



# DESENSITIZED TO DANGER

*As the number of school shootings and lockdowns spike across the nation, demand for better security protocols rises at CCHS community.*

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violence in 2021, bringing the tally since the Columbine High massacre to more than 285,000.”

According to the 2014 study, “Student safety: Parents’ and school principals’ perceptions” in the academic journal “New Waves”, this massacre sparked national change in public schools toward greater campus security and emergency planning.

“Following the notorious mass murder at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, in April of 1999 and a series of other school mass-shootings during the 1990s, more state governments around the country began to require school safety or ‘crisis management’ plans to address potential threats to

**T**here were 30 school shootings nationally in 2018, 27 in 2019 and nine in 2020, according to a Dec. 31, 2021 Washington Post article. In 2021, there were 42.

“(In 2021), the nation smashed the previous record of 30, despite most schools remaining closed to in-person classes for the first two months of the year,” the article stated. “In total, about 34,000 students were exposed to gun

student safety in public schools,” the study stated. “Many of these plans were drafted with active shooters as the primary anticipated threat.”

Clarke Central High School English department co-chair Meghan McNeeley, who has taught at CCHS since 2017 and previously worked at Clarke Middle School for 15 years, notices a freedom of movement of students and visitors in and around the CCHS campus.

“(It) was shocking when I first came here, but we’re pretty vulnerable here. This is not a very secure campus, and it’s hard to make it secure,” McNeeley said. “I know that measures have been taken (by CCHS Principal Dr. Swade Huff), but we are open on all sides to pretty busy streets. I think because things haven’t happened here, we think it can’t happen here. But I sometimes look at the openness of our campus, and how students come and go from all over -- from (the) Career Academy and (the) University of Georgia when they’re dual enrolled, and parents come onto the campus. You want it to be an open, free space but at the same time, you want it to be safe.”

According to CCHS Assistant Principal Dr. Summer Smith, when there is a need for administrative attention, one of two protocols is employed. An administrative hold will keep students in place in classrooms, while a lockdown, which is more secure with additional restrictions, is initiated in cases

of more serious threats such as intruders. Previously, these protocols were referred to as soft lockdowns and hard lockdowns, respectively.

“The administrative hold means that business can continue as usual inside classrooms, but everyone has to be out of the hall. The lockdown means that students and teachers should take cover in classrooms, turn off lights (and) get away from doors or windows,” Smith said. “The administrative hold is usually used for situations where the halls need to be clear or if there is something happening in the community that is concerning, but not a serious threat. The lockdown is used in the most serious of threats.”

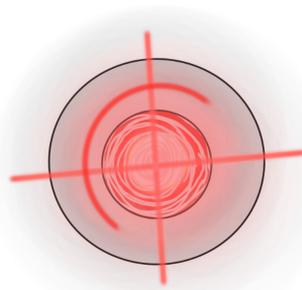
The protocols set in place at CCHS include Centegix CrisisAlert badges, which have been utilized among Clarke County School District administrators, faculty and staff since Aug. 27, 2021. Centegix is an Atlanta-based information technology company that provides emergency communication tools for various fields.

“The decision to install Centegix (in the CCSD) occurred after the school shooting in Parkland, Florida,” CCSD Safety and Energy Coordinator Patrick Dyer said. “We have decided to use the Centegix platform as a means to increase our chances of survival in an emergency scenario by equipping as many staff members as possible with the ability to notify as many people as possible as fast as possible.”

CCHS faculty and staff were trained to use Centegix badges via an asynchronous video lesson. According to Dyer, pressing the badge three times will initiate a staff alert for CCHS administrators and security officers in cases of less serious events, such as student altercations. In some cases, administrators will then choose to initiate an administrative hold to secure the entire campus. If the button is pressed eight times or more, the alert will also reach all CCSD Cabinet members and school resource officers, and immediately send the school into lockdown.

“Some positive feedback (about the badges) is that staff members use the staff alert feature regularly for assistance with student altercations, and that they really like that function,” Dyer said.

According to CCHS Family Engagement Specialist Christian Barner, Smith and the Centegix Admin Alerts Reports, an administrative hold took place on Dec. 3, 2021 due to administrator action instead of a badge press, and a lockdown that was later decreased to an administrative hold was initiated on April 14 due to a badge press. While the Centegix Admin Alert Reports also reflect an Oct. 14, 2021 lockdown, the ODYSSEY Media Group was



# ADMINISTRATIVE HOLDS VS LOCKDOWNS

## ADMINISTRATIVE HOLDS\*

### *What they are:*

No students are allowed in the hall. Business continues as usual inside classrooms.

### *When they're used:*

During community events and less serious threats.

\*previously known as soft lockdowns

## LOCKDOWNS\*

### *What they are:*

Students and teachers take cover in classrooms by turning off the lights and getting away from doors or windows.

### *When they're used:*

During the most serious threats.

\*previously known as hard lockdowns

unable to confirm this event. On such occasions of holds and lockdowns, Barner sends an email to families to clarify the event.

“This afternoon, Clarke Central was placed on a brief administrative hold. A student reported that they saw another student in possession of a weapon,” Barner stated in an email to CCHS families on Dec. 3, 2021 after the school day ended. “The school’s safety protocols were executed, and it was quickly determined that there was no weapon on campus and no threat to students or staff.”

TEACHER

While the badges have initiated the proper security response in these cases, two inadvertent administrative

holds or lockdowns took place this school year on Dec. 6, 2021 and Jan. 18, according to Centegix Admin Alerts Reports obtained by CCHS Principal Dr. Swade Huff. On Jan. 18, the Centegix report reflected an inadvertent press.

According to Smith, on Dec. 6, 2021, a badge holder intended to initiate a staff alert due to a student altercation in the Mell Lobby. However, due to additional inadvertent presses, the school went into lockdown. According to Huff, many students were in the Miller Jordan Jr. Food Court and outdoors on the CCHS campus during the event, unsure of where to seek safety.

“When (the Dec. 6, 2021 lockdown) happened during lunch, it gave us an opportunity to reflect on practices that we have in place, because again, the goal is if it's a serious threat, to make sure that our kids (that) were in the cafeteria have a (safe) location in the Mell Auditorium. But at the same time, we have to remove the barriers because teachers don't have a master key to access the Mell Lobby,” Huff said.

CCHS Senior Army Instructor Lieutenant Colonel David McMickle has witnessed the consequences of inadvertent or additional badge presses.

“Most of the time what I'm hearing is that the fights caused the teacher to panic and (push the button eight) times, or, ‘Did I push it three times?’ And then it turns into a lockdown when it's just a fight. So, everybody's locking the doors when we need to be responding to a fight. And so yes, (it's) very confusing,” McMickle said. “But (the CCSD leaders) can't just throw me a badge and expect me to understand everything going on.”

Infographic by Eva Orbock and sourced by Summer Smith

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**Featured:** SCHOOL SAFETY: Clarke Central High School Junior Kelvie Williams reenacts part of the current lockdown protocol at CCHS Feb. 15. According to CCHS English department teacher Meghan McNeeley, the existing lockdown procedures set in place for the CCHS community have shown the need for improvement in order to ensure safety for students, teachers and faculty. XX Photo by Lucas Donnelly

**Right:** CENTEGIX LANYARD: With the increase in school lockdowns around the nation and Athens-Clarke County, Clarke Central High School now uses a new security badge system, Centegix. Although faculty and staff experienced training for the new protocols, several false alarms caused by false presses of these badges occurred on Dec. 6, 2021, Jan. 18 and Jan. 24. "There have been instances when (faculty or staff members) at CCHS have pressed the button on the badge too many times resulting in a lockdown. There have been five lockdown alerts triggered at Clarke Central this school year," CCSD Safety and Energy Coordinator Patrick Dyer said. "Of those five alerts, four were due to student fights. During one of those four instances, a lockdown was triggered twice, back to back for the same fight by the same staff member. These four lockdown alerts should have been staff alerts -- not lockdowns." Illustration by Eva Orbock.

CCHS freshman Braelin Grant believes the inadvertent lockdowns have led to a level of desensitization to potential danger among her peers.

"I feel like (the false alarms) contribute a lot to people not being as worried about a lockdown when it actually comes, because it's always written off as, 'Oh, it's probably a fight or something,'" Grant said. "That seriousness is kind of taken away from it and it shouldn't be, because if it was a shooter in school, then we wouldn't think that it is that serious."

Regardless of the cause for a hold on campus, Grant feels unsettled during these events.

"Lockdowns make me feel anxious, and I know, especially, for a lot of my friends, they get (anxious) when they don't know what is happening," Grant said. "Most of the time, either the students or teachers don't know what's happening. A lot of them only figure out what is happening through rumors, which can most of the time either be wrong or be exaggerated."

While she recognizes the need to withhold information to ensure its veracity,

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"I'm sympathetic to the fact that they don't want to create too much panic or alarm and have parents rushing to the school."

-- **MARY ATTAWAY,**  
CCHS parent

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CCHS parent Mary Attaway recommends more efficient communication to families to mitigate the spread of such rumors.

"I know there was a lot of different stories floating around amongst (my daughter CCHS freshman Camille Attaway) and her friends, and everybody, after the (April 14 lockdown)," Attaway said. "(Administrators) must know that the children are texting their parents, so maybe I could see that they would send something out earlier, just saying that something's going on. But I'm sympathetic to the fact that they don't want to create too much panic or alarm and have parents rushing to the school."

According to licensed Athens psychologist Katherine Gross, it is important for students to have emotional support from adults in these situations.

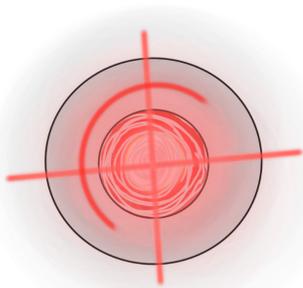
"Teachers (should be) equipped with the support they need beforehand so that they can do the drill effectively, or respond effectively if there is, indeed, a lockdown, but also provide (students with) that emotional support," Gross said. "We have to get creative with how we are supporting students and teachers in case of an emergency, because (campus safety threats are) a real issue that students are facing."

As a student, Grant feels there has been a lack of training about what to do during each protocol.

"I don't think I necessarily feel prepared for lockdowns," Grant said. "I think definitely with fire alarms or tornado warnings I do, but if it's a type of lockdown, I don't know what the different types are, because I don't think that's ever been said to me."

During her 17-year tenure at Clarke Middle School, McNeeley experienced a school intrusion, which resulted in a lockdown. As a result of the encounter,





McNeeley makes a point to teach her students how to stay safe during these safety crises.

"I tell my students my CMS story, and we go over it. I always explain to them at the beginning of the year or beginning of the semester what to do, why we do it and how to handle (lockdowns)," McNeeley said. "I feel like we have to be very upfront (because) we do these security things for this reason."

McNeeley sees a need for new ideas to be incorporated into CCHS' security protocol, including improvements in the staff and faculty lockdown training to ensure a better understanding of what to do on campus in the event of an emergency.

"We, teachers, need training at the beginning of the year, (and) kids need training. (We need to) tell them it's coming (and) get them ready," McNeeley said. "If you're a teacher who's not comfortable doing that because you, yourself, don't understand it, have one of us veteran teachers come in and talk to the kids (and tell them) it's going to be okay."

Along with his 20 years of military experience and education in Criminal Justice and Security Management, McMickle believes a clear and improved emergency response protocol is necessary at CCHS.

"(Lockdown protocol) is a topic that we should have professional learning on to make us more effective teachers in the event that we have an emergency. (During an emergency) is not the time to try to train people or figure out what's going on," McMickle said. "Everybody has to understand and go do (lockdown) training, because one leak is going to cause the enemy or the person that is trying to do the harm, to get in."

While he acknowledges the Centegix badges are a step toward greater security, McMickle hopes to continue conversations with school leaders about revising these protocols.

"We need to listen to the teachers and the students that we need to keep safe. And then we need to critically look at it and say, 'This isn't working or this is working,' and then we need to refine (and make changes)," McMickle said.

As CCHS and the CCSD continue to evolve safety protocols for campuses, there is alternating opinion on desire for communication following these events. Attaway believes notification should only be sent when the lockdowns are intentional.

"I look forward to reading something at the end of the day from the administration, but we get so much correspondence that I do feel like if we were inundated with every accidental hold or lockdown that it would be too much," CCHS parent Mary Attaway said. "So maybe an idea would be to kind of summarize it in the weekly newsletter or something if they felt the need to, but I only want to be notified when it's an intentional lockdown for something that was going on."

However, CCHS junior Kelvie Williams hopes to see an increase in communication from administrators in these events for the peace of mind of the students affected.

"If they are going to lock us down and not let us know anything, (they should) send the emails out to the parents about what's going on," Williams said. "I feel like even if it's not a hard lockdown, we should still know what's going on around us, instead of waiting until 4 o'clock to get an email about what happened. We were already worried at school all day."



**Right:** LOCKDOWN PROTOCOLS: CCHS English department teacher Meghan McNeeley stands in the hallway displaying the Centegix security badges CCHS faculty use for lockdown protocols on March 31. Due to the several false alarms that have been triggered by the security badges, the existing lockdown procedures are in dire need of changes and improvements. "I think there needs to be some very clear outlines of scenarios or situations," McNeeley said. "We teachers need training at the beginning of the year. I think that kids need training. I think knowledge is power." Photo by Aza Khan

