Pre-Planning for Safety

I’m Jeff Eichman and I’m an Education Specialist with Region 6 Educational Center in Huntsville, Texas. If I’m a brand new teacher or being assigned to a brand new facility, let’s say for example that I have been teaching in maybe a different part of the building and now I’m moving into either a new part of the building or something like that, a new program area, the first thing I want to do when I walk up to the door, I really need to start from the outside walking in. And what I mean by that is from the doorway looking into the building and looking into the facility, as far as from a safety standpoint, an accessible standpoint, and things like that. Now if it’s a newer facility surely it’s going to meet ADA compliance standards and things like that, but if it’s an older building, there might be some issues. Issues that I mean by that would be either a threshold or a step-up at the doorway itself, the door opening and the doorknob, the doorknob needs to be something that doesn’t require grasping. It needs to be something that is easily accessible. The doorway needs to be at least 36 inches opening, so that way if a student is in a wheelchair or something like that they have an opportunity to come into the classroom.

Of course when I turn the lights on, look at the lighting, I want to make sure my lighting is adequate and things like that. Then make sure the classroom, as far as any of the chairs and tables and things like that, the aisles and walkways are definitely clear, so that we don’t have any trip hazards. Sometimes when we go out, I see cords, especially from projectors that are on carts and things like that, running in the middle of the classroom that the teachers have to be mindful to tell the students to be aware of them. Probably something better to fix that problem would be to relocate the outlet that they’re plugged in or actually mount the projector from the ceiling to eliminate that all together, so you don’t have that. You know, Internet cords and things like that, fortunately in today’s world of technology are starting to move forward, and we’re doing more and more wireless technology. So that eliminates some of the trip hazards, but yet we still need to be mindful of the trip hazards, especially in some of our older facilities. Of course carpet, and things like that, or rugs, or anything like that you just need to make sure that you’re paying attention as far as what the floor looks like. If it’s a floor that someone could slip and fall on or anything like that or trip, so we need to look at that.

As far as when I was in a classroom, one thing that I used to focus on was I always had my class rules posted, and my expectations posted. I had an evacuation route in case there was some reason we needed to get out of the classroom; everyone knew what the route was and where we were to go and things like that, if we had fire drills, procedures for that, exactly how that all works. Unfortunately in today’s world, we have to think about lockdown procedures and things like that, so with all those things said, does my door lock? Do I have access to be able to lock it? What are the procedures for my school district, is the door to stay locked at all times and that I open the door to allow someone to come in? And so you know, all those kinds of things, especially if we’re moving into another room or building, we need to kind of look at all of the things.

Lighting, ventilation, HVAC, are there extremes in temperatures, and things like that. If there a leak in the roof, do we have a water issue? Is there mold, mildew? You know all of those kinds of things.
We start talking about tools and equipment and things like that. Do we have the correct safety guards in place? Are the tools and equipment that we’re using do they actually meet the current industry standards? Do they actually meet modern day standards, so that we’re teaching kids on equipment and technology that they’re going to be using in the workforce later on, from that standpoint. Of course first aid, is there a first aid kit? Eye protection, safety glasses, where do we store those safety glasses, are they just laying around somewhere or do we actually have a cabinet they fit into? And any other personal protective equipment that the students are going to need while they’re out there, if it’s a health science lab or some other type of setting where it’s maybe not a traditional shop, does the lab and equipment have all the necessary safety features? What I mean by that, buildings that are constructed over a certain time period have to have an emergency shut off, so that it kills all of the water, gas, electricity, and everything to that classroom in the event that there’s an accident, especially if you’re using gas and things like that.

When we start talking about moving into that setting, as far as from a chemical standpoint, are all the chemicals in a storage area where they are in a fire proof container, so that we don’t have to worry about any type of accidents like that? One thing that was interesting that I actually learned, I went into a science lab room and the vent from the science room was vented out into the hall of the high school. Which would probably not be a very good scenario in case there was ever a chemical spill in there because you’d be venting potentially dangerous fumes right out into the hall. So, you know, people need to be mindful that the exhaust needs to go outside of the building, so something like that doesn’t happen. In a lot of our shops and a lot of our manufacturing facilities, we’re using solvents, chemicals, paints, auto tech facilities using gasoline, and things like that, and a lot of flammable materials, so hopefully they’re stored in a flammable cabinet resistant to flames, so that way we don’t have to worry about potential problems like that. I’m going to try to look at the big picture. I’m going to try to incorporate everything as far as from a safety standpoint, especially things that I’m going to teach the students about. We definitely want to make sure that all of the tools, equipment, and everything is in clearly working order. Any guards and things like that that need to be in place, we need to make sure that they’re all in place, and that any rules and things like that we need to be posted, we will make sure that we have them posted as well.