



## **Assessing Lockdown at Shooting at Rancho Tehama Elementary School, Corning, CA**

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### **Incident Overview**

Shortly before 8 am, on November 14, 2017, while students were playing in the schoolyard at Rancho Tehama Elementary, Kevin Janson Neal, 44, carried out a mass shooting attack a quarter mile away. Upon hearing gunshots, the teachers and staff immediately placed the school under lockdown procedures by rushing the children into classrooms and under desks, locking the doors. The school's gate was automatically locked. The shooter's white Ford F-150 pick-up truck then proceeded to crash through the school's front gate as they hunkered down, with the driver emerging from it with a semiautomatic rifle. Wearing a tactical ballistic vest with extra magazines for his guns, the gunman stormed into the school's quad and shot at the walls and windows, but was unable to enter the schoolrooms. One student was shot in a classroom while under a desk. After about six minutes with the gunman becoming frustrated when he could not gain entry inside the classrooms, the shots stopped as got back in the stolen vehicle and continued the shooting spree along other streets. After crashing the stolen vehicle, he robbed someone and took a second vehicle.

### **Assessment**

The overall shooting rampage lasted 45 minutes, with four people killed and 10 injured. It is reported that the shooter's wife was killed at his home prior to his rampage. No children died at the school, although two suffered gunshot wounds and were airlifted to area hospitals. The attack ended when police officers, firing in pursuit of the vehicle, rammed it and shot the gunman to death.

The shooter was reported by his sister to have had a history of mental illness and episodes of rage, leading to several arrests. At the time of the shooting, Neal had been on bail after he was arrested in January 2017 for assaulting one of his neighbors, who had a restraining order against him.

The school lockdown by the quick-thinking staff was praised for preventing a greater death toll. During the lockdown, the school's doors were locked and the students rushed inside and instructed to hide on the floor underneath desks and tables. As stated by Phil Johnston, Tehama County Assistant Sheriff, "the quick action of those school officials, there is no doubt in my mind based on the video that I saw, saved countless lives and children."

### **Assessment**

School lockdowns represent the second option of the Department of Homeland Security's "Run, Hide, Fight" protocol. Practicing lockdowns (part of the "Hide" option), when the "Run" or "Fight" options are not possible, became widespread in the aftermath of the 1999 high school shooting in Columbine, Colorado, that killed 12 students and a teacher. This option

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was reinforced following the December 2012 shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School, in Newtown, CT, when the attacker shot his way into the school, thereby bypassing a security system that permitted visitors to enter if they were buzzed in at the front desk. In an example of the effectiveness of the lockdown protocol, a library clerk at the school had sent the children in the library to a back closet between book shelves, which was part of a plan developed in advance, and which had saved their lives at the time. As a consequence of the widespread application of this protocol, upon a suspicion of a threat, teachers now are instructed to lock their classroom doors, turn off the lights, usher their students into corners and closets that are away from windows, and sit quietly until law enforcement officers arrive. To reinforce this protocol, school lockdown drills have become as common as a fire drill, with the awareness that the better prepared schools are, the better they can protect their students.

While lockdown drills are generally held at least annually, it is recommended by some public safety experts that, like fire drills, they be held more regularly.

In a further advance of the lockdown option, rather than being passive and static while waiting for the arriving police, it is recommended not merely to lock a classroom's or another room's door in such emergencies, but to make oneself as hard a target as possible by preparing to improvise in case an armed intruder succeeds in breaking through a door by exercising the "Fight" option by throwing objects at the attacker.

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