

Fighting Back

Written by Administrator
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Playing hide-and-seek with an armed intruder may not be enough. Sulphur Springs Independent School District has incorporated a new type of training to prepare teachers if a violent intruder enters the campus, including aggressively confronting the intruder if it helps save students' lives.

The new protocol is entitled ALICE, standing for alert, lockdown, inform, counter and evacuate. In the U.S., there have been more than 140 school-related shootings since 2000. ALICE was created to protect schools against violent intruders who may wield any weapon from a knife to a gun. This new program is an aggressive step forward from the original SSISD plan of alert and lockdown. "We are here to protect our kids," said Rusty Harden SSISD human resources director, referring the SSISD students. "After everything that has happened recently in the public, we want to be prepared in the event something happens." The move toward the research-based ALICE program came from a new study released last year by the federal government for school safety and emergency planning. The study incorporates lessons learned from recent incidents and seconds the concerns voiced by stakeholders following the more recent shooting in Newtown, Conn. "The ALICE response plan was originally created by police officers one week after the Columbine school shooting," said Sherry Chester, SSISD director of grants and professional development. "Since then, the program has gained momentum, and last summer the Federal government released a publication backing the program." According to the 2013 federal study "Guide for Developing High-Quality School Emergency Operations Plans," teachers have three basic options of run, hide or fight if they come in contact with a violent intruder. In the original SSISD plan of alert and lockdown, the study found that there were significantly more injuries and fatalities if the intruder got into the classroom. Chester stated that in the 2007 Virginia Tech shooting, shooter Seung-Hui Cho showed intense aggravation if he could not get through a locked door and would double back and cover previous classrooms to find additional victims. "We do not want anyone to be sitting ducks," said Chester. "With ALICE, that is no longer the case." For the past two weeks SSISD Police Department has been conducting ALICE drills throughout the school district to train faculty

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members on the new procedures. Carey Lobin, SSISD counselor, helped teach the course at the Early Childhood Learning Center this week. Lobin stressed during the presentation that the new training was just another tool in the teacher's emergency tool belt. "Even with police officers on campus, it is very important to know how to handle any situation," said Lobin. "If there is a tornado or fire, we have rules set in place to protect our kids. ALICE is no different." After the drills, ECLC Head Start teacher Karri Kerby sat down to talk about the ALICE experience. "During a lockdown situation everyone needs more than one way to get out," said Kerby. "Our job is to take care of our kids. I have a child and I want more than one way to keep our children safe." During the ALICE drill, teachers were expected to follow the new protocol as if a violent intruder was in the building. "As soon as we heard the alert, adrenaline kicked in," continued Kerby. "Your job is to react to the situation and protect your classroom, no matter what happens."