protected and safe at school. After all, emergencies can happen at any time in any place, including schools. Because of this, West Liberty-Salem Local School District had an emergency preparedness plan in place and a school safety team covering basic components like fire drills and general building safety.

Unfortunately, in recent decades, school shootings have become more common across the United States. As of September 2020, there have been 68 school shootings in the country since Columbine in 1999. This caused West Liberty-Salem administrators to begin thinking more critically about the importance of security and active shooter response training. They decided to incorporate ALICE into their school safety plan during the 2013-14 school year.

The following year, Andy McGill was hired as the K-12 assistant principal, and he had previous experience with ALICE. Implementing the training and equipping all school personnel with ALICE life skills was important to him because “sometimes bad things happen, and it pays to be prepared,” he says.

Implementing ALICE

Initially, Hissong was taken aback by the concept of ALICE Training®. “When you’re in education and you’re a superintendent or a teacher, or anyone, you’re kind of used to being in charge or in control of the students [and] making sure they’re safe,” he says.

Rather than put the responsibility on one group, ALICE empowers every single individual to make lifesaving decisions when faced with an active threat — students included. By recognizing there is no “one size fits all” approach to responding in an active shooter situation, ALICE Training® teaches a multi-option approach instead of the long-practiced but outdated “lockdown only” approach still used by many schools and institutions across the country.

Each letter of ALICE represents a proactive options-based strategy to be considered in the event of an active shooter:



Alert

First notification of danger and acceptance



Lockdown

If evacuation is not a safe option, barricade entry points into the room; prepare to evacuate or counter if needed



Inform

Communicate information about the threat in real time with clear language



Counter

Actions that create noise, movement, distance and distraction are done with the intent of reducing the shooter’s ability to shoot accurately



Evacuate

Remove yourself from danger when safe to do so using non-traditional exits if necessary

Once West Liberty-Salem officially decided to embrace ALICE Training®, the next step was updating all staff on the concept and implementation of it. A certified ALICE trainer was brought in to conduct formal training with school personnel. “It was very eye-opening,” Hissong says.

Next, students went through the process of ALICE Training®, learning examples of each active-threat response like barricading doors and escaping through windows. “[They] just did a really good job,” he explains.

Designed to be used by anyone, anywhere, and at any time, the ALICE program is mindful of age and ability and the diverse backgrounds of students and staff.

Long-Term Results and Recall

Fast forward a few years to that morning in January 2017. The faculty, staff and students of West Liberty-Salem Local School District knew exactly what to do when faced with a real active shooter threat. McGill, who had been directly involved with the incident, was extremely impressed with the way the entire school community reacted to the presence of an active shooter and how they implemented various ALICE responses. “Our staff [and] our kids were unreal good. I mean, it was textbook stuff,” he says.

Hissong was home sick that morning and wasn’t planning to come in until he received a call about the active shooter. When he arrived on campus, he was impressed with how well everyone, especially the students, had implemented ALICE.

“In less than two minutes, our whole high school wing had pretty much evacuated the building,” he says. “The doors were barricaded; they had broken out windows. The thought process and the decisions that the staff and students made that day... It was very clear that ALICE had done its job.”

McGill shares the same sentiments. He said that communication was fantastic, as multiple 911 calls were made from the campus. One teacher called the main office to communicate that there was an active shooter, allowing the secretaries to make a PA announcement. Just about everyone evacuated or barricaded, leaving the hallways clear. All these proactive options-based responses show that there is no one-size fits all solution to a violent threat and that ALICE emphasizes the importance of alternative actions that can be taken based on each individual’s circumstances.

“You felt pressure during the [ALICE] training and so that training made you want to respond,” McGill says. “So, I think that translates very well over to the actual event where, you know, there is that pressure so let’s respond. You feel like you can make a decision — that to me is the #1 thing that comes out of ALICE.

“If it never happens, and it’s never going to happen, that is absolutely wonderful...but why not be ready? Why not be ready?” McGill says.

“The thought process and the decisions that the staff and students made that day... It was very clear that ALICE had done its job.”

Why Your School Needs ALICE Training®

Similar to McKrill's initial sentiment about active shooter Having the "it won't happen to me" mentality can be harmful, leaving your school unprepared and unprotected in the rare but life-altering event of a shooting. ALICE Training®, a solution of Navigate360, allows anyone — students, faculty and employees — to feel confident and empowered to make lifesaving decisions in the face of violence. With blended learning and a trauma-informed approach to training, students and staff will walk away with life skills that can be used beyond the walls of the school.

If you would like to learn more about the proactive multi-option active threat response strategies of ALICE Training® and how this research-based program helps you protect your school community, contact [Navigate360](#) today.



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