

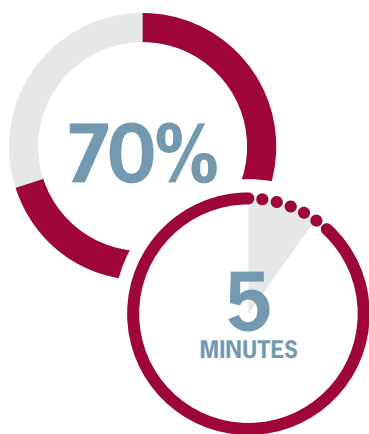


# The Importance of Communications in a School Crisis Plan

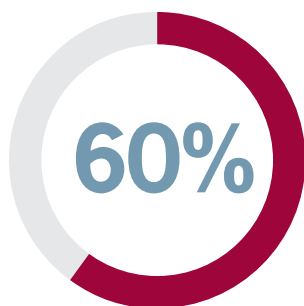
Integrating day-to-day communications with emergency response



# During the first few minutes of an emergency, before first responders have arrived, occupants are at their most vulnerable, often unaware an emergency is even happening.



Most shootings last less than 5 minutes



of shootings end before first responders arrive

According to the FBI, 70 percent of shootings last less than five minutes, and 60 percent end before first responders can arrive.<sup>1</sup> In many scenarios, even when law enforcement was present or able to respond, civilians still had to make life or death decisions in those first few minutes.

To help keep students, faculty and staff safe and informed when seconds count, schools must consider the communication and security systems they currently have and how they are utilized during their response to certain emergencies. Paging and intercom systems form the foundation of most communications efforts in a school building and will naturally play a vital role in an emergency response as well. Schools should invest in an integrated system that not only facilitates day-to-day event management and communications, but also is designed and maintained with emergency response in mind.

## The Role of Communications in a Crisis

A comprehensive crisis plan includes a reliable, ease-of-access solution for emergency communication. A solution designed for immediate and automatic emergency announcements, which can be combined with other technologies, should be at the heart of an emergency crisis plan.

No matter what type of emergency schools can utilize emergency communication solutions to send notifications and instructions as quickly as possible to the entire campus and before first responders arrive. This will allow occupants to activate crisis plan actions as well as communicate to offsite district officials and other parties that need to be informed and could also be at risk.

## Power of Automation

Automated responses and notifications can save valuable time during a

### Crisis communication technology is key for a variety of emergencies, including:

1. Active shooter
2. Severe weather
3. Non-custodial parent
4. Community threat
5. Bomb threat
6. Gas leak/chemical spill
7. School violence
8. Student/staff health emergency

<sup>1</sup> "A Study of Active Shooter Incidents in the United States Between 2000 and 2013." U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation. Washington Navy Yard, Washington, D.C. September 16, 2013.



crisis, sending the right message and information to all appropriate contacts instantly. Most school paging systems can be upgraded to broadcast automated notifications and responses throughout the campus. These systems are proven and reliable, and ideal mediums for crisis communication as they are used on a daily basis by staff, do not require daily maintenance (like re-charging) and are difficult to disable or disconnect.

While many schools have installed emergency panic buttons, it is important to also map out what functions and other systems the panic button triggers. A list of steps and associated responsibilities should be included in a crisis plan, laying out how best to respond to different situations. Panic buttons within a communications system can be preprogrammed to perform all the appropriate steps, launching an emergency response with a single push. A variety of pre-recorded and automated responses can be triggered via computer, phone or mobile app, including:

- Building-wide prerecorded audio messages
- Notification to first responders
- Message to district office
- Trigger visual messaging
- Signal to lock all doors
- Interface to other security systems

## Key Capabilities

Communication systems can vary in their capabilities, so it is important to select one that best suits the school district's needs. Consider an integrated solution that guarantees that staff, students, visitors, parents and administration all have consistent experiences throughout the district, leaving no room for error or miscommunication.

### District

Consider a solution that enables a single person to start an automated response that reaches the entire district. In addition, all sites throughout a district should be kept up-to-date on the status of a crisis situation. In a district-wide emergency, including severe weather, the ability to initiate a widespread warning or alert without calling each school individually saves time. From a single platform, district-wide systems can also update administrators and first responders on which schools are in duress and which are safe.

### Front Office

For those working in the front office, the communication system should include a phone, telephone style console or microphone that provides simple access to campus wide live paging as well as hands-free two-way communications in each classroom. A permanent panic button should be installed in the front office as well as any other centralized location to instantly trigger a lockdown. It is

important to consider each school's physical layout, including the location of the front office, as additional panic buttons and access to live paging may be needed elsewhere in the building.

### Classrooms

Each classroom should house a permanently installed speaker that is loud enough for everyone in the room to hear when emergency messages are broadcasted. Classrooms should also have buttons or call switches installed enabling occupants to send an alert if there is an emergency, or notify the front office or other staff if they need assistance. The two-way communications with the front office is hands-free allowing anyone in the classroom to communicate with the front office from any location in the room. Both the speaker and buttons should be installed in a way that cannot be easily disabled by anyone. Classrooms can also be outfitted with visual notification lights and message boards for additional emergency instruction.



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## Collaborate with manufacturers and installers that specialize in critical communications in schools.

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### Other Considerations

Newer, IP-based solutions are designed with emergency notification capabilities while offering day-to-day scheduling and event management. Some new systems allow you to augment your existing system to add newer emergency features without immediately replacing working systems.

Look for flexible solutions that are in line with the district's current technology plan. Systems that are network and software-based, upgradable and standards-based are easily combined with existing infrastructure, allowing for a more seamless adoption.

Likewise, consider how easily the system will be used by staff and

faculty, or the level of training required. Leveraging familiar technology that is used daily throughout the school will make it easier to use in the event of an emergency.

Collaborate with manufacturers and installers that specialize in critical communications in schools. Their knowledge of school buildings and district requirements and how they need to communicate both every day and during emergencies will help to ensure the solution works for the district so they get the right system programmed and installed to meet their unique needs.

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This white paper was prepared for Rauland AMETEK.



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