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Fulton educators train for potential intruders



Stephanie Backus/FULTON SUN photo: Mark Warren with Strategos International talks to teachers in a Fulton High School classroom about the ways they can lock down the classroom if a shooter were to attack the school.

By [Katherine Cummins](#)

Thursday, January 20, 2011

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The first time, we sat in the dark, crouched in corners, hiding behind desks and under tables, locked in closets, listening to the yelling and the blasts in the classroom next door, wondering whether we would be next or if the shooter would move on further down the hall calling out names, trying to find his intended victims.

Then suddenly the door was open and he was inside, demanding to know where Katie Beth was. As we all looked at him, mute, he simply started shooting before turning around and exiting the room.

Shortly thereafter the all clear code was given, and as the faculty and staff of Fulton High School and Fulton Middle School (and one reporter) — who were participating in an intruder training program Wednesday afternoon — poured back into the 400 wing at the high school, more than one commented “that was the longest three minutes of my life.” When instructor Vaughn Baker with Strategos International, which offers intruder response training for schools, churches and other groups, asked how many had been “shot” with the empty paintball gun, 36 hands went up in the air. Using the “past” scenario — based on the lack of training for such situations until after the Columbine shootings in 1999 — there were 36 dead or seriously wounded victims in three minutes.

We ran through the scenario again several times, once using standard lock-down procedures — which consist of simply locking doors and turning off lights in hopes that an intruder won’t realize there are people in the room — and twice using lock-down procedures that include barricading the door and preparing to defend ourselves or exit, if possible, should the door be breached. The second time, 25 people were shot. In the third and fourth scenarios, there were only three and four victims.

Those practical exercises were the culmination of nearly two hours of training that included a lecture on how and why campus intruders had been successful in the past and taking the teachers into classrooms to show them different ways they could defend their classrooms and keep students safe. In particular, Baker and fellow instructor Mark Warren emphasized the value of solid pre-planning and the importance of teachers taking the lead.

“Who do you really think the first responders are?” Warren asked after pointing out it takes at least an hour for a SWAT team to get fully mobilized for a response, and Fulton Police Major Roger Rice said it would take local authorities three to five minutes to arrive. “You are. The people on the scene when it happens are the first responders, and what and how you respond to it could determine how bad it’s going to be.

“You have to asses (the threat) and what action you are going to take based on what you see in front of you.”

He used a recording of a 911 call from a substitute teacher in the library at Columbine High School as an example of the power of words and the importance of having an authority figure students can look to for guidance when there is an armed intruder. On the tape, the substitute teacher could repeatedly be heard yelling at students to stay under the tables — which Warren pointed out was standard for a tornado drill, the only kind of emergency training the teacher had ever received.

“She told the kids to get under the table, and they stayed there to the point they allowed somebody to walk up with a gun and shoot them point-blank,” Warren said, noting most of the deaths at Columbine occurred in the library. “We have to look at the power of direction you’re going to have.”

He praised Fulton for being “ahead of the game” by already having all doors automatically locked during the day, and having run some intruder and lock-down training before.

Using examples like the Virginia Tech shootings in 2007 and the more recent armed intruder at a school board meeting in Florida, Warren talked about the differences between handling threats from inside and outside the school building, and what to do when an intruder makes it past barricades or is in the room with you and the lock-down fails.

He emphasized a three-point approach to handling a hostile campus intruder or shooter: Lock out — getting students in rooms and securing them against forcible entry; get out — if you are too close to the shooter to get to a classroom or secure area, are in a large space such as the gym or commons area or if the shooter is in your room, get away from the shooter and to the nearest exit as quickly as possible; and take out — “if you can’t do anything else, fight,” using any tools or resources available to you.

“It has to become automatic,” Warren said, referring to knowing what to do and where to go given any one of those scenarios. “No amount of preparation is going to help you prevent this, but what it does is give you a prepared, appropriate response.

“The thing we hope is the training we’ve given you today is completely useless to you, but hopefully you’ve seen the value of being prepared.”

High school English teacher Julie Owen said she thought Wednesday’s training was “really very beneficial.”

“It makes you as a teacher think about what you need to do for your students — you need to calm down and think rationally,” Owen said. “It made me think about things I hadn’t thought about before, like knowing exactly what your plan of action is and to be prepared.”

Guidance secretary DeAnne Nigus, who works with student office assistants all day, said she too appreciated the training.

“We’ve had Roger Rice and his staff come in and do scenarios before, this was a little more in-depth,” Nigus said. “It was very good, very well-done.”

Rice, who also observed the exercises Wednesday afternoon, said such training is important for the same reasons Warren gave during his presentation.

“Like he said in there, we have trained kids what to do in a fire, in a tornado, we have to train on this too,” Rice said. “It has to become automatic.”

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