



Bloomington Public School District Makes Schools Safer with Emergency Mass Notification Solution from ePlus

Bloomington Public School District, located in Passaic County, New Jersey, serves a diverse school population. With three schools—an early childhood school, an upper grade elementary, and a middle school—and 120 teachers and staff, the district supports 615 students from pre-kindergarten through eighth grade. The district's mission is to deliver a comprehensive education for its students while prioritizing their safety and well-being.



The Challenge

"Security is always at the forefront of my mind," said Dr. Michael Nicosia, superintendent of schools at Bloomington Public School District. "Before we can even teach students academic basics, they need to feel safe in their school setting."

With that objective in mind, the district continuously seeks innovative solutions to make its schools more secure and to enhance its ability to respond quickly in the case of an emergency. But aging building facilities, legacy technology infrastructure, and a lack of a common language often inhibited the district's efforts.

"To address the lack of a common language, we adopted the Standard Response Protocol (SRP), the nationally-recognized process for incident response in schools," Nicosia said. "That gave us common terms and definitions and a clear set of actions to follow. But we needed to do more to improve our response capability."

The district's three buildings are 50, 60, and 100 years old, and the legacy infrastructure often limited the ability of teachers and administrators to communicate. "Our infrastructure was archaic, meaning that teachers weren't able to communicate with each other or communicate quickly with the main office," Nicosia said. "A perfect example of this was when we had a gas leak in one of the school kitchens. The staff smelled gas. They followed our protocol, evacuated the building, and notified the fire department. I was sitting in my office, typing away on my computer. Fire trucks and police cars were on the way, and I didn't know what was happening. Finally, I got a call. But by then, we had 300 kids outside a building, and no way of getting communication out to the district or the broader community."

Nicosia added, "We had the Standard Response Protocol, but to initiate a security procedure, a person had to announce it over the PA system.

Teachers had to hear it. And if they missed it, they missed it. There was no repeat announcement. Our system didn't take into account how people today actually process information—it was only verbal. What we were doing was working, but we realized we could be doing it a hundred times better for the sake of our students and our community."



Bloomington Public School District

Website: www.bpsnj.org

Location: Bloomington, NJ

Superintendent:
Dr. Michael Nicosia

Students: 615

Faculty and staff: 120

Industry: Education

Solution:

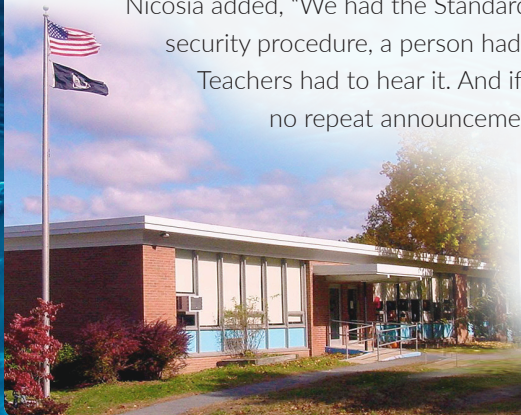
+ Emergency Safety Automation
Solution from ePlus

Features:

- + Multi-Channel
Communication
- + Geographic Targeting
- + Integration with Existing
Systems
- + Customizable Message
Templates
- + Mobile App Access

Key Outcomes:

- + Improved Emergency
Response
- + Increased Stakeholder
Engagement
- + Streamlined Communication
Processes
- + Enhanced Preparedness
and Resilience





The Solution

Nicosia knew the district needed to improve its infrastructure in order to overcome these challenges. His goal was to implement a modern mass notification solution that would enable communication with the main office, deliver messages to staff in a variety of formats, and allow them to keep the Standard Response Protocol—all at the same time.

“A lot of vendors out there offer to solve communication issues, but you have to fix them their way,” Nicosia said.

“And we had just spent a lot of time training our staff on a nationally-recognized protocol working with our police department.”

As Nicosia and his technology manager researched possible solutions, they attended a technical conference in New Jersey. And that’s where they first came across the Emergency Mass Safety Automation Solution from ePlus.

“We saw ePlus presenting alongside another school district,” Nicosia said. “The district explained how ePlus helped them implement a mass notification system using the Standard Response Protocol. As I sat there watching, I said to myself, ‘We need that.’ “What I was hearing about would help fix our district emergency response communication challenges with one platform.”

After thorough research and evaluation, Bloomingdale Public School District selected ePlus Technology to implement an automated and comprehensive Emergency Mass Notification Solution. Working with the ePlus team, the district upgraded its servers and network wiring in each building, replaced its analog paging system with an IP-based digital one, and integrated the new solution with its existing IP phone system. In addition, the team installed external horns and strobes to alert anyone outside the buildings of an emergency.



Key features of the ePlus Emergency Mass Notification Solution include:

- + **Multi-Channel Communication:** The Emergency Mass Notification Solution enables the district to send alerts and messages via multiple communication channels, including SMS text messages, voice calls, email, mobile apps, and social media platforms. This ensures that messages reach recipients through their preferred channels, maximizing reach, coverage, and effectiveness.
- + **Geographic Targeting:** The solution allows for targeted messaging based on geographic location, enabling the district to send alerts to specific schools, classrooms, or administrative offices as needed. This feature facilitates more precise communication during localized emergencies or school-specific events.
- + **Integration with Existing Systems:** The Emergency Mass Notification Solution seamlessly integrates with the district’s existing communication infrastructure, including student information systems, staff directories, and emergency contact databases. This streamlines data management and ensures accurate and up-to-date recipient information for emergency notifications.
- + **Customizable Message Templates:** The solution provides customizable message templates for various types of emergencies, such as weather-related closures, lockdowns, medical incidents, or evacuation procedures. This standardized messaging ensures consistency and clarity in communication during crisis situations.
- + **Mobile App Access:** The solution includes a mobile application that allows recipients to receive alerts, view emergency procedures, and access relevant resources directly from their smartphones. The app enhances accessibility and enables stakeholders to stay informed and prepared, even when away from their computers or classrooms.





The Results

The implementation of the ePlus solution yielded several positive outcomes for Bloomington Public School District:

Improved Emergency Response

One of the most significant results of the new solution has been the dramatic change in emergency response. According to Nicosia, the district saw significant improvements in its ability to communicate critical information during emergencies, leading to quicker response times and enhanced safety for students, faculty, and staff.

"We had a child in one of our elementary schools go missing," he said. "He left Point A, but never made it to Point B. Using the new solution, the teacher was able to press a button in the app, put the building on lockdown, type in 'student missing', and notify police officers. They were on their way to the school, without a call ever being made. And within 45 seconds of the button being pushed, they had established a perimeter around the school, and the student was located in under five minutes."

Nicosia explained that without the ePlus solution, the process would have been much slower. "In the past, the teacher would've had to call the main office. The main office receptionist would've had to ask questions to understand the problem. Someone at the main office would've had to dial 911, and the 911 operator would've had to dispatch the police department. That would have taken at least five minutes, maybe longer. And five minutes is a long time when a child is missing."

Increased Stakeholder Engagement

The multi-channel communication capabilities of the solution foster greater engagement and participation among stakeholders, ensuring that important messages reach recipients promptly and effectively.

"Notification goes out to everyone immediately through multiple channels," Nicosia said. "This keeps everyone informed and updated. And we're able to get information about emergencies to the police before 911 is ever touched. That means we have emergency personnel on the way much faster, and all our key people are engaged."

Streamlined Communication Processes

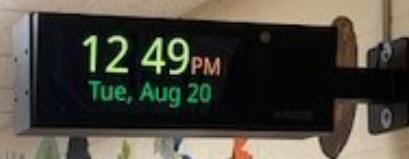
According to Nicosia, the integration of the Emergency Mass Notification Solution with existing systems streamlined communication processes and reduced administrative burden, allowing district personnel to focus on emergency response and student safety.

"Faster communication is the really big benefit," he said. "We are able to reduce manual steps, cut out the number of calls, and speed up the entire process dramatically."

Enhanced Preparedness and Resilience

The implementation of the Emergency Mass Notification Solution enhanced the district's overall emergency preparedness and resilience, empowering stakeholders to proactively address potential risks and mitigate the impact of emergencies.

"The state says schools should have at least two points at which a lockdown can be initiated," Nicosia said. "We blow that metric out of the water. We have 200 employees. This means we have over 200 points, because every employee can call a lockdown or initiate an emergency protocol from their mobile device as well as call from any of the phones in the district. So, we went from having three points—one phone in each building—to over 200 points, which really improves our preparedness and our ability to respond."





Final Comments and Advice

Bloomington Public School District successfully addressed its communication challenges and improved its ability to respond to emergencies. The implementation of a comprehensive Emergency Mass Notification Solution enables the district to enhance and automate safety procedures, streamline communication processes, and foster greater resilience within the school community.

"In my opinion, this is the cutting-edge system for schools," Nicosia said. "I've worked in a lot of districts, and many of them are just like Bloomington: buildings are old, and administrators don't know where to start. They know where they are and where they want to be, but they don't know how to bridge the gap. And I was there, too, until I met the team at ePlus. They showed me a demo of what was being done in another district, and that helped me see how to get from where I was to where I wanted to be. Today, we have a solution that gets rave reviews from staff and families, and I think it's the model for where all districts need to be."

Nicosia added that working with ePlus really helped the project succeed. "They send their staff onsite," he said. "I think that is undervalued today. But there are so many things they were able to point out because they were onsite, things you just can't see on a video call. Also, their people were efficient and knowledgeable—we got designs and quotes back really quickly. And I was very impressed with their install team. They didn't just send a couple of people—there were teams of people, running wires and installing hardware. The process was very organized and systematic. Everything was tested. They conducted onsite training for the district. And they've been with us every step of the way. Anytime I need something or have a question, I have a dedicated point of contact to call."



**Where Technology
Means More®**

**For more information on the Emergency Safety Automation
Solution from ePlus:**

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