



SCHOOL CRISIS RESPONSE

**IN A CRISIS, YOUR PLAN
IS IN THEIR HANDS**

SCHOOLDUDE

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Introduction

In general, we like to think of our schools as safe places – after all, we send our children there on a daily basis. But that doesn't mean that administrators should be lack when it comes to comprehensive crisis and emergency response planning. Developing and maintaining a crisis management plan should never fall by the wayside. Not only can it keep students and faculty safe in the event of an emergency, but it can also provide peace of mind to families and can be positioned as a strength for the educational institution as a whole.

School emergencies: An overview

Recent years have gradually begun to see a dedicated school crisis response plan become more of a necessary, practical concern. While newsworthy disasters remain thankfully rare, the fact remains that emergency preparedness is still a vital part of every school's planning. In fact, a 2014 survey reported on by SchoolDude indicated that last year, 88 percent of schools were required to communicate to parents about an emergency safety situation. More alarming is that 31 percent of schools in 2013 communicated with parents about a lockdown incident.

Emergencies at a school can take many forms, including:

- Fire or other natural disaster
- Disease or health outbreak
- Accident or safety concern
- Terrorism threat or violent aggressive action

The variety of situations that could potentially arise means that school districts need crisis plans that are proactive, immediate, actionable and, most importantly, easily communicated. The good news is that many schools have been addressing this need on an ongoing basis – SchoolDude pointed out that 59 percent of schools reported their ability to respond to safety threats as either “somewhat strong” or “strong.”

However, changes in both the nature of threats schools can potentially face and the existing channels of communication and information sharing mean that administrators must reassess the efficiency of their current crisis response plans to make sure that safety needs are met.

The state of crisis plans

Despite the fact that the majority of schools feel adequately prepared to handle emergency situations, it's clear that there is room for improvement as well. In fact, 52 percent of schools noted an expectation to spend more on improved crisis management solutions in the coming year.

While technology has surged in other aspects of school management, crisis and emergency response practices are still uncharacteristically antiquated. The SchoolDude data reported that the vast majority of schools, 79 percent, use paper and binders as their primary method of communicating essential crisis response information, and 74 percent indicated a reliance on maps, diagrams and other paper-based visual aids.

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Interestingly, these paper processes are dominating crisis response, but paper can't respond in real-time and is very hard to access in the event of an emergency. Further, binder methods are inherently dated. The information is out of date the moment you print it, and is both difficult to update and expensive to reprint.

Approximately 58 percent of schools spoke of an email notification system to communicate with staff and faculty in an emergency situation, and 33 percent used email to communicate with parents and other external stakeholders. The challenge to consider with an email, or alert-only response process, is that alerts by definition can only make people aware of an emergency. They don't offer proactive information and instructions to help manage situations. In addition, alert-only processes are not tailored for specific audiences, locations or events.

The question is, what is driving this lack of proactive crisis response planning? After all, increased media coverage of recent events is actually making districts, and the public alike, more aware of the potential for emergency situations in schools.

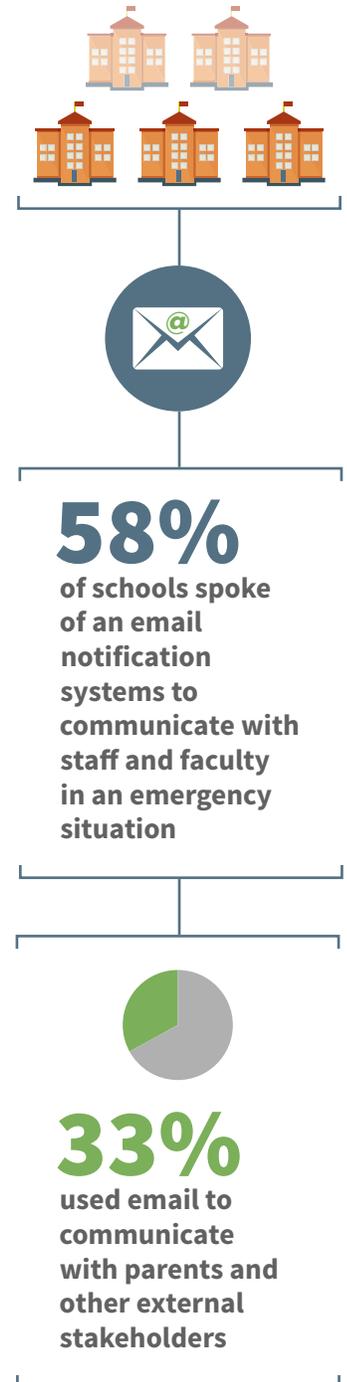
Conventional challenges

Administrators may feel that their current crisis plans are adequate, but it's important to be aware of the restrictions and problems that may arise from purely analog communication systems. Binder-based plan documents can be useful for training purposes, but in the event of an actual emergency, when time is the most precious resource you have, do all staff and faculty have access to the binder, poster or emergency flipchart? Restricting these response tools to the handful of individuals who have access to the necessary information can create bottlenecks and severe safety concerns. Even with evacuation maps posted in several locations around the school, the odds that essential personnel will have access to plan information at the exact moment an emergency hits are almost zero.

Again, this is an issue that is gaining more attention among administrators. In fact, 48 percent listed access to mobile apps for communication purposes within their top three priorities for updating emergency response plans.

Put your plan in their hands

The idea of using mobile technology in crisis management situations isn't new. In fact, schools have been using text messaging and mass notification systems to alert staff and even parents of emergencies, largely in accordance with the 2008 addition to the Clery Act requiring timely notification in crisis situations. However, while a good step, mobile notifications are only part of the solution. Alerts aren't action plans, and provide nothing in the way of communication or guidance to staff and stakeholders.



Fortunately, the explosion of smartphone usage is its own solution. Consider some of these facts:

- 300 Million smartphones were sold in 2014 between April 1 and June 30
- 67% of all Americans own at least 1 smartphone device
- Americans spend 34 hours per month using mobile apps and browsers

There are a number of benefits pointed out by the International Data Corporation inherent to the smartphone that make it ideal for emergency situations:

- 84 percent of smartphone users communicate almost exclusively through social media channels and apps
- 79 percent of smartphone users have their phones with them for 22 hours a day

The key point is that this doesn't indicate an additional requirement for schools – the vast majority of them already have crisis plans in place, and many of them are already equipped with the necessary mobile tools to share critical information with staff and faculty. Marrying these two factors can dramatically improve emergency response in ways paper-based or even MNS systems can't compete with.

You've planned, they're prepared

A lot of smart thinking has gone into your safety plans. You've invested countless hours and energy, thought through all possible events and scenarios, and documented the best response for each. You know exactly what to do.

Using a comprehensive mobile safety platform such as CrisisManager, you can now put your safety plan in their hands, on the one device they are never without. The ability to not only publish custom plans, but also to update them as often as you need, is literally at your fingertips, ready to empower everyone in your school with the information to act. Keeping everyone safe, informed and prepared – now that's smart.