

## School Resource Officer



## Lockdown to Lock out Danger

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Thursday, January 13, 2005

This academic year, Georgetown joined school systems across the country in implementing an emergency lockdown procedure established to minimize the danger of outside threats to students and staff, as well as coordinate the efforts of public safety and school officials.

Drills for the plan, called "Code Blue," will begin in the next few weeks.

According to School Resource Officer James Rodden, these "critical incident" procedures have been imported by what school administrators have experienced in other school districts as well as a plan made available by the North Carolina district attorney's office.

"A lot of schools have these plans," said Rodden. "We're not reinventing the wheel here."

High school officials established a procedure last year.

"They sort of took the ball and ran with it," said Rodden.

When Rodden began working as the school resource officer at the beginning of the school year, it became clear that the plan was a good one, but lacked coordination with police and other safety officials who would be outside the building in the event of a critical incident. School and public safety officials have established a plan, approved by the School Committee, that will be invoked if any school is placed in jeopardy by an outside threat.

While for many, the idea of a Code Blue brings to mind the horrors of a Columbine-esque incident, the plan can be used for any number of lesser problems. Examples include a crime in a nearby neighborhood, or if an unauthorized adult on the premises.

When a threat presents itself, a Code Blue will be announced at the school. At this point teachers are to shut off the lights, lock the classroom door, and move the students into the least visible part of the room. One staff member will be assigned to each corridor to check for students or staff in the hallways and bring them into the nearest classroom.

Each room is now equipped with a kit containing four large laminated cards. Two are green, with the room number and teacher's name; the other two are red, and say, simply, "Help." One card is to be placed in the window so that police outside the building will know the room is clear, and the other will be slid under the door so that it is visible in the hallway.

"We'll know they're in trouble one of two ways," said Rodden. "Either they had a chance to use the red 'help' card, or we won't see any cards at all, and we'll know we have to make sure that room is secure."

The police department will have a "jump kit" for each school, containing a layout of the interior, contact names, keys and other essentials. Two points, a command post and a staging area, have been established for each building as well.

A Code Blue could be used for any number of incidents where students could be placed in harm's way.

"It could be something like a domestic situation, where one parent is demanding to see the child when they are prohibited from doing so," said Rodden. "They can lock down the school and keep the students safe until the situation is contained."

Nearby cities and towns have already used their own version of a Code Blue to contain threats from the outside. In Ipswich, a bank robbery occurred five minutes before school was scheduled to let out and the suspect had been seen heading in the general direction of one of the schools. The Ipswich school resource officer called for a lockdown and was able to spot the suspect on school property moments later.

"The biggest problem in that situation was the parents arriving to pick up their kids," said Rodden. "The students were safely inside, but parents were outside pulling on the doors, not knowing the suspect was being arrested on the other side of the building."

Rodden wanted to alleviate concerns parents might have about how the reasons for the Code Blue drills will be explained to the students.

"We're not going to tell the younger kids, 'There's a man in the building with a gun,'" said Rodden. "During the drills they'll be told there is an incident and what's happening is in order to keep them safe."

The Middle/High School has already held drills. The first Code Blue practice runs for the elementary schools will occur, with warning, in the next few weeks.