

When E-Mail is Not Enough

New Advances in Communications Technology
Help Schools Improve Staff Communications
and Community Engagement

An eScreenz White Paper

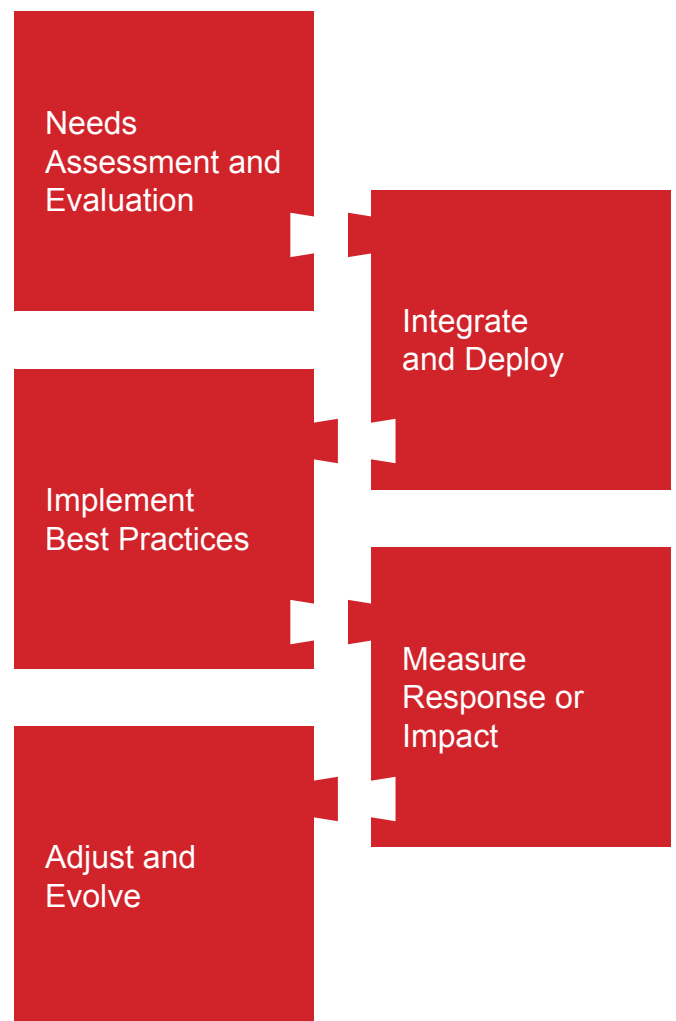
Digital communication systems have the potential to create better-informed school communities. However, with budget constraints and slow technical adoption, it is not surprising that older technologies such as landline phones, e-mail and websites remain common solutions. Phone calls go to voice mail, e-mail inboxes fill and Website updates can be overlooked. Newer communication technologies solve these issues and provide better ways to reach everyone. This white paper is intended to help you plan for new communication adoption and to introduce you to one of the newer and more interesting communication tools being implemented by schools.

Today's students are born and raised on digital and mobile technologies. They text each other about school events, activities and their personal lives quicker than staff can communicate to classrooms down the hall. And it's not just the students. Parents want to know about the school lives of their children and especially any potential situation that might impact the safety of the school and their child.

...the world has become faster than email and far more ubiquitous than the tethered phone.

Caught in the middle are the schools who are tasked with not only educating their students, but also with finding the right mix of communication technologies that will enable them to meet these ongoing demands to supplement the educational requirements and communications to multiple audiences. The immediacy of news delivery, impact of social media, and mobile Web accessibility generates heightened awareness and urgency to anyone with a smartphone. At any given moment a ring or vibration is sent to mobile devices, and instantly we know about news from a faraway continent or an incident occurring down the street. This dynamic shift in digital information not only changes the traditional flow of communications from newspapers to TVs to tablets; it also changes how school districts will plan to communicate to staff, students, and their communities.

Many organizations - from large public corporations to small non-profits - routinely examine their communication practices and systems to keep current on new technologies that will enable them to more effectively communicate with their internal and external audiences. The tools of the trade evolve and change, but the basic fundamentals for designing a Communication Strategy remain the same:



Needs Assessment and Evaluation

Creating a communications plan need not be a complicated task – a simple Excel spreadsheet can be set up to list technologies that are available. List which ones are in use, how they are used, how you can measure impact, and the limits and applications of each technology. Add other technologies that could be used. This is helpful for future planning. For instance you may learn about a new technology, but because of your current budget cycle, you will not be able to purchase it for the current year. By evaluating your current systems you can use your new communications assessment to plan for integration of new technology for the future. (See Figure 1 – Sample School Communications Technology Assessment.)

What becomes apparent for the education market is that the traditional internal communications model used in corporate environments isn't the best solution. A school needs not only to include internal staff but also parents and the community at large.

While a number of communication technologies are in use at many schools including automated emergency notification systems, one area that is emerging as an attractive solution to more effectively reach both internal and external audiences is desktop messaging. This hybrid digital/desktop display solution has the unique ability to reach all PCs on a district's network, communicate information on digital signage systems, and reach staff and community mobile device users from a single source.

One such solution is an enterprise technology called eScreenz. Developed by Entre Computer Services, a 25-year old IT services firm, eScreenz combines the speed of message delivery via a network connection, the high-impact visual format of digital signage but on PCs, and clickable messages with hyperlinks for additional information. (See Figure 2 and Appendix for more information.)

Figure 1: Sample School Communications Technology Assessment

Technology	Type	Internal/Ext	Objectives	In Use?	Success Measures	Notes
E-mail	Push	Both	Broadcast messaging; sharing; task tracking/management	Yes	Yes, but overused	Primary tool to reach teachers, staff, and parents
Intranet	Static	Internal	File sharing; information archive	Yes	Analytics: number of visitors, time spent on site, new sections added	Exponential growth yet old info not removed, platform outdated
eScreenz - Desktop Messaging	Push / Pull	Both	Centralized desktop broadcast messaging; engagement, immediacy	Yes	Installed at all locations, ranks high on surveys	Mobile option expanding to staff and community
Digital signage	Push	Both	Reach students and staff through large monitor displays	No		Expanding eScreenz Digital Signage to all schools in district in 2014
Cable Access Channel	Push	External	Reach parents and district community	No		Not available in our region
Web meetings – large scale	Collaborative	Internal	Sharing; meeting facilitation, team	Yes	Engages all teachers and staff at all locations at one time	Used to broadcast quarterly school district staff town hall meetings
School Website	Push	Both	School contact info, events, staff info	Yes	Easy place to find up-to-date school contact info and event listings	
School Internet Portal	Collaborative	Both	Provide web access to parents on school events and student assignments	Yes	Update info on student progress	
Instant Messaging	Collaborative	Internal	Real-time status info; networking, one-to-one conversations	No		
Internal Social Media (such as Yammer, Jive)	Collaborative	Internal	Real-time status info; networking, one-to-one and small group conversations	No		
Web Meetings – small group /one-on-one, i.e.: Skype, MS Lync	Collaborative	Internal	Video calls and conferencing; screen sharing; status info	No		
Videos	Pull	Both	Training, sharing of content and expertise	Yes	Available on our intranet	Training programs, town hall meetings, etc.
Mobile devices (phones and tablets)	Collaborative	Both	Engagement; information sharing	Yes		Limited use to staff, teachers, and management teams
Pagers	Push	Internal	Reach key staff members	No		
Common PCs or Internal kiosks	Static	Internal	Network access for staff who don't have PCs	No		
Voice Mail Emergency Notification Systems	Push	Both	District-wide Voicemail messaging	Yes		
PA Systems	Push	Internal	Daily audio announcements at beginning of each school day	Yes	Instant ability to reach entire school population as needed	In place at each school facility in district
Standard Phones	Collaborative	Both	Quick access to staff, management, and parents	Yes		Not available to all staff

Figure 2: New hybrid enterprise-communication technologies display a traditional digital slide show across multiple platforms.



Desktops



Laptops



Big Screen Displays



Tablets



Smart Phones

For school administrators seeking to improve not only staff communications but also community engagement on a daily basis, this type of technology provides additional features besides desktop and mobile deployment. (See Appendix for more information.)

A few of the supported features include:

- Network deployment to PCs
- Urgent notifications
- Clickable messages
- On-demand access
- Compliance enforcement
- Targeted messaging
- Digital signage
- Screen saver option

When evaluating new communication technologies, there are a number of factors to be taken into consideration.

Why should companies evaluate new technologies and their overall communications?

All organizations are typically equipped with a number of technologies for communications. What helps organizations move from average to a more engaged, progressive organization is how they evaluate, measure and plan their communications in order to improve business efficiencies as well as employee engagement. Successful organizations keep current on trends and best practices in order to maximize their technology purchases that will yield the best results.

Define the types of communication tools – are they push or pull?

Knowing what types of communication technology exist and defining their applications and usage will help determine the right mix of technologies for your organization. Today's technology provides a wealth of options for users to select and implement to meet their requirements.

For example, e-mail is a push communication tool. Messages are created and pushed out to individuals or groups. A pull communications tool drives the user to a particular message, such as going to a specific location on a network or external Website to view or attend a presentation, or requiring users to activate a device, such as a video on a DVD.

Just like a carpentry project requires a variety of tools (each with its own unique applications), a successful school communications program employs a variety of tools to meet various communication applications; they all work together to arrive at a common, unified goal.

Is it a collaborative tool, such as one-to-one or one-to-many?

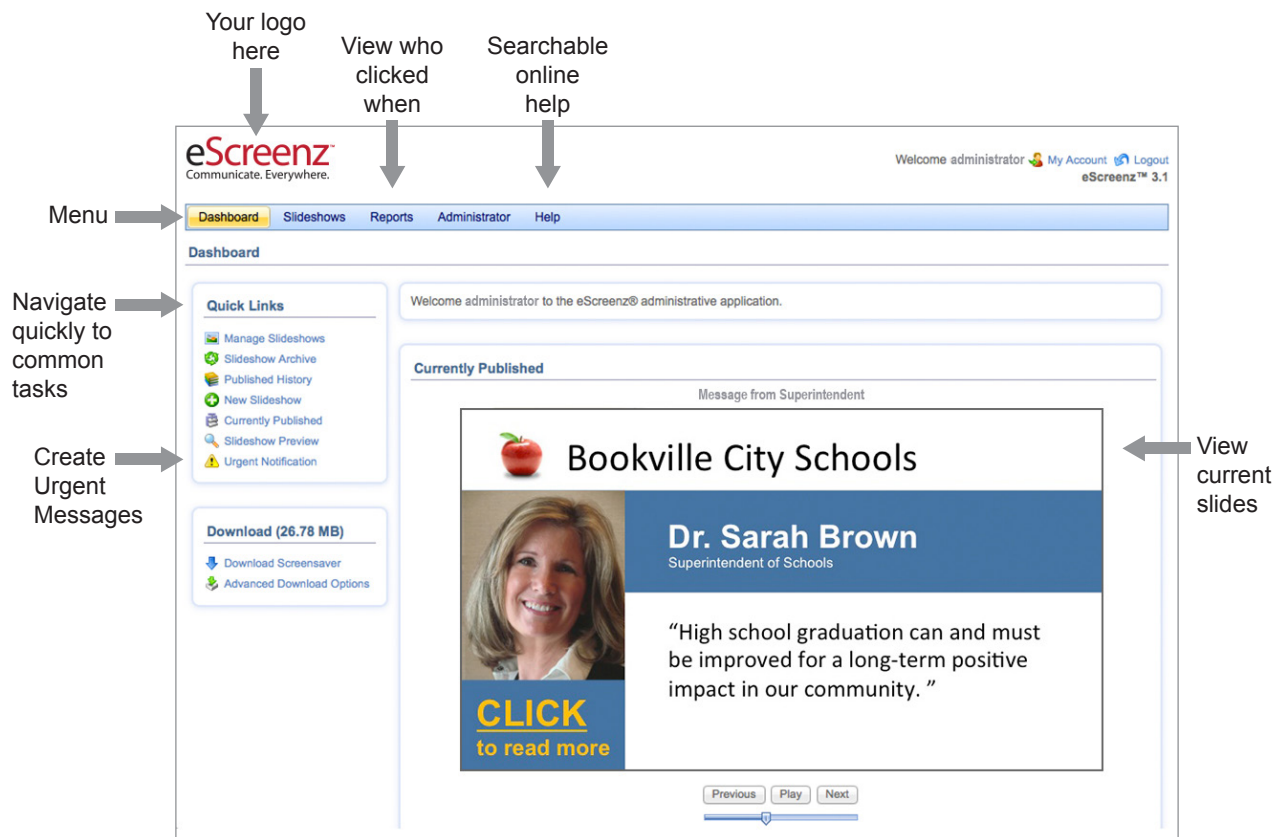
Each type of communication technology has its strengths and weaknesses. Knowing how you want to reach your employees and how you can engage them will define and shape the direction you go in your technology selection process. Successful organizations employ a mix of technologies that provide both one-to-one as well as one-to-many communications.

For example, e-mail can be both one-to-one and one-to-many. Internal social media tools provide a way for individuals and small groups to instantly and electronically communicate on a particular topic. And digital signage systems provide a one-to-many form of communication. Hybrid communication systems, such as eScreenz, provide compelling advantage as the technology provides a more effective one-to-many reach throughout an organization. The system communicates executive level and departmental messages across multiple platforms of networked PCs, digital signage, and mobile devices from a single source.

What is the impact of the technology on staff time - both for message creation and message display?

Learning to use a new technology and the ability to successfully manage an ongoing communications program tool takes time. The more complex a system is, the longer the learning curve, and the greater the risk of creating user reluctance to use the new technology. Conversely, selecting a more intuitive and easier-to-use system not only assures success of the technology platform but also generates more interest and enthusiasm to use a new platform. Today's modern communication systems typically offer a Web-based messaging creation platform that is visually intuitive and easy to manage on a daily basis. (See Figure 3.)

Figure 3: Newer communication technologies provide Web-based access for ease of use and instant access to program management. (Image courtesy of eScreenz)



On the aspect of the daily electronic communications that goes on in every company and school, information overload is a real issue and the risk of adding any new technology to your mix of communication tools needs to be examined. Two of the more popular forms of internal communication today are e-mail and intranets. Yet, for many companies, email is overused and overwhelms many people with the volume of daily messages. Intranets by necessity typically contain so much information that it's easy to spend volumes of time trying to search for a particular document.

If a technology can be used to reduce the amount of e-mails sent out by an organization as well as help staff find information faster on an intranet, that technology will improve the business efficiency of an organization. So if a district of 120 teachers can reduce their time reading emails and searching for information on their intranet by one minute per day per employee, they will gain an estimated* 50 instructional days per year. Feature-rich desktop messaging systems have that capacity to help advance a school's communication's capabilities while improving business/organizational efficiencies.

Who will own/drive the content?

Progressive companies and organizations know that employee and staff buy-in and participation will enable a new communications program succeed. In the case of the desktop messaging technology, by having multiple departments participate in the content creation, your school messaging systems are more well-rounded, improving audience participation and staff engagement.

How does the new technology support the business / district goals?

Both schools and businesses alike have common goals – they seek to provide the best level of service possible to their customers. As such, communications becomes a strategic tool that helps superintendents and CEOs to communicate direction, progress, and daily updates to staff, students, and communities. Combining the use of new technologies will provide that advanced level of communications needed to ensure a more informed and engaged staff.

What other communication features would be beneficial for my district?

Schools have a wide range of communication needs and defining these requirements enables districts to better evaluate new solutions. Technologies that offer a wider range of features that better leverage and extend the value of school investments are valued more highly than single use systems. For example, higher-performing desktop messaging systems not only provide multi-platform message distribution capabilities, but also provide additional features such as urgent notifications and compliance messaging. This provides additional value to district technology investments.

How can other departments utilize the new technology?

Every department needs to communicate. Getting various departments involved in the selection process assures a more successful purchase and program. It also opens up the door to potential cost-sharing by department.

It is not uncommon in the business world for one department in a corporation to be evaluating new communication technologies without knowing that other departments are doing the same. This creates duplication of effort, research, and ultimately wastes valuable time for the organization.

More progressive organizations seek to foster cross-departmental engagement so that time-efficiencies are gained, additional requirements and uses can be determined, and ultimately, better investments occur.

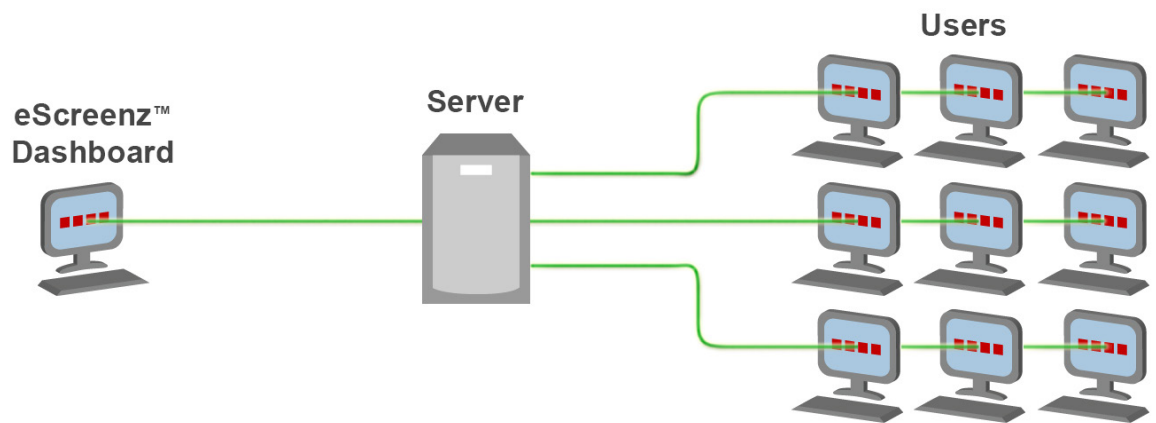
Who will be viewing the messages?

Knowing your audience is key. Part of your strategic communications plan needs to include defining your audience and knowing how you are going to reach them. For schools, there are typically four audiences within a district:

1. Management team
2. Teachers and staff
3. Students
4. External (parents and community)

Messaging systems used by schools can be tailored to meet each of these audiences. For example, a hybrid desktop messaging system can create student body messages for display on large screen monitors throughout district campuses, while separate messages can be sent out to staff and teachers on networked PCs. At the same time similar messages can be shared with the external communities on mobile devices.

Figure 4: Understanding and pre-planning network configuration of new technology ensures successful integration into existing infrastructure. (Image courtesy of eScreenz.)



What departments and executives need to be involved in the decision-making process?

It is highly recommended to get your IT management involved early on in the selection process. They can help your school make a more knowledgeable selection of technology, as well as understand the technical requirements needed to deploy and support a new system.

Superintendents and principals should be included, even on a limited basis, so that they are aware of new program plans and updated on new technologies under evaluation.

Integrate and Deploy

Before a new technology can be deployed, other criteria in the selection process include understanding how a new system needs to be configured, installed, integrated to your existing infrastructure, and then deployed to your internal and external communities. Mapping out the network configuration with the supplier of your technology with the active involvement of your IT department will ensure a smooth technical deployment to your school and community. (See Figure 4)

Defining how you use the new technology will also impact next steps and assignments. For instance an urgent notification when a school needs to go into lockdown procedure is used only by a few designated staff.

If your new communications technology is one that is going to be used on a daily basis, assigning roles and responsibilities to departmental content managers will provide fresh and relevant content for your audiences.

Figure 5: Representative sample questions that can be created to measure program success.

Question	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Our staff is routinely informed of new policies as they occur	0	0	0	0	0
Current school communication systems adequately meet our needs	0	0	0	0	0
Overall, there is good communications between staff and management	0	0	0	0	0

Launching your new system is important as well. Just having a new technology show up on staff PCs or not informing your audience that you are rolling out a new technology can actually impede the success of your program. People need to know what is happening and why. For example, in the case of launching a new desktop messaging system, one approach that schools use is to have a “Name the Network Contest” to encourage staff and students to name and brand the new system. This creates school involvement, buy-in of the new technology, and helps with faster adoption and acceptance of the technology. It also builds excitement for the new platform.

Implement Best Practices

Once a particular technology has been implemented, use of best practices of that solution will yield maximum results, greater impact and success. Beyond the foundational training provided by most vendors, asking your vendor to supply an overview of best practices along with case studies will optimize your system’s usage. Online communities, other districts and peers can be additional resources for new ideas and communica-

tions concepts and messaging. See Appendix for best practices for desktop messaging samples and uses.

In any typical school day there are numerous types of messages that can now be communicated electronically. Incorporating a desktop and mobile communications technology will provide a more visual, more current, and easier way to communicate many of these topics relevant to your school. This will keep your staff, students, and communities more engaged and informed.

Measure Response or Impact

To ensure any program’s success, it is vital to periodically review communication programs and establish ways to measure or gauge the impact of a particular platform. One way to measure your communication program’s success and/or areas to improve is to conduct an audience survey. For school administrators, creating a several surveys tailored to your audiences can provide the feedback you need to measure the impact and messaging content of your systems. (See Figure 5.)

Alternatively, newer desktop communication technologies enable schools to measure clicks and/or viewers to hyper-linked messages that can inform management of quantity of clicks and viewers who wanted to learn more about the information in a particular message.

Word-of-mouth feedback can also provide an informative channel to gauge a program’s success. This could be done in one-on-meetings, departmental meetings, e-mail, or town hall/conference discussions.

Adjust and Evolve

As with any initiative, continuous improvement, evaluation, and adjusting will ensure your communication program’s success. As new communication concepts are acquired, incorporating them into your communications program will help your program remain vibrant, relevant, and effective.

Appendix

Section 1: eScreenz Technology Overview

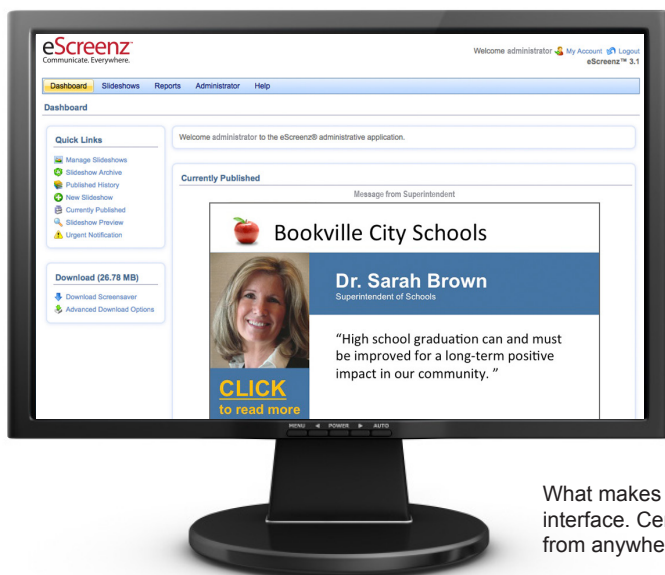
Executive Summary

eScreenz is a communications tool that provides compelling business value to schools and businesses seeking to strengthen internal and HR communications, employee engagement, safety messaging, compliance reporting, and emergency notification procedures.

This Web-based solution addresses many of the problems caused by the sheer volume of daily e-mail communications, difficulty in navigating and finding information buried deep within a school's intranet, as well as the lack of a centralized messaging platform that effectively engages employees.

For schools districts, eScreenz provides superintendents and principals with a powerful alternative to today's traditional school communications with a high-impact affordable solution to reach and engage their staff, student body, and communities.

eScreenz uses existing desktops, laptops and large format displays to distribute high-impact visual messages. In addition, the patent-pending clickable message allows users one-click access to documents or more information on intranets or Websites. eScreenz enables schools to keep pace with today's need for faster communications.



What makes eScreenz so easy to use is its Web-based interface. Centrally manage all messages by logging in from anywhere with an Internet connection.

If a district of 120 teachers can reduce their time reading emails and searching on the intranet by one minute per day per employee, they will gain an estimated* 50 instructional days per year.

Business Value and ROI

- Reduction of e-mail
- Improved messaging efficiencies – reach employees on existing infrastructure of PCs, laptops, tablets and mobile devices
- Maximize and leverage usage of school intranet
- Cross-departmental applications engage all employees
- Expanded emergency notification with mobile capability
- Ease-of-use ensures limited impact on staff for content creation and distribution

Primary Features and Benefits

- Screen saver option for ubiquitous display of company news on desktops and laptops
- Patent-pending clickable messages that take users directly to specific information they need
- Urgent Notifications display critical information almost immediately - even while computers are in use
- Verification reporting for compliance with corporate policies
- Central management that quickly reaches entire employee base, even if e-mail goes down
- On-demand Quick View allows users to access messages anytime
- Digital signage expands messages to large screen monitors in high-visibility areas
- Mobile capabilities reach employees, parents, and communities

Section 2: Best Practices – How Districts Can Utilize eScreenz to Improve Communications

Many types of messages can be communicated using an integrated desktop and mobile communications system.

Administrator/Principal Communications:

- State of the business/progress
- New staff, teachers and students
- New policies
- Special recognition
- District-wide teacher meetings
- Changes in schedules

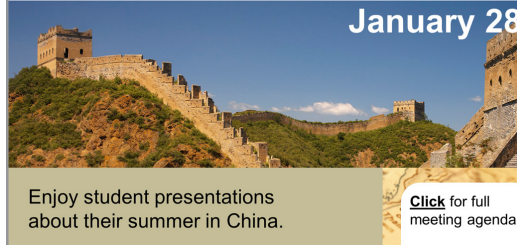
Human Resources information:

- Benefits communications
- Upcoming meetings, picnics, holidays
- Teacher and staff recognition and awards
- Welcome new employees
- Wellness information

Student News

- Sporting events, schedule changes, awards, and achievements
- Production stats
- Requests for volunteers
- Upcoming meetings
- Band and orchestra updates
- Drama and musical tickets
- Robotics competitions
- Honor Society and academic awards
- School policy reminders

Board of Education Meeting January 28



Student Wellness

- Anti-bullying messages
- Nutritional information
- Improving study habits
- Proper social media etiquette
- First aid reminders
- Counseling and Guidance Programs

IT

- Planned outages and network upgrades
- Unplanned outage responses (network restoration efforts and time to resolution)
- Software training tips
- Policy and procedural reminders
- IT security and e-mail safety messages



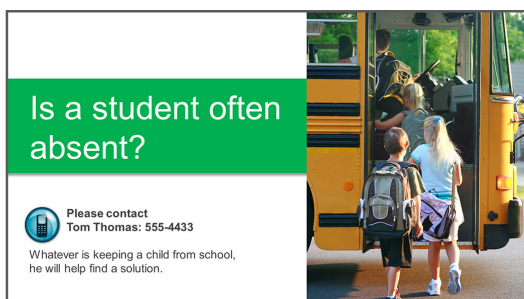
After-Hours Seminar Managing Classroom Bullies

Wednesday, October 17
Room 118
5 p.m.



School Safety / Facility Management

- Security policy reminders
- Disaster responses
- Evacuations
- Emergency preparedness
- Intruder alerts
- Lockdowns
- Missing employee/student



School Marketing & Community Involvement

- School closings
- Sports highlights
- University visits on campus
- Community classes