

ENHANCING SAFETY AND COMMUNICATION IN K-12 SCHOOLS: A 12-MONTH GUIDE



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INTRODUCTION

Staying Safe and Informed Throughout the Year

Safety is a critical component of any K-12 school, and a key part of safety is having the right information about an emergency. Leveraging tools and practices that keep the right people informed at the right time go a long way toward enhancing safety and security in schools and districts.

However, safety is an ongoing process. It doesn't happen all at once, and it should never be thought of as something that can be done once and then be left alone. Safety requires continuous adaptations to respond to the needs of your school or district.

In this eBook we will provide a detailed outline of the entire school year to advise on best practices and steps you can take to make sure everyone is informed about emergency situations.

Start Prepping for Next Year

PREPARE FOR BACK TO SCHOOL

As hard as it might be, when the school year ends, it's time to start looking forward. While parents are getting supplies to prepare their students for the new school year, administrators and school security officers should be making sure they have everything in place to provide a safe learning environment. Part of that process involves adding and testing technology that can reach everyone during an emergency.

Emergency notification systems offer schools a means to send critical information to everyone who needs it, for events like active shooters and severe weather. Advanced systems can tie into legacy paging systems and security features, such as door locks, to help leverage existing technology and offer additional opportunities to increase security at schools.

Before the new school year, there are several steps school officials should take to assess their emergency notification capabilities.



STANDARDIZE PROCEDURES TO SAVE TIME

Review what kind of procedures are currently in place and identify areas that can be improved or expanded. Know what kind of events constitute sending notifications to key personnel and how those notifications will be sent. Some scenarios may only require a select group to be notified, while others may call for everyone to be alerted of the situation. Standardizing these practices before the school year begins can save time when an actual event occurs, and testing when buildings are primarily empty allows for room to correct mistakes during non-crucial moments.

ANALYZE HOW YOU DISTRIBUTE INFORMATION

Once you have a plan in place for who will be notified during what situations, consider how you are distributing the information people need to help manage the event. Overhead paging is helpful to reach everyone in a building, but during an emergency, every available channel of communications should be utilized to share information. Look into how you can send messages as phone calls, SMS text messages, emails and push notifications to quickly get information to the people that need it. Emergency notification systems should let you send messages in multiple formats to large groups simultaneously.

Taking these steps in June and July will go a long way toward being prepared when school starts in the fall.

Enhance Communication and Connectivity

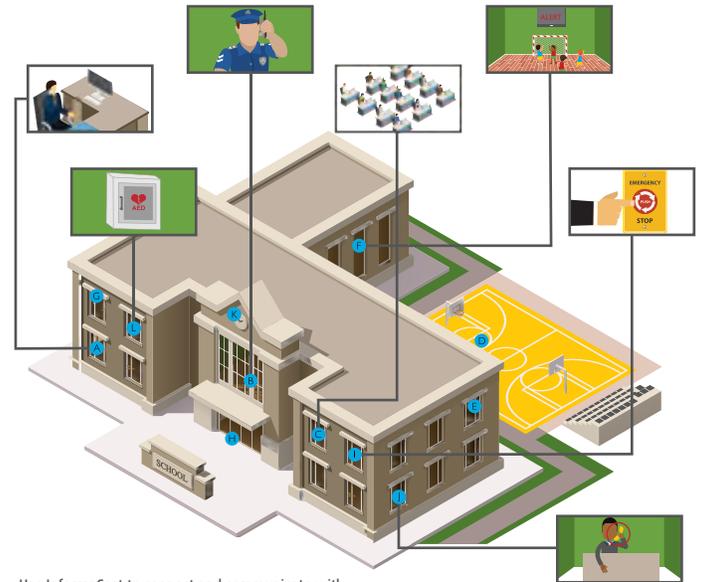
SHARE CRITICAL INFORMATION

In K-12 schools, there are many people to reach and many ways to reach them. Overhead paging, phones, and digital signage are just some of the ways critical information is communicated.

But disparate systems can make communication challenging, which in turn can lead to unnecessary risks. In preparation for the start of the school year, look at how you can bring these systems together to ensure messages are sent without incident.

The infographic on the right offers seven tips for connecting systems and tools to enhance communication in your K-12 school.

7 Tips to Enhance K-12 Communication and Connectivity



Use InformaCast to connect and communicate with

- A Administrator/Security Office
- B Mobile phones
- C Computer desktops
- D Outdoor speaker
- E Overhead speaker
- F Digital signage
- G School bells
- H Door access
- I Panic buttons
- J Landline phones
- K Clocks
- L AED Box

1. Utilize a single system to manage all your messages, groups and devices

2. Reach people on mobile devices

3. Automate as much as possible
(Bells, weather alerts, recurring announcements)

4. Tie into the Internet of Things
(Door locks, digital signage, panic buttons, AED boxes)

5. Get in front of people on their desk phones and computers

6. Utilize speakers inside and out to achieve maximum reach

7. Monitor phones to know when 911 is called

Student safety is a top priority for any K-12 school. Streamlining communication systems makes it easier to share information that keeps people safe.

Set Your School Bell Schedule

SHARE CRITICAL INFORMATION

As school is about to start, consider setting your bell schedule for the upcoming year. It may not seem like school bells are an important part of school safety, but properly-functioning school bells are crucial to the flow and productivity of your school or district. Setting them early will help you avoid headaches down the road. Here are a few things to consider when you set up your bell schedule:

1. Think about who will hear your bell tones.

What are the needs of your staff and students? Would a soft or familiar bell tone help younger students get acquainted with school bells? Do your students and staff need to be able to hear bells in a large, busy school?

2. Decide what you'd like your bell tones to communicate.

Would you like to have different tones communicate different things? (e.g. - one announces class period start, one announces class period end) Would you like to play passing music? Will scheduled announcements be part of your bell schedule?

3. Consider where you would like your bell tones to reach.

Perhaps you'd like to have separate bells for different floors, or if you have a blended campus, you'd like to have separate bells for the elementary school classrooms and the middle school classrooms.

4. Schedule when you would like your bells to sound.

After you have thought through the first three items, it's time to create your bell schedule. When you choose to have your bells sound depends on the personal needs of your school or district. Perhaps you want to have a bell to announce the beginning and end of each class period. Maybe you'd like to have a five minute warning bell. Think about what type of schedule would work best for your staff and students.

5. Plan for unexpected changes.

Come up with a plan for how you will change your bell schedules for early release, inclement weather, teacher in-service—anything that would disrupt the normal flow of the day.



If you're looking for ways to incorporate custom bells for your school or district, check out these five resources for school bell .wav files.

- sounddogs.com
- soundbible.com
- freeloops.com
- 4shared.com
- audiosparx.com

Communicating Throughout Your School

EASING WOES WITH SCALABLE SOLUTIONS

After the school year has begun, you may start to encounter unseen issues. Events may impact procedures and certain systems may not work as advertised. You may also find you aren't reaching as many people as you need to with critical messages, or the messages aren't going to the right people when they do go out.

Necedah Area School District, a rural district located in central Wisconsin, was encountering similar issues. The district houses its elementary, middle and high school in one building. With 700 students and 130 staff and faculty, communicating messages to the right audiences is a crucial component of running day-to-day operations smoothly.

When Kris Saylor, director of technology, had the opportunity to renovate the district's overhead paging system, he knew he needed a solution that would provide better reach than the current analog system. With three schools in one building, he needed to be able to designate messages for the right audience, and upgrade his speakers to ones that offered better sound quality.

"We had speakers placed every six feet throughout the school, but no one could hear anything," said Saylor. He needed a system that was flexible, easy-to-use and reached everyone. So he turned to emergency notification software.



BRINGING EVERYTHING TOGETHER

Saylor installed IP speakers throughout the building to provide clear audio and scrolling-text announcements. With the help of the emergency notification software he and his team have been able to drastically improve how they schedule bells, configure zones and send messages.

Currently, the district has zones set up to reach everyone in the building: a zone each for the elementary, middle, and high school, one combined middle and high school zone, one zone for outside speakers and one zone specifically for the gymnasium.

This streamlined the steps needed to make a page, saving time when critical information needed to be shared.

Protect Schools from Nearby Threats

KEEP PEOPLE SAFE, INSIDE AND OUT

When things are running smoothly internally, it's time to look at how to prepare for outside threats that may collide with your school or district. On a K-12 campus, threats outside of buildings can be just as dangerous as those within. Armed robberies at nearby businesses, fleeing fugitives, or police pursuits are all cause to keep people inside your building and out of harm's way.

A recent article from Campus Safety Magazine outlined the steps one Los Angeles-area middle/high school took to deal with outside threats that approached school grounds. When a suspect pursued by police ended up in front of the school, security personnel were deployed and a lockdown was put in place using a pre-recorded message broadcast throughout the school. Police arrived soon after and the incident was resolved without harm coming to anyone on campus.

While the systems the school had in place worked as they were supposed to, administrators saw an opportunity to better leverage technology and training. Following the event, the school increased the number of lockdown drills it conducts and improved internal and external communications through new speakers and a reverse 911 system.



LEVERAGE EMERGENCY NOTIFICATION SOFTWARE

When an emergency occurs, emergency notifications should be sent over as many channels as possible. Only utilizing email or overhead paging rarely has the desired effect for making people aware of a desired situation. At the same time, it doesn't benefit anyone to have to log into multiple systems to send the same message in a variety of ways.

Schools that utilize systems that can send messages in multiple formats to a variety of on-premises and mobile devices have a better chance of reaching everyone. Being able to send live, ad hoc, or pre-recorded audio, as well as text and images in emails and SMS texts also helps reach the maximum amount of people with critical information.

Mobile Matters

REMOTE ACTIVATION

As the calendar year ends, and the second half of the school year is about to begin, it can be a good time to look at ways to reach people on more devices. Mobile devices may seem like a concern for higher ed institutions who have students who are spread out across a campus, but K12 districts and schools can also benefit from emergency notification systems that utilize a mobile component.

One of the biggest advantages of using a system with a mobile application is that emergency messages can be sent remotely. When a crisis occurs, every second counts, and that time shouldn't be wasted needing to get to a desk phone or desktop computer to log into a web interface.

Look for systems that can connect with other systems you already have so with a simple press of a button in an app you can send messages to all of your devices.

CONFIRMATION RESPONSE

Another advantage of a system that can send to mobile is a confirmation response functionality. When sending your message, you can ask for people to respond saying that they are safe or that they need assistance. This can be particularly helpful when needing to send a message throughout a district.

A robust mobile app will also offer real-time insights, so you can see that people have received and read your message, and see who needs help right on your phone while you continue to manage the situation at hand.



GEO-LOCATION

Some systems will also utilize GPS to establish an area of interest for emergency notifications. Using GPS coordinates, you can define an area that can include an entire district, a school block, or whatever area you think is pertinent. Then, using the GPS in people's mobile phones, you can configure to system to send alerts to everyone inside that area, or be alerted when someone (like school guests) or something (approaching severe weather) enters the area.

Clear Communication During a Crisis

REDUCE NOISE AND MINIMIZE MISINFORMATION

A new year brings new opportunities to improve processes and procedures for emergency communications. During a crisis situation, communications can quickly become muddled. Conflicting reports from social media, news outlets, and district or school officials can lead to unnecessary confusion and fear among students and staff. Having a system in place that notifies an entire campus during an emergency can help keep everyone safe.



HERE ARE SEVEN TIPS FOR PROVIDING CLEAR COMMUNICATIONS DURING A CRISIS

- 1. Utilize a Single System** - When a crisis occurs, time is of the essence. Safety and security personnel don't have time to log in and out of different systems to send multiple messages. A single system that reaches everyone helps share vital information quickly.
- 2. Reach Multiple Devices** – Your system should reach landline phones, mobile devices, desktops and even digital displays. Every available device that can reach your campus population should be utilized to inform them of the situation.
- 3. Provide Regular Updates** – Combat misinformation by sending customized follow-up messages after your initial alert goes out. Include more specific information about the situation and what steps students and staff should be taking to remain safe until it has been resolved.
- 4. Designate Groups** – Use your notification system to determine who receives certain messages. During an emergency, everyone should receive an alert, but to help manage the crisis, instructional follow-up messages might only need to be sent to certain groups. Select these groups ahead of time for more efficient crisis management.
- 5. Build Message Templates** – Prepare for any scenario by pre-building message templates. These messages can be sent immediately at the onset of a crisis to provide basic information that initiates safety procedures.
- 6. Send in Multiple Formats** – Ensure you reach everyone by sending your notification in multiple formats. Phone calls, SMS texts, push notifications and emails make it more likely everyone receives your message during a crisis.
- 7. Gather Your Team** – Certain systems will give you the ability to instantly bring together your crisis management team in a conference call. This is especially helpful when you need to connect school and district officials who are likely in separate locations.

Reach People on Their Desktops

SEND MESSAGES THAT DEMAND ATTENTION

It's important to cover all of your bases when sending an emergency message. One device that is sometimes overlooked is desktop computers. It is easy to think that because people have access to email through their desktop or have their mobile phones with them, they will receive an emergency communication. But many schools don't allow students to have cell phones on them in classrooms and people need to go out of their way to check email. Using an emergency notification system that connects directly to computer desktops to display messages the moment they are sent helps ensure everyone is informed.

Here are four types of messages to consider when utilizing desktop notifications.

POP-UP MESSAGES ON DESKTOP SCREENS

These messages will pop up over whatever other applications someone may be using. This is often the most effective method for getting your message in front of someone on their desktop. The desktop user will not be able to pull up any new applications over the pop up message until they acknowledge the message.

SCROLL TICKER MESSAGES ALONG THE BOTTOM

Having the ability to have messages scroll along the bottom of a computer screen similar to cable news tickers is less obtrusive option than the pop up, and can still include the necessary information to keep people informed.

TOAST NOTIFICATIONS

Toast notifications will linger for a few seconds before disappearing. Users can click on it for a more detailed message.



TRAY NOTIFICATIONS

In certain circumstances, the work being done on computer desktops is critical, and cannot be interrupted. In those situations, a tray notification is most appropriate. On Macs, the system icon will typically jump to indicate a new message is available. On Windows, a number will appear over icon to signal a new message.

CUSTOMIZATION

When looking at a system that offers desktop notification, another important feature is customization. Make sure messages can be fully customized, including font type, size and color, and background color. If a system allows your school or district logo to be included, it helps clarify who the message is coming from.

Social Media Can Help and Harm

INFLUX OF INFORMATION CAN CAUSE ISSUES

According to the Daily Dot, our awareness of violent events has concurred with the rise of social media. As these channels become more ubiquitous, everyone is empowered to become a source for information. While this can help spread the word at the onset of an emergency, it can also hinder the response to an ongoing incident by adding confusing and incorrect information into the conversation.

DON'T CONFUSE FACTS AND RUMORS

Such was the case during an active shooter incident at UCLA in May of 2016. The Washington Post reported about misinformation spread through social media and traditional news outlets. Students were alerted through the school's official notification system, but access to their phones meant they were able to look for additional information on other channels such as Facebook, Twitter and local news websites. This led to rumors about the number of shooters and their locations on campus, increasing the fear and anxiety caused by the situation.

CREATE RELIABLE, CONSISTENT CHANNELS

Establishing reliable channels for communication is a critical component of an emergency response plan. Since many people's first instinct is to check social media, organizations need to create trustworthy channels that are updated regularly. Channels like Facebook and Twitter that have dedicated staff can provide accurate updates to ongoing situations. These are valuable resources and go a long way toward combating misinformation. This can help keep personnel informed and updated regularly, but also serves as a source for parents and the media who can recognize it as an official channel to receive information.



It's also important that the messages stay consistent across channels. The information shared via social media, should be the same information included in email and text messages that update people impacted by the event.

PART OF A LARGER WHOLE

Social media is a key component of any worthwhile emergency communication plan, but it should be one part of a larger whole. The main goal when an emergency occurs is to spread information to as many people as possible to help keep them safe until the situation is resolved.

Prepare for Severe Weather

PLAN TO GET THE WORD OUT

Summer is coming, and with it, an increased possibility of severe weather. To protect students and staff, you need to develop efficient methods for monitoring potential weather events, and getting the word out to protect people when threatening weather approaches.

Here are a few questions for you to consider when creating or updating your severe weather response plan:

- How do staff members currently learn about weather alerts?
- Do people listen to a weather radio or wait to hear outdoor sirens?
- Who is in charge of initiating an alert to your organization?
- What will the alert say?
- Have you identified safe places where people should seek shelter?
- Can staff trigger an emergency notification if they're away from their desk?

STAY INFORMED

A notification system capable of keeping you and your staff informed wherever you are can help provide an answer to many of these questions by:

- Monitoring for alerts from the National Weather Service.
- Pre-building messages and automatically notifying the right people when severe weather is approaching.
- Allowing you to gather your safety team together to discuss response efforts.
- Sending emergency notifications to your entire organization via several different devices, such as overhead paging systems, IP phones, digital signs, iOS/Android devices, and more.

IDENTIFY SAFE PLACES

One of the key components of this safety strategy is providing people with a location they should go to when severe weather approaches. Taking action and getting to a safe location can mean the difference between escaping harm, injury or death. Consider what the hazard is and how that impacts where your people should go. Should they shelter in place (tornado) or evacuate (hurricane)? Go low (tornado) or go high (tsunami or flash flood)? Answering these questions in advance can help save time and get people to safety quickly.

Learn more about weather safety in the infographic on the following page.

IS YOUR ORGANIZATION PREPARED FOR SEVERE WEATHER?

Consider these three questions when reviewing your emergency response plan:

1 DO YOU LISTEN TO A WEATHER RADIO OR WAIT TO HEAR OUTDOOR SIRENS?

InformaCast's ability to **automatically broadcast audio and visuals** gives you a better chance that everyone is reached over the sounds of a manufacturing facility or other loud environments.

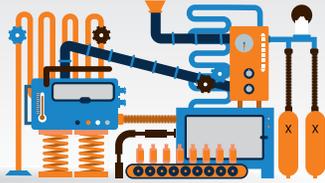
See this in action: <https://www.informacast.com/demo-weather.html>



workers rushing from one place to the next



forklifts beeping



machines churning



A WATCH VS. WARNING

A watch means severe weather is possible during the next few hours. A warning means that severe weather is expected within the hour.

Source: NOAA.gov

THE TORNADO EF SCALE:

- F0 65-85 mph
- F1 86-110 mph
- F2 111-135 mph
- F3 136-165 mph
- F4 166-200 mph



WILDFIRES:

EACH YEAR THERE ARE ABOUT **100,000 WILDFIRES** IN THE U.S.



THE AVERAGE LENGTH OF WILDFIRES **INCREASED** FROM **5 MONTHS** TO **7+ MONTHS** IN THE WESTERN U.S.

Source: Union of Concerned Scientists 2013



A **Fire Weather Watch** and **Red Flag Warning** are the two most common types of fire weather alerts issued by the National Weather Service

2 HOW DO YOU KNOW YOU CAN REACH EVERYONE?

InformaCast radically increases your chances of reaching everyone when it matters, even if some modes of communication are compromised. **Reach your people simultaneously** through:



Cisco IP phones, digital signage, speakers, mobile devices, desktops, email, Twitter, **and more...**



OF BUSINESSES THAT CLOSE BECAUSE OF A NATURAL DISASTER **NEVER REOPEN.**

Source: Insurance Institute for Business & Home Safety

STATES WITH THE MOST WIND/HAIL LOSSES



Damage caused by wind/hail cost State Farm & policyholders **more than \$3.9 billion a year.**

Source: Rocky Mountain Insurance Information Assoc.

3 WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR KEEPING EVERYONE SAFE DURING A WEATHER EMERGENCY?



InformaCast provides the **flexibility** to have **automatic** weather alerts sent to **your team of managers** who trigger or pass an alert based on severity. Other customers prefer to have no human points in the process, and the automatic weather alerts go **directly to everyone.**

Keep Graduation Visitors Informed

PREPARE FOR AN INFLUX OF VISITORS

The school year is winding down, and your school or district is preparing for graduation celebrations. Even if visitors will only be on school grounds for a few hours, it's just as important to keep them safe and informed as it is for students and staff.

SIMPLICITY IS KEY

An easy way to keep people informed by reaching them on their mobile devices. Certain mass notification systems will allow visitors to opt-in to receive emergency notifications. Using mobile phones, they can text a number with a simple message to begin receiving emergency notifications via SMS text messages. Visitors can also register via a web browser.

From active shooters to severe weather, any type of emergency can occur at almost any time. When sending communications to students and families about graduation, include instructions for how they can register to receive emergency notifications. Include information on signs around schools during graduation weekend. It might also be helpful to include links to other safety resources and instructions to safe places on campus in the event of severe weather.

Send a sample message to encourage registration, such as "To receive notifications during Graduation Weekend, text #GradDay to 555-555-5555."



Graduation weekend on campus can be hectic, so having a source that sends out instructions and reminders about events taking place can be helpful for visitors.

BEYOND GRADUATION

Once graduation is over, begin thinking about events taking place next school year that may involve an influx of visitors. Sporting events, guest speakers, concerts and more, may draw people not typically on school grounds. When people purchase tickets, include information about how they can opt-in for emergency notification alerts, and during the event include opt-in instructions on signage around schools.

CONCLUSION

Strong school safety starts with a solid foundation of communication. It is a year-round effort, and while it is no simple task, there are tools that can help overcome the challenges you face.

InformaCast emergency notification software helps bring together disparate systems in one interface. It allows you to pre-build messages for scenarios from active shooters to severe weather, and reach all your devices and people with critical information.

In K-12 schools, it can also be used to automate processes like school bells and daily announcements to keep everything running smoothly.

Visit singlewire.com/informacast-k12-education to learn how using InformaCast can enhance communication and safety in your school or district.

