

N Hall, Upstairs Lack Safety Features

Classrooms Lack Emergency Windows, Tools To Break Glass For Quick, Safe Exits

Staff Opinion

School safety, particularly in response to a fire or shooting, is a concern for school officials who plan drills so that students can practice their response to an event. However, the N-hall in the school building was not built with safety in mind. Unlike other classrooms in the school, N-hallway does not offer emergency window exits in the event of an emergency – and that needs to be corrected.

N-hallway has three escape exits, two located on each end of the hallway and one underneath the stairwell. But should a fire, smoke, or a shooter prevent the students in N-hall classrooms from fleeing into the hallway, the school could have a recipe for disaster. In the event of an explosion where debris could block a hall, such as in the 1971 bombing of Ayden-Grifton High School in Ayden, N.C. or the unsuccessful bombing planned by the Columbine High shooters, one exit may not be enough.

“In today’s climate and after recent events, I find it uneasy that the N-hall classrooms do not have an escape window or anything to use to break the windows,” said an N-hall teacher who wished to remain anonymous. “There have been too many incidents in the U.S. in regards to mass shootings to not have another option to flee from the building.”

Built without the emergency exit windows found on the other halls, none of the windows in the N-hallway classrooms open, and teachers have not been given any tools to break the glass, should that be necessary.

The International Fire Code states



that for 1,500 occupants, two exits must be available, however, according to State Fire Marshall Donald Cooke, sprinkler systems and possible rated construction may mitigate the need for window exits in case of fire. But if a shooter walks the N-hall or if a bomb goes off, sprinklers and rated walls won’t help.

“The opening of windows is not a requirement, so while the original building has windows that open, there was a decision that we weren’t going to put [escape windows] in the new wing,” says Joe Rome-nick, Executive Director of Operations. “There is no safety requirement as far as having open windows.”

But there *should* be. All the classes have double glass window panes which take a lot of force to break, according to the manufacturer Rational, Windows and Doors. It would take a heavy object (preferably a specialized hammer) to break the double panes. Even if a teacher or student were to throw a heavy object (i.e. a brick), then

most likely, only the first pane would break. All classrooms should be supplied with a hammer to break glass.

It would take time for students to break the glass, time that might allow a threat to reach to the students.

Furthermore, all upstairs classes should have a rope ladder so students would not need to jump in an emergency. Nation Ford has fire drills once a month, but in any emergency,

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students may not file out in an orderly manner – human instinct is to *run* away from danger. The lack of escape through windows are huge problem.

Even if students could break the glass and climb out the second floor window of an N-hall classroom, it would require teamwork to navigate a ladder due to a ledge on that hall.

N-hallway should be redesigned to match the rest of the building. All classrooms should be equipped with some emergency exits, and second floors classrooms should be supplied with escape ladders.