

CASE STUDY

Empowering Educators to Respond in a Crisis With ALICE Training[®]

By Matthew Lasota, Dean of Students at Oxford Academy



Maintaining security at a boarding school is a unique challenge.

We don't have typical 9 AM- 3 PM school hours or even 9 AM- 5 PM office hours. People are here around the clock, and once you factor in the needs and schedules of our staff, students, and campus visitors, there are many moving parts.

That was our experience at Oxford Academy. Founded in 1906, Oxford Academy is an all-boys boarding school that prides itself on providing a first-class education tailored to the individual student. Our ability to provide such personalized, one-on-one learning for grades nine through 12 stems from our commitment to our founder's vision and capping total enrollment at 48 students.

Our approach to education goes far beyond the academics taught in our classrooms. We encourage our students to embrace all the benefits of the vibrant seaside town of Westbrook, Connecticut.

While we are confident we offer our students a positive, holistic environment, we aren't always as confident when determining the best precautions to keep our entire community safe. As Dean of Students at Oxford Academy, one of my primary responsibilities is to do just that.



An Incident Pushed Us Beyond Our Comfort Zone.

Our school has a robust health and safety committee that oversees and enforces all safety policies. We run regular drills to meet all the requirements set by our accreditation body and state and town regulations.

Like many schools, though, we used to stick to the “safe” things, such as fire drills and extreme weather event lockdowns. Training students for these situations was well within the faculty’s comfort zone. We couldn’t say the same for active shooter drills. Contemplating a violent critical incident (VCI) felt vulnerable in a way that other safety precautions didn’t. As a result, we didn’t actively prepare for a VCI as much as we did other events.

Our approach reflected my own thoughts on VCI training. I joined Oxford Academy in 2000 and became Dean of Students in 2011. For much of that time, I held school crisis and VCI training at arm’s length because dealing with these kinds of events wasn’t why I became an educator. I wanted to be a school administrator, not a law enforcement agent. Even as I witnessed the decades-long evolution of such incidents at schools nationwide, thinking about my school in that way was frightening and intimidating.

Then, we encountered a VCI at Oxford and had to confront those thoughts. Previously, whenever we dealt with an incident on campus, our response always felt measured and controlled. By contrast, the VCI surfaced feelings of uncertainty and a loss of control that stayed with me long afterward.

More than anything, I wanted to regain that sense of control and return our school to its “safe and secure” mode. To do that, we had to elevate our safety program.

A Profound Training Experience

There are plenty of VCI training programs on the market, but we chose Navigate360 ALICE Active Shooter Response Training program because of its comprehensive, options-based approach. The two-day certification course includes scenario training that helps prepare trainees for the unthinkable and empowers them with strategies to regain control in any situation. Designed for schools by educators



and experts, ALICE Training® takes a trauma-informed and age-appropriate approach to violent-incident response. It recognizes the emotional impact such a training can have on participants, actively avoiding re-traumatizing those

who have experienced a VCI. At the end of the two-day course, I would become a certified instructor capable of training my colleagues and adapting the material to Oxford Academy's circumstances.

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Having seen the course outline, I braced myself for the two-day experience. After the first morning of lecture-type learning, we engaged in scenario-based training using simulations based on real-life events. I won’t sugar-coat it: It was heavy. With each simulation, my thoughts kept returning to my experiences and desire to keep our school community safe.

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While the training was intense, the level of detail and compassion expressed by our instructors made it profound. Our instructors, Kevin and Mike, were cognizant of the fact that we were educators first and foremost. They ensured we understood the nuances of each situation while remaining sensitive to how that information affected us. ALICE Training® was thorough, professional, and exactly what I was there to learn. **I could immediately envision how it would positively impact our school safety.**



Learning Valuable Skills That Last a Lifetime

We are beginning to implement the training principles, and the Navigate360 team has been instrumental in that process. I have the continued support of my instructors and the full support of Navigate360 team members, who are responsive to our follow-up questions.

To other school administrators who know about ALICE Training® but are afraid to wade into the emotional waters — **it's much easier to address these feelings than having to navigate a real-life event with no training at all.** This kind of training isn't easy, but it's essential. By working through the hard stuff with a trained professional, you remove the confusion from an incident and regain control.

We all hope we will never have to protect our colleagues and students during a VCI. Unfortunately, real life doesn't give us that choice. The greatest gift my ALICE instructors gave me was reframing an uncomfortable topic as a life skill that I can intellectually understand and impart to my colleagues and students.

ALICE Training® was an incredibly rewarding experience that left me feeling better prepared and in greater control. It has changed everything I think about situational awareness and how to keep my school safe.



Learn more about
ALICE Training® today.

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