

Robb Elementary School Attack Response Assessment and Recommendations



ALERT

TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY

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The following abbreviations are used throughout the report.

ISS – Internal School Surveillance
FH – Funeral Home video footage
OS – Officer Statement
IOI – Investigating Officer Interview
BWC – Body Worn Camera
UPD CS – Uvalde Police Department Call Sheet
RL – Radio Logs
UCISD PD – Uvalde Consolidated Independent School District Police Department
UPD – Uvalde Police Department
DPS – Texas Department of Public Safety
BP – Border Patrol
BORTAC – Border Patrol Tactical Teams

This report was created using school video, third party video exterior of school, body cameras, radio logs, verbal testimony of officers on scene, and verbal statements from investigators. This report should not be considered a definitive or final report as all investigatory options have not been exhausted at this point. This report should be considered a living document. It is subject to changes as new or further evidence becomes available. This report is being compiled for the explicit purpose of identifying training gaps to be addressed by police officers across the state of Texas. The authors of this report are subject matter experts in their field of active attack incidents, patrol, and tactical operations with over 150 years of combined experience. These are the expert opinions based on experience, research, and studies of other incidents and not a formal accusation of the responders on this incident.

Introduction

Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas was attacked on May 24, 2022. The attack resulted in 21 fatalities (19 students and 2 teachers) and 17 injuries. The Texas Department of Public Safety contacted the Advanced Law Enforcement Rapid Response Training (ALERRT) Center soon after the attack to assess the law enforcement response. The ALERRT Center was selected for this task for a variety of reasons. First and foremost, ALERRT is nationally recognized as the preeminent active shooter / attack response training provider in the nation. ALERRT was recognized as the national standard in active shooter response training by the FBI in 2013. ALERRT's excellence in training was recognized in 2016 with a Congressional Achievement Award.

More than 200,000 state, local, and tribal first responders (over 140,000 law enforcement) from all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and U.S. territories have received ALERRT training over the last 20 years. The ALERRT course catalog includes several courses designed to prepare first responders to 1) isolate, distract, and neutralize an active shooter, 2) approach and breach a crisis site using traditional and non-traditional methods, 3) incorporate effective command to manage a rapidly evolving active situation, and 4) manage traumatically injured patients to improve survivability. ALERRT's curriculum is developed and maintained by a team of subject matter experts with over 150 years combined law enforcement, fire, and tactical experience.

ALERRT training is research based. The ALERRT research team not only evaluates the efficacy of specific response tactics (Blair & Martaindale, 2014; Blair & Martaindale, 2017; Blair, Martaindale, & Nichols, 2014; Blair, Martaindale, & Sandel, 2019; Blair, Nichols, Burns, & Curnutt, 2013;) but also has a long, established history of evaluating the outcomes of active shooter events to inform training (Martaindale, 2015; Martaindale & Blair, 2017; Martaindale, Sandel, & Blair, 2017). Specifically, ALERRT has utilized case studies of active shooter events to develop improved curriculum to better prepare first responders to respond to similar situations (Martaindale & Blair, 2019).

For these reasons, ALERRT staff will draw on 20 years of experience training first responders and researching best practices to fulfill the Texas DPS request and objectively evaluate the law enforcement response to the May 24, 2022, attack at Robb Elementary School. This initial report will be focused on the portion of the response up until the suspect was neutralized.

The information presented in this report is based on a incident briefing held for select ALERRT staff on June 1, 2022. The briefing, which was held for approximately 1 hour, was led by an investigating officer with knowledge of the event and investigative details. Briefing materials included surveillance footage from the school, Google Maps, a brief cell phone video, and verbal questions and answers between ALERRT staff and the investigator. We were first oriented to the location of this incident by the investigator via Google Maps. We were then given a chronological timeline of events and actions by the investigator as we reviewed the cell phone and school surveillance video. All times presented in this report are based on timelines provided by investigators. Additionally, we have received additional information as the investigation is still ongoing. The timeline presented here is based on the most current information as of 6/30/2022.

The report will begin by presenting a thorough timeline of events as evidenced through video footage and details garnered from the ongoing investigation. Each entry cites the data source (refer to abbreviations presented on the Table of Contents). Following the timeline, we will comment on tactics utilized by responding officers. Information related to breaching options will be presented as a supplemental attachment at the end of the report. The tactical discussion is the opinion of ALERRT, and it is based on years of extensive training, research, and an ever-evolving understanding of active shooter response. The concepts discussed are foundational to ALERRT's nationwide training curriculum. While the discussion will be frank and objective, it is not meant to demean the actions taken by law enforcement during this incident. Rather, the discussion is intended to improve future response. For this reason, attention will be drawn to actions that worked well and actions that did not.

Detailed Timeline



Figure 1. Overhead View

At 11:27:14, a female teacher (Female 1) exits the exterior door in the west hall propping the door open with a rock to prevent it from closing behind her (see Figure 2 for suspect entry point). (ISS)

At 11:28:25, the suspect becomes involved in a motor vehicle crash in a dry canal near the elementary school. Two people from a nearby business approached the crash scene at 11:29:02. The suspect engaged them both with a rifle. The two people were able to flee back to the business unharmed and called 9-1-1. (FH)

At 11:29:40, Female 1 returns through the west entry deliberately kicking the rock from the door jamb. Female 1 pulls the door shut and continues to look out of the exterior door as she is frantically speaking on her cell phone. Female 1 attempts to enter a door on the south side of the west hallway only to find it locked. Female 1 knocked on the door, and it was eventually answered by another female (Female 2). Female 1 appears to advise Female 2 of the emergency whereupon Female 2 re-enters her room and secures the door. Female 1 moves into a room closest to the exit on the north side of the west hallway. Female 1 re-enters the hallway numerous times yelling down the hall for students to get into their classrooms. (ISS)

At 11:30:14, the suspect, wearing dark clothing and carrying a bag, left the crash scene and climbed a chain-link fence onto the elementary school property. The suspect walked deliberately across the open grounds between the fence and the teachers' parking lot. The suspect moved towards the school buildings on the westmost side of the campus. Although a defect that might have been caused by a bullet was located on a building south of the affected structure, it could not be

substantiated at this time that any rounds were fired at a teacher and children on the playground at the time of the crash. (FH)

At 11:31:36, the suspect is captured on video between the cars shooting, and a Uvalde Patrol unit is captured arriving at the crash site. (FH)

At 11:31:43, a Uvalde Consolidated Independent School District Police officer drives through the west gate near the crash site and across the field to the south side of the affect building, at a high rate of speed. (FH)

At 11:32:08, the suspect reached the west teachers' parking lot adjacent to the affected building and fired through windows into the westmost rooms prior to entering the building. (FH and audio file from ISS)

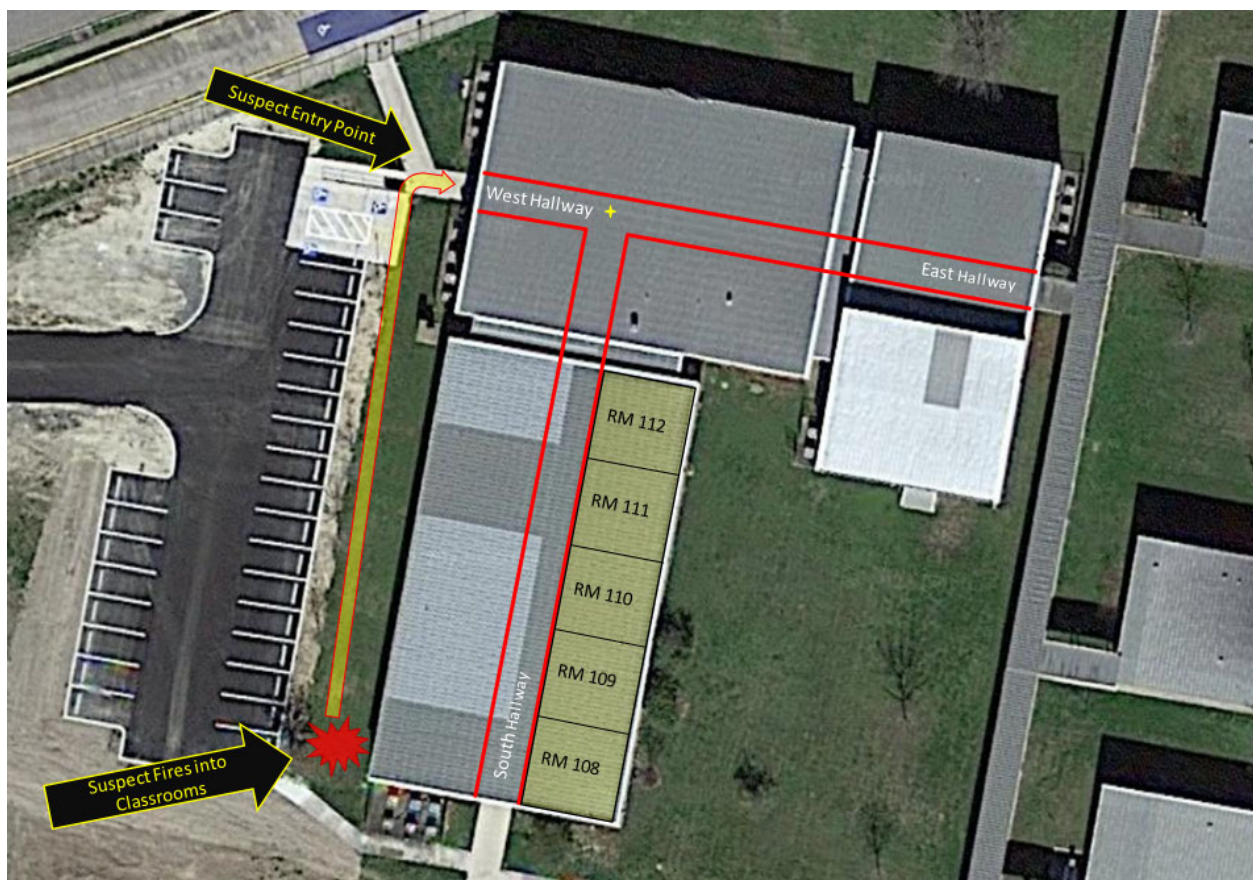


Figure 2. Suspect Entry Point

Prior to the suspect's entry into the building at 11:33:00, according to statements, a Uvalde Police Officer on scene at the crash site observed the suspect carrying a rifle outside the west hall entry. The officer, armed with a rifle, asked his supervisor for permission to shoot the suspect. However, the supervisor either did not hear or responded too late. The officer turned to get confirmation from his supervisor and when he turned back to address the suspect, he had entered the west hallway unabated. (OS per investigating officer interview).

Note: The internal school surveillance (ISS) video consisted of a ceiling-mounted camera that was situated at the intersection of three intersecting hallways (as indicated by the yellow star in Figure 3) This camera captured 1) the suspect's entry point, which was the short (West) hallway leading to an exterior door; 2) a second long hallway (South) with multiple classrooms on either side of the hall and an exterior door at the southmost end of the hall; and 3) a third hallway (East) that leads to other classrooms, restrooms, a teachers' lounge, a library, and an exterior door at the eastmost end of the hallway.



Figure 3. West Building Layout

At 11:33:00, the suspect enters the school from the exterior door in the west hall while holding a rifle. The suspect looked around the hallway and then continued to walk down the west hallway before turning right (down the south hallway). The suspect walked past a series of rooms with closed doors and a firewall “break.” before making his way to room 111 and 112. (ISS)

At 11:33:24, upon reaching rooms 111 and 112, the suspect fired a series of rounds from the hallway in the direction of classrooms 111 and 112. (ISS)

At 11:33:32, the suspect made entry into what appears to be classroom 111. Immediately, children's screams could be heard along with numerous gunshots in the classrooms. The rate of fire was initially very rapid then slowed, lasting only a few seconds. (ISS)

At 11:33:37, the suspect backed out of what appears to be classroom 111 into the south hallway. The suspect made a slight turn to what appears to be his left and fires a series of rounds from the hallway into classroom 112. The suspect then re-enters what appears to be classroom 111 and continues to fire what is estimated to be over 100 rounds by 11:36:04 (according to audio analysis). During the shooting the sounds of children screaming, and crying, could be heard (according to audio analysis). (ISS)



Figure 4. Officers Initial Entry into West Building

After the suspect made entry into the west building, three Uvalde Police Department (UPD) officers gathered on Geraldine Street (behind police vehicles) in front of the school drop-off / pick-up area. Then the officers, using a bounding overwatch tactic, move quickly (one at a time) to the west door.

At 11:35:55, all three Uvalde Police Department (UPD) officers entered the structure through the west door into the west hallway. These officers were equipped with the following: one with external armor and two with concealable body armor, two rifles, and three pistols. At 11:36:00, four officers entered the south hallway through the south door closest to the suspect. It is not clear what equipment these officers had with them. Four more officers entered the west hallway through the west door at 11:36:03. Three of these officers were from the UPD and one was from the Uvalde Consolidated Independent School District Police Department (UCISD PD). They were equipped with three external body armor carriers and one with concealable body armor and pistols. (ISS)

It did not appear that any of the officers were in possession of breaching tools, medical equipment, ballistic shields, or “go-bags.” (ISS)

NOTE: *A “go-bag” is typically a bag or backpack that is widely used in the law enforcement community to respond to critical incidents. The “go-bag” commonly consists of spare ammunition, medical equipment, and breaching tools. The purpose of the “go-bag” is to carry equipment needed for a specialized response, when carrying that equipment on a regular basis is not feasible. Taking a “go-bag” into a crisis site facilitates the availability and implementation of these tools in a patrol response where tactical assets and teams are not readily available.*

At 11:36:04, the last shots from the initial barrage from the suspect were fired. There were seven officers in the west hallway and four officers in the south hallway. (ISS)

At 11:36:10, officers from the west and south hallway advanced to rooms 111 and 112. As the officers entered the threshold of rooms 111 and 112, they were fired upon by the suspect, who was in room 111. The gunfire at 11:37:00 and 11:37:10 drove the officers away from the threshold of room 111 and 112 and back to the west and south hallways prior to either team making contact with either room 111 or 112 classroom doors. (ISS)

At 11:38:38, the suspect concludes firing, according to audio estimates 11 rounds are fired. (ISS)

Investigators advised that two officers were injured by building material fragments caused by the suspect’s rounds passing through the walls. (IOI and ISS)

Officers generally remained at the intersection of the west and south hallway and in the south hallway near the south entrance until the final assault. (IOI and ISS)

At 11:38:11, officers on scene, but outside of the hallway, call for additional assistance to include a tactical team with specialized capabilities. (BWC and UPD CS)

At 11:38:37, an officer outside of the hallway advises the suspect “is contained.” (BWC)

At 11:40:58, the suspect fires 1 round according to audio estimates. (ISS)

At 11:41:30, dispatch asked via radio if the door was locked, a UPD officer responds, “I am not sure, but we have a hooligan to break it.” (BWC)

At 11:44:00, the suspect fires one more round according to audio estimates. (ISS)

At 11:48:18, a UCISD PD officer enters through the west hallway door and states, “She says she is shot,” referring to his wife. He is escorted outside of the building. (BWC)

By 11:51:20, law enforcement from various agencies (including UPD, UCISD PD, Uvalde Sheriff's Office (USO), Fire Marshals, Constable Deputies, Southwest Texas Junior College Police Department (SWTJC PD), and the United States Border Patrol (BP) had arrived at the scene and were moving inside and out to evaluate the situation. (ISS, UPD CS, RL)

At 11:52:08, the first ballistic shield entered the west hallway. (ISS)

At 11:53:10, a Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS) special agent arrived at the perimeter and was advised to man the perimeter. Another officer makes a comment about there being kids still in the building, the DPS special agent advised, “if there is then they just need to go in.”

At 11:56:49, the DPS special agent states “there's still kids over here. So, I'm getting the kids out!” (BWC)

At 12:03:51, a second ballistic shield arrives, and at 12:04:16 a third shield arrives on scene in the west hallway. (ISS)

At 12:06:16, UPD RL notes that no Command Post is set up, advised bodies needed to keep parents out. (RL)

At 12:10:17, officers in the west hallway begin passing out and donning gas masks. (ISS)

At 12:14:10, CS gas cannisters and launcher deliverable varieties are brought in. (ISS)

By 12:13:00, dispatchers had received numerous 9-1-1 calls from a child explaining that there were several children and one of her teachers deceased and another teacher hurt in room 112. (UPD 9-1-1)

At 12:15:27, it appears tactical team members of United States Border Patrol Tactical Teams (BORTAC) arrive and assist with fortifying the law enforcement position at the intersection with ballistic shields. (ISS)

At 12:20:46, a fourth ballistic shield arrives in the west hallway. (ISS)

At 12:21:08, four shots are fired by the suspect from within one of the two classrooms. (ISS)

At 12:21:22, BORTAC members move to a set of double doors within 36' of rooms 111 and 112 bringing two ballistic shields. However, no assault on the rooms was conducted. (ISS)

At 12:23:35, BP medical team members began setting up medical triage in the east hallway in front of the restrooms. They had numerous backboards, medical kits, a defibrillator as well as bleeding control supplies. (ISS)

From 12:21:16 until 12:34:38, a continuous conversation takes place in the south hallway, involving UCISD PD Chief Arredondo and a UPD officer discussing tactical options and considerations including snipers, windows, and how to get into the classroom. They also discussed who has the keys, testing keys, the probability of the door being locked, and if kids and teachers are dying or dead. (BWC)

At 12:35:39, BP agents arrive in the west hallway with the first observed breaching tool, a Halligan tool. (ISS)

From 12:37:45 until 12:47:25, UCISD PD Chief Arredondo attempts to negotiate with the suspect, speaking in English and Spanish. The Chief also calls someone to try to look into the windows from outside, he then begins asking for more keys. At 12:46:18, he exclaims, "If y'all are ready to do it, you do it. But you should distract him out that window." At 12:47:25, Chief Arredondo states, "He's going in! He's going in! Tell those guys on the west that they're going in! Let 'em know!" (BWC)

At 12:47:57, a USO deputy arrives in the west hallway with a sledgehammer. (ISS)

At 12:50:03, an ad Hoc team assaults room 111, neutralizing the suspect. The suspect had concealed himself in a book closet, he then emerged when the team made entry. Footage showed officers frantically carrying the dead and injured to the casualty collection point (CCP) in the east hallway. Some law enforcement officers rushed casualties directly through the exterior door at the end of the west hallway. It is unknown if medical personnel (EMS) were staged nearby for direct patient handoff. (ISS)

The result of this incident was 19 children and two adults killed with an additional 17 reported injuries. Additionally, the suspect was neutralized through gunfire in the assault.

Physical Site Assessment

The investigator escorted ALERRT staff to the crime scene for a site walkthrough. As expected, there was a large quantity of dry blood on the floors in all three hallways. There were noticeable penetrating ballistic defects throughout various walls in the south hall.

The classroom doors were inset just over 36” into a 90-degree inset from the hallway to accommodate the swing of the outward opening classroom doors towards the hall. Each inset had two separate doors, side-by-side, leading into a separate classroom. The door on the left-hand side of the inset opened outward from right to left, and the door on the right-hand side of the inset opened outward from left to right as seen in Figure 5.

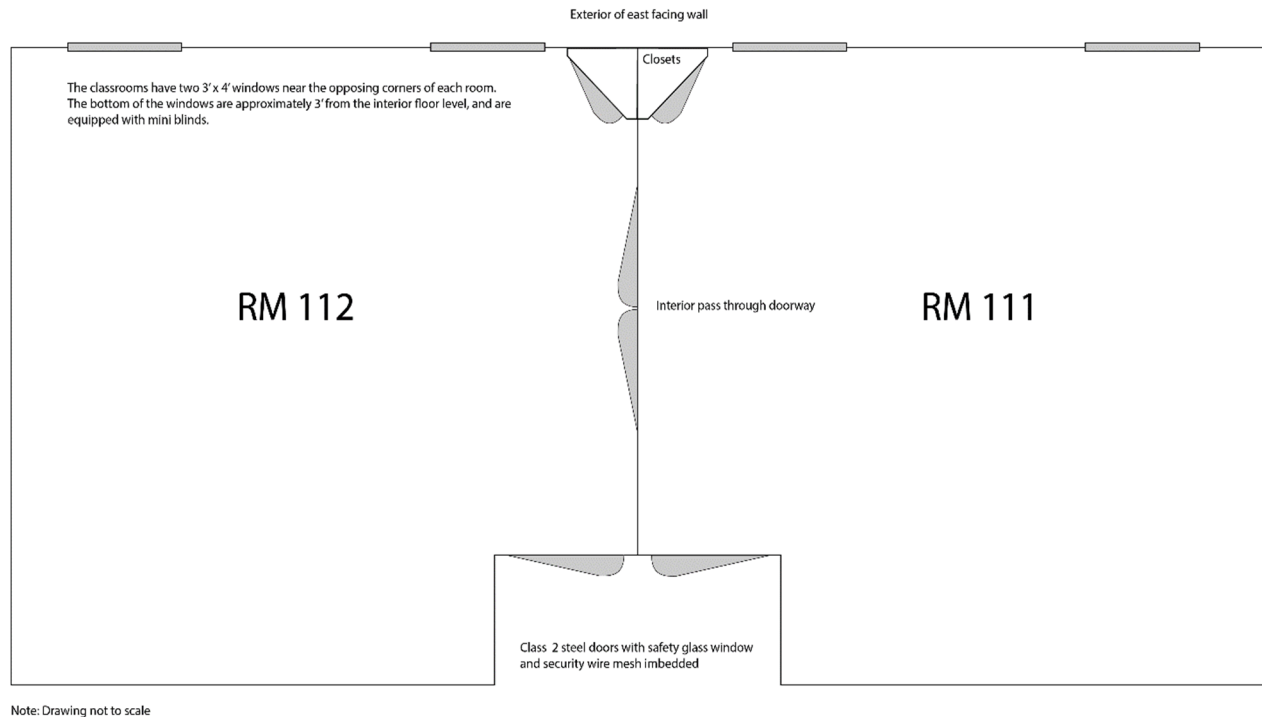


Figure 5. Classroom Layout

The classroom doors were class 2 steel doors. The classroom doors had safety glass with security wire mesh imbedded (see Figure 6). The hardware consisted of a single metal door handle locking latch, three exterior metal hinges, and a door closure device mounted to the top inside portion of the door. The door jambs were composed of steel and set in a metal stud and sheetrock wall.



Figure 6. Class 2 Steel Door

The door to room 111 had been removed for evidentiary purposes and collection. Once the evidence had been removed the door was left on the floor of the room. The door for room 112 was intact and in place. There was a noticeable concentration of exiting bullet defects in the area of the inset. There were noticeable bullet defects on the door jamb of classroom 111, approximately 5' from floor level. Both rooms 111 and 112 possessed an extraordinary amount of dry blood concentrated on the floor.

The exterior walls of each classroom had two 3' x 4' windows near the opposing corners of each classroom (see Figure 3). The bottom of each window was approximately 3' from interior floor level, and they were equipped with mini blinds. From the exterior, the windows were approximately 4' from ground level. The windows were composed of a heavy aluminum frame with three lateral cross beams that held four (4) 1'x3' panes of tempered glass, as seen in Figure 7.



Figure 7. Exterior Classroom Window

An exterior window on the right-hand side as you enter room 111 had a clear bullet defect. Based on the fragmented spiderweb pattern it was evident that the window was composed of safety glass, which fragments into small pieces when it is struck with enough force to break.

It appears the investigative teams cut out sections of sheetrock in the south hall to collect evidence. The interior walls were constructed with vertical metal studs every 16". Pink fiberglass insulation was installed between each vertical metal stud and was encapsulated between sheetrock material to form walls that separated each "paired" set of classrooms.

An assessment of the classroom closet, on the exterior wall, which is directly opposite of the classroom door, revealed that the exterior wall was cinder block on the inner portions and decorative brick on the exterior (as seen in Figure 7).

Tactical Assessment

While the previous section detailed the timeline, the following discussion will assess different tactical issues present in the response. We will use the most recent version of our Level I manual (v.7.2) as our primary reference (ALERT & FBI, 2020). We are breaking this discussion into three parts: 1) circumstances outside the building prior to suspect entering building, 2) initial officer response, and 3) changing environment leading to the eventual assault on room 111.

Circumstances Before the Suspect Entered the Building

We identified three key issues that occurred prior to the suspect gaining entry to the building. First, a teacher propped open the exterior door at 11:27:14. ALERT staff noted rocks (some of which were painted) were placed at most external doors of the building. Based on this observation, it appears that propping doors open is common practice at this school. While the teacher did kick the rock and close the door prior to the suspect making entry, and the propping open of the door did not affect what happened in this situation, circumventing access control procedures can create a situation that results in danger to students. After the teacher closed the door, she did not check to see if the door was locked. Perhaps this was because the door is usually locked. However, on this day the door was not locked, and because it was not locked, the attacker was able to immediately access the building. This again highlights the importance of not circumventing access control procedures. Even if the teacher had checked to see if the door was locked, it appears that she did not have the proper key or tool to engage the locking mechanism on the door. Finally, we note that the door was a steel frame with a large glass inlay. This glass was not ballistic glass, nor was there film on the glass to maintain the integrity of the door if the suspect shot the glass. This suggests that the suspect would have been able to gain access to the building even if the door was locked.

Second, one of the first responding officers (UCISD PD) drove through the parking lot on the west side of the building at a high rate of speed. The suspect was in the parking lot at this time, but the officer did not see him. If the officer had driven more slowly or had parked his car at the edge of the school property and approached on foot, he might have seen the suspect and been able to engage him before the suspect entered the building (ALERT & FBI, 2020, p. 3-4.)

Third, a Uvalde PD officer reported that he was at the crash site and observed the suspect carrying a rifle prior to the suspect entering the west hall exterior door. The UPD officer was armed with a rifle and sighted in to shoot the attacker; however, he asked his supervisor for permission to shoot. The UPD officer did not hear a response and turned to get confirmation from his supervisor. When he turned back to address the suspect, the suspect had already entered the west hall exterior door at 11:33:00. The officer was justified in using deadly force to stop the attacker. Texas Penal Code § 9.32, DEADLY FORCE IN DEFENSE OF PERSON states, an individual is justified in using deadly force when the individual reasonably believes the deadly force is immediately necessary to prevent the commission of murder (amongst other crimes). In this instance, the UPD officer would have heard gunshots and/or reports of gunshots and observed an individual approaching the school building armed with a rifle. A reasonable officer would conclude in this case, based upon the totality of the circumstances, that use of deadly force was warranted. Furthermore, the UPD officer was approximately 148 yards from the west hall exterior door. One-hundred and forty-eight yards

is well within the effective range of an AR-15 platform. The officer did comment that he was concerned that if he missed his shot, the rounds could have penetrated the school and injured students. We also note that current State of Texas standards for patrol rifle qualifications do not require officers to fire their rifles from more than 100 yards away from the target. It is, therefore, possible that the officer had never fired his rifle at a target that was that far away. Ultimately, the decision to use deadly force always lies with the officer who will use the force. If the officer was not confident that he could both hit his target and of his backdrop if he missed, he should not have fired.

If any of these three key issues had worked out differently, they could have stopped the tragedy that followed. First, had the exterior door been secured, the suspect may have never gained access to the building. At the very least, the suspect would have been delayed and responding officers would have had more time to find and stop the shooter before he entered the building. The UCISD PD officer might have seen the suspect had the officer not been driving as fast or if he had approached on foot. Lastly, had the UPD officer engaged the suspect with his rifle, he may have been able to neutralize, or at least distract, the suspect preventing him from entering the building.

Initial Response Within Building

We identified three key issues that occurred before the suspect entered rooms 111 and 112 for the last time. First, Uvalde ISD had protocols in place requiring doors to remain locked at all times, and the school was currently on an active lockdown prior to the suspect gaining entry to the school. The suspect was still able to gain access to room 111. We received information from the investigating officer that the lock on room 111 had been reported as damaged multiple times; however, this has not been confirmed through work orders at this time. Regardless, the suspect is seen entering the room, exiting the room, and then reentering the room again prior to officers entering the building at 11:35:55. The only way to engage the lock is to insert a key from the hallway side of the door. At no point is the suspect observed entering the hallway and engaging the locking mechanism. Based upon this, we believe that the lock to room 111 was never engaged.

The second issue involves having teams of officers at both ends of the south hallway. ALERRT teaches that a single team should be in a single area of building at a time (ALERRT & FBI, 2020, pp. 2-20 to 2-26 & 7-4). Having multiple teams or splitting an existing team can create a crossfire situation. If the suspect had emerged from the classrooms, officers from both teams presumably would have opened fire resulting in a high likelihood of officers at either end of the hallway shooting officers at the other end. The teams should have quickly communicated, and officers at one end of the hallway should have backed out and redeployed to another position. Additionally, ALERRT teaches that teams consist of up to 4 members (ALERRT and FBI, 2020, pp. 4-1 to 4-27). Teams larger than 4 tend to create congestion and interfere with the ability of the team to operate quickly and effectively. Therefore, once 4 officers were in the south hallway area of the building, no additional officers were needed in that area. Additional officers should have been assigned other tasks.

The third issue revolves around losing momentum. The first three responding UPD officers enter the west hall exterior door at 11:35:55 and an additional four officers entered the south hall at

11:36:00. Audio recordings indicate the suspect was actively firing his weapon until 11:36:04. The first responding officers correctly moved toward the active gunfire, which was acting as their driving force (ALERRT & FBI, 2020, pp. 2-15 to 2-16, 2-26, 2-33). The seven officers converged on rooms 111 and 112 at 11:37:00. As the officers approached the doors, the suspect began firing. This gunfire caused both teams of officers to retreat from the doors. We note that the officers **did not** make contact with the doors (i.e., they never touched any part of the doors). The team approaching from the north fell back to the T-intersection of the west and south hallways. This position is approximately 67 feet from the doors of rooms 111 and 112. The team approaching from the south fell back to the south end of the south hallway. The team in the south hallway were not visible on camera, so their distance from the affected classrooms is unknown.

ALERRT teaches that first responders' main priority in an active shooter situation is to first **Stop the Killing** and then **Stop the Dying** (ALERRT & FBI, 2020, pp. 2-9, 2-15 to 2-16). Inherent in both stopping the killing and dying is the priority of life scale (ALERRT & FBI, 2020, pp. 2-6 & 2-34). At the top of this scale, the first priority is to preserve the lives of victims/potential victims. Second, is the safety of the officers, and last is the suspect. This ordering means that we expect officers to assume risk to save innocent lives. Responding to an active shooter is a dangerous task (Blair & Duron, 2022). There is a chance that officers will be shot, injured, or even killed while responding. This is something that every officer should be acutely aware of when they become a law enforcement officer.

To adhere to the priority of life, the first responding officers' actions should be determined based on the current driving force. In this instance, there is a suspect actively shooting inside an occupied elementary school. The active gunfire is the driving force, and the officers correctly responded to this driving force by moving toward the rooms that were being attacked.

Ideally, the officers would have placed accurate return fire on the attacker when the attacker began shooting at them. ALERRT trains the widely-used ABCs of cover – **A**ccurate return fire, **B**ody armor, and **C**over (ALERRT & FBI, 2020, p. 2-21; Blair et al., 2013). The ABCs give the first responder a tiered approach to achieving cover while maintaining control of the situation. Further, the ABCs are presented in order of preference (A first, B second, C third). As noted in Figure 6, there was a window in the center of each classroom door. Officers could have utilized the window to send accurate return fire back at the suspect. Even though the room was darker than the hallway, the suspect would have been backlit by the exterior windows and muzzle flashes would have been present. Obviously, this return fire must be consistent with the fundamental firearms safety rules (e.g., the officers must ensure that students will not be hit by the officers' return fire). Any officer with body armor should have squared their body armor to the threat to improve protection. In this situation, we don't believe the last course of action (moving to cover) was a viable option because the interior construction of the school would not stop bullets, and therefore, was not cover. Maintaining position or even pushing forward to a better spot to deliver accurate return fire would have undoubtedly been dangerous, and there would have been a high probability that some of the officers would have been shot or even killed. However, the officers also would likely have been able to stop the attacker and then focus on getting immediate medical care to the wounded.

It is not surprising that officers who had never been shot at before would be overwhelmed by the directed gunfire. This is especially the case if they had not been consistently training to deal with this type of threat. However, even after retreating, the officers were still presented with a clear driving force. The suspect was actively firing his weapon when the officers entered the building, and a reasonable officer would assume that there were injured people in the classrooms. The officers also knew the suspect was still alive and preventing them from accessing the wounded in the classrooms. These injured people are a driving force (ALERT & FBI, 2020, p. 2-17) Once the officers retreated, they should have quickly made a plan to stop the attacker and gain access to the wounded. There were several possible plans that could have been implemented. We list a few here:

- A. Perhaps the simplest plan would have been to push the team back down the hallway and attempt to control the classrooms from the windows in the doors. Any officer wearing rifle-rated body armor (e.g., plates) would have assumed the lead as they had an additional level of protection. A team of 4 officers could have utilized the windows in the doors to control a large portion of the classroom from the hallway. Two officers would have taken angular positions on each window. This would have allowed them to cover a large portion of each classroom and the officers would have been likely to see and engage the attacker. Again, this would have been dangerous, but the priority of life scale dictates that the officers assume risk to save innocent lives. It is also worth noting, the officers had weapons (including rifles), body armor (which may or may not have been rated to stop rifle rounds), training, and backup. The victims in the classrooms had none of these things. If the classroom doors were locked, some of the officers on the door windows would have been able to provide cover while the other officers breached the doors.
- B. If the officers believed that they could not establish control through the doors, they should have found another way to stop the killing and dying. One option would have been to breach the exterior windows of the classrooms. Ideally, this would have involved breaking more than one window simultaneously and then raking the blinds out of the window. It is likely that the suspect would have fired at the officers, but the exterior construction of the building would have provided them with good cover. After the windows were broken (i.e., ported), the officers could have planned to simultaneously stand up in the windows to confront the attacker (i.e., cover). The room would have been substantially darker than the bright exterior conditions at the time. However, breaking the windows and raking the blinds would have increased lighting in the room. Hand-held or weapon-mounted lights could also have been used to increase visibility (see Supplementary information regarding an assessment of breaching options).
- C. Both options a and b could have been done simultaneously. The window breaks could have been used to signal the start of the assault and draw the suspect's attention from the doors. The window officers would stay behind the cover of the exterior wall while the door officers had priority of fire. Then the window officers could stand and cover the rest of the room.
- D. Other options (such as breaching the sheetrock walls or having an officer run past the rooms to draw fire while other officers moved up to cover the interior windows) could also have

been utilized. Each of these alternatives would have had various strengths and weaknesses but would have regained momentum for the officers.

None of these actions were taken. While it would have taken a few minutes to coordinate and execute any of these actions once the officers retreated from the rooms, taking 2, 3, 5 or even 10 minutes to do so would have been preferable to the more than an hour it took to ultimately assault the room.

We commend the officers for quickly entering the building and moving toward the sounds of gunfire. However, when the officers were fired at, momentum was lost. The officers fell back, and it took more than an hour to regain momentum and gain access to critically injured people.

Changing Circumstances Prior to Assault

As discussed, the situation became static at 11:38:37. Prior to this, at 11:38:11, the UCISD PD Chief called for additional assistance (tactical teams and equipment). The responding officers began treating the situation as a hostage/barricade rather than an active shooter event. The timeline shows that the shooter was killed at 12:50:03. This section will describe the escalating circumstances that unraveled over the one hour, eleven minutes, and twenty-six seconds between officers taking static positions and the moment the suspect was killed. We will detail key moments where officers' capabilities increased due to arriving equipment and personnel as well as moments where the exigency of the situation increased due to either suspect actions (e.g., firing his weapon) or additional information (e.g., injured people) being communicated to the officers inside the building.

A reasonable officer would have considered this an active situation and devised a plan to address the suspect. Even if the suspect was no longer firing his weapon, his presence and prior actions were preventing officers from accessing victims in the classroom to render medical aid (ALERRT & FBI, 2020, p. 2-17).

For the sake of argument, we will assume that officers believed the active shooter situation had transformed into a hostage barricade starting at 11:38:37. We'll also assume that officers needed additional equipment and/or trained tacticians to perform the room assault. In a hostage/barricade, officers are taught to utilize the 5 Cs (Contain, Control, Communicate, Call SWAT, Create a Plan; ALERRT & FBI, 2020, pp. 2-17 to 2-19). In this instance, the suspect was contained in rooms 111 and 112. The officers established control in that they slowed down the assault. However, the officers did not establish communication with the suspect. The UCISD PD Chief did request SWAT/tactical teams. SWAT was called, but it takes time for the operators to arrive on scene. In the meantime, it is imperative that an immediate action plan is created. This plan is used if active violence occurs. It appears that the officers did not create an immediate action plan.

Factors Increasing Exigency

We identified two factors that we believe increased the exigency of the situation and should have prompted officers to execute an immediate action plan. These factors were ongoing gunfire and the presence of injured people.

Gunfire. At 11:40:58, the suspect fired one shot. At 11:44:00, the suspect fired another shot, and finally, at 12:21:08, the suspect fired 4 more shots. During each of these instances, the situation had gone active, and the immediate action plan should have been triggered because it was reasonable to believe that people were being killed.

Injured People. While it is unclear whether the information from 9-1-1 about injured people in the classrooms was being communicated to officers on the inside of the school, at 11:48:18, a UCISD PD officer enters through the west hallway door and states, “She says she is shot,” referring to his wife. The officer was looking at his phone when he relayed the information to the other officers in the hallway. Based on statements, he had received a call from his wife in the room. This statement illustrates officers on scene were aware of at least one injured person in need of assistance.

Factors Increasing Capability

In addition to information that should have increased the exigency of the situation, a variety of factors increased the capabilities of the officers while dealing with these threats. These included breaching tools, shields, tactical operators, and CS gas. Please refer to Figure 8 on page 20 for a detailed timeline of the factors that increased both exigency and officer capability.

Breaching Tools. A UPD officer stated that they had a Halligan at 11:41:30 when asked by dispatch if the doors were locked. This tool was not seen on camera, and if he was referring to the tool being on scene or at the UPD is unclear. A Halligan tool was captured on camera at 12:35:39. A USO deputy arrives on scene with a sledgehammer at 12:47:57. This completed the toolset needed to breach an outward opening door.

Ballistic Shields. The first ballistic shield arrives on scene at 11:52:08. A second ballistic shield arrived at 12:03:51, a third ballistic shield arrived at 12:04:16, and a fourth ballistic shield arrived at 12:20:46. Each ballistic shield afforded first responders additional protection from potential gunfire. We do not have information about the ballistic rating of each shield at this point.

Tactical Operators. While many officers flowed through the scene, the first known tactical operators (i.e., BORTAC) arrived at 12:15:27. BORTAC operators receive extensive training and equipment to respond to barricaded suspects. Additionally, it is common for tactical operations to be turned over to tactical operators upon their arrival; however, it appears that control of tactical operations was not given to the tactical operators on scene.

CS Gas. Between 12:10:17 and 12:14:10, gas masks were passed out and CS gas cannisters and launchers were on scene.

The assault team entered the room at 12:50:03, 1 hour, 11 minutes, and 26 seconds after the first responding officers took static positions. The assault team had keys that could unlock the door. It

does not appear that any officer ever tested the doors to see if they were locked. As we described earlier, we do not believe the door to room 111 was locked.

As this section illustrates, there were multiple points in time where the driving force increased through additional gunfire; however, officers did not act on these increases in driving force. Additionally, officers on scene continually received additional equipment and tactical components that increased their capabilities to address the suspect. Ultimately it is unclear why the officers decided to assault the room at 12:50:03. There was no apparent change in driving force or response capability at this point.

While we do not have definitive information at this point, it is possible that some of the people who died during this event could have been saved if they had received more rapid medical care. In the next part of this AAR, we intend to address that Stop the Dying portion of the response that occurred following the killing of the suspect.

Additionally, we have noted in this report that it does not appear that effective incident command was established during this event. The lack of effective command likely impaired both the Stop the Killing and Stop the Dying parts of the response. The final part of this AAR will address incident command issues.

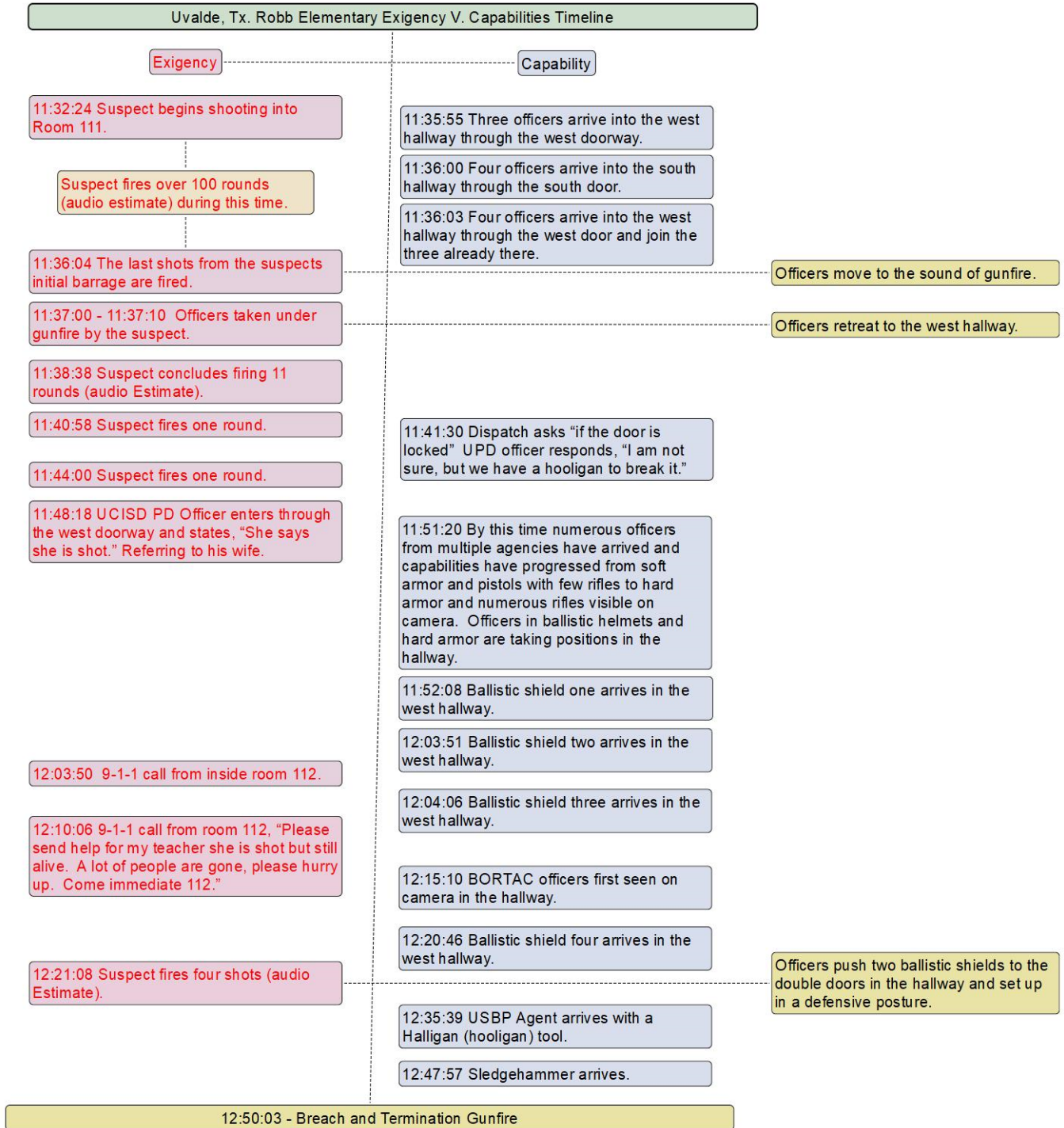


Figure 8. Exigency vs Capability Timeline

Supplemental Materials

Breaching Assessment and Opportunities

The initial wave of officers in this incident worked to locate and identify the location of the suspect. However, in doing so, they were met with a difficult challenge posed by the suspect; they were being fired at while attempting to enter the classroom where the suspect, victims, and casualties were located. Furthermore, the officers did not have any breaching tools. For the purposes of this report, breaching tools refer to common tools that are expected to be carried and utilized during active shooter / active attack events. The responding officers making the initial approach did not have immediate access to ballistic shields. The officer's overall level of training is unknown at this point.

ALERRT staff conducted a series of tests at Robb Elementary School incorporating critical thinking and breaching techniques to determine possibilities that may have changed the incident outcome. ALERRT staff used non-traditional tools that can be purchased at most any hardware store or obtained from a firetruck. The tools used were a 10LB sledgehammer, a Stanley Fat Maxx, and a Halligan tool (see Figure 9).



Figure 9. Breaching Tools

Keyed Entry

After much discussion and observation, it was clear that an unshielded officer faced imminent serious bodily injury or death if they were to attempt to unlock the door. This was proven during the initial responding officers first attempt to open the door. The breach point and inset locations in the south hall received heavy gunfire, and this breach method, alone, was untenable.

Pry

ALERRT staff performed a “pry” on the door using a Stanley Fat Maxx and a sledgehammer. The breaching technique was recorded and performed relatively quickly (the door was opened in 3-4

seconds). Although the breach was conducted quickly, and a positive breach was established, there was still a substantial risk of serious bodily injury or death to officers if this breach were to be performed without a ballistic shield.

Pry with a Distraction

The purpose of implementing a distraction during the breach is to redirect the suspect's focus away from the breach point while the breach is performed. In this case, banging on a wall in the south hallway was used as a distraction. The distraction was initiated, and a positive breach was established relatively quickly (i.e., 3-4 seconds). When the door was opened the ALERRT staff member that was placed in the room as a suspect was focused on the wall where the distraction was performed. The distraction afforded the breachers time to perform the breach while lowering the risk of serious bodily injury or death.

Breaching an outward opening door with a sledgehammer

Typically, outward opening doors are breached using a pry technique. There are techniques that can be used to breach outward opening doors using a sledgehammer or ramming technique. This technique was attempted and proven to not be a viable option due to the construction of the metal door. A positive breach was not established, and performing this technique took a long time. Unshielded, the probability of serious bodily injury or death would be high.

Wall Breaching

Utilizing the walls in an adjoining classroom, a series of wall breaches were conducted. The purpose for a wall breach is to create a distraction prior to conducting a pry breach. Additionally, a wall breach can create a port hole allowing officers to engage the suspect through the opening.

Using a sledgehammer with the strike face toward the wall, a distraction was created by striking the wall multiple times. The strikes resulted in limited penetration to the interior wall in the adjacent classroom.

Using a sledgehammer with the strike face turned sideways, a port was created with 2-3 strikes to the wall. Any remaining insulation materials were removed by hand to clear out the opening.

Using the Stanley Fat Maxx, a distraction was performed by penetrating the sheetrock into the adjacent room with a single puncture through the wall.

It was evident that the suspect in this attack fired numerous rounds from a rifle that penetrated the sheetrock walls. These distractions/ports offer a breaching option but still come with a risk for unshielded officers.

Pry with a window distraction

This breaching method incorporated an exterior window breach as a distraction while simultaneously prying the classroom door. The windows were breached with a Halligan tool while the interior door was breached with a Stanley Fat Maxx and sledgehammer. The window breach added to the tactical advantage by causing the subject in the room to direct attention to the windows while the interior breach team was able to breach, enter, and address the subject.

It was found that “port and cover” on the window was challenging due to miniblinds obstructing view and unequal lighting conditions.

- Port and cover refers to breaching a window and addressing threats from that opening.
- Miniblinds or obstructions would need to be cleared with a breaching tool for a view into the room,
- The classroom was significantly darkened without artificial lighting while the exterior was relatively sunny and bright. When the exterior window was breached, the unequal lighting conditions resulted in the exterior members having diminished capabilities to see into the dark classroom to acquire a target. Raking the blinds out would increase the lighting in the room, and hand-held or weapon mounted lights could further improve lighting conditions.

Additional Breaching Options

Vehicle Breaching. The use of a motor vehicle to breach fortified locations should always be considered as a breaching option in matters of exigent circumstances and loss of life. However, in this incident, vehicle breaching was not a viable option due to the construction and layout of the school. Vehicle breaching was also not feasible because the officers were unsure where innocent children and teachers were located in the room.

Ballistic Breaching. The use of a 12-gauge shotgun and 00 buck is another viable breaching method that could have or may have been used with the proper equipment and training.

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