



On Nov. 13, 2014 the School Resource Officer (SRO) for Jewett Middle Academy (a Winter Haven Police officer) conducted a coordinated lockdown drill with the principal of the school based on a requirement sent from the Safe Schools Department of the Polk County School Board. The Polk County School District has asked schools for several years to practice four drills other than fire drills to include lockdown and evacuation drills.

The drill was not an exercise with SWAT teams, diversionary devices or role players storming the school as has been portrayed by the media. The drill at Jewett Middle Academy was coordinated and executed between the SRO in conjunction with the principal with times and details not to be revealed to staff, students or parents.

When the Jewett Middle Academy SRO set up the drill with the principal, he and the other officer, both in police officer uniforms, made an independent decision to conduct the drill with their firearms in the low-ready position (pointed towards the ground at the side). At that point, the two officers and a school administrator went from classroom to classroom and made their evaluations.

Once I was informed of the display of firearms during the drill I immediately mandated future drills without drawn weapons within the City of Winter Haven. I continue to support these drills without firearms, and value their importance in maintaining the safety of students and staff.

I have made every attempt to explain the drill process and that I had immediately removed any chance for an officer to make the same decision regarding firearms at any future drills at public schools inside the city limits of Winter Haven. Furthermore, the SRO who was assigned to this school has been reassigned to patrol.

To reiterate, the drill that occurred was not conducted as an active shooter scenario training as what has been portrayed in canned videos across the nation. It is unfortunate that incorrect video displaying true scenario-based training has been linked to this drill at Jewett. Our agency has made every attempt to educate the community and media regarding the differences of the two.

Ultimately, I am the acting Chief of our agency and the responsibility of our officers and their actions rests solely with me.

Sincerely,
Charles Bird
Chief of Police