



## Setting K-12 Students and Parents Up for Success with Mass Notification

For K-12 schools and districts, communicating with parents and families has always been challenging. Since March of 2020 when COVID-19 outbreaks forced schools to shut down and shift to 100-percent online learning, and eventually to hybrid models, the spotlight has intensified on this longstanding problem.

**A**nd now schools across the country are gradually reopening. This has left many districts wondering how to effectively communicate with parents and parents expecting schools to reach them immediately when their children's safety is at risk.

### Bridging the Communication Gap with Parents

Fortunately, K-12 schools and districts have accelerated the use of technology to bridge the communication gap with parents. They are relying on the mass notification system (MNS) to instantly send parents emergency alerts, as well as

engage parents more deeply and keep them up-to-date on their children's learning progress.

**76 percent of K-12 survey takers reported using MNSes at their schools**

Administrators not only can broadcast alerts to every student's parents. They also can precisely target groups of contacts, such as parents of children in a particular grade, class or program who may be at risk of exposure. The modern MNS translates notifications into multiple languages to reach parents who don't speak English.

The MNS has become standard technology for K-12 schools. According to a poll by Campus Safety, of 600 K-12, higher education and healthcare institutions surveyed, 76 percent of K-12 survey takers reported using MNSes at their schools.<sup>1</sup>

### Increasing Parent Engagement with Digital Communications

School principals, teachers and administrators have repeatedly emphasized the importance of parental engagement with their children's schools.

Keeping in touch with parents more frequently is one strategy many schools are pursuing to increase family involvement. Using an MNS, administrators can make school top of mind for parents by sending them reminders about parent-teacher conferences, big games, pep rallies, fundraising drives and parent-student dances.

Additionally, schools can alert parents to deadlines for tryouts for athletic teams, bands and drama productions and registration for after-school programs and standardized test prep classes. Volunteering is another excellent way to boost parent engagement, and schools can alert parents to opportunities to coach teams, drive children to events or lend a hand in the cafeteria at lunchtime.



In the survey Trends in Community Engagement by Blackboard, parents ranked the methods they prefer schools and districts to notify them about general information: their favorite is email (82 percent), followed by automated calls (50 percent) and text messages (45 percent). Parents also prefer push notifications that grab their attention instead of social media channels that require them to proactively search for information.<sup>2</sup>

**Additionally, districts and schools are using MNSes to communicate more effectively with their staff**

### **Sending Important, Everyday Notifications**

Schools also are using MNSes to contact parents with routine information that is nonetheless important. This category includes automated attendance calls, reminders of various deadlines and overdue payment notices for lunch programs and activities fees and appointments with teachers.

Additionally, districts and schools are using MNSes to communicate more

effectively with their staffs. A principal or administrator can target teachers in an emergency, invite them to meetings, conduct surveys and even automate the sequential calling of a list of substitute teachers, a process that ceases when substitutes respond that they are available.

### **What to Look for in an MNS for Your School or District**

If you've been considering an MNS, now is the perfect time. The federal government has allocated billions to K-12 education as part of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act, \$13.2 billion). This act gives schools broad discretion in how to spend funds for reopening schools, including "Developing and implementing procedures and systems to improve the preparedness and response efforts of local educational agencies."<sup>3</sup>

The good news is an MNS is not only powerful and versatile but also affordable for districts and individual schools. Here is a checklist of the capabilities and attributes your MNS must have to ensure you can always reach the right person at the right time, wherever they are located.

## **Mass Notification System Evaluation Checklist**

**A best-in-class MNS will offer capabilities such as:**

- Unlimited messaging
- SMS text, voice, email and mobile app push notifications
- Mobile app to initiate and receive communications
- Contact groups for highly targeted messaging
- Call scheduling
- Caller ID (so recipients will read, listen or answer)
- Real-time polling
- Automated, sequential calling
- Confirmations of message receipt
- Multilingual support
- Real-time reporting
- Audio library of prerecorded messages
- Templates for email and text notifications

**System attributes that are must-haves include:**

- Usability, speed and relevance
- Integration with popular student information systems
- Cloud-based
- Redundant, geographically dispersed servers and backups

**The right MNS technology provider offers:**

- 24/7/365 support
- Decades of successful service delivery
- Stellar reputation

**If you want to learn more about how a modern MNS can improve communications and engagement with your students' parents, visit [OnSolve.com/k-12](https://onsolve.com/k-12).**

<sup>1</sup><https://www.securitysales.com/fire-intrusion/survey-campuses-multiple-emergency-notification-systems/>

<sup>2</sup><http://bbbb.blackboard.com/community-engagement-report>

<sup>3</sup><https://www.future-ed.org/what-congressional-covid-funding-means-for-k-12-schools/#:~:text=The%20stimulus%20bill%20that%20passed,Relief%20Fund%20and%20%2414%20billion>

