



NEWS RELEASE

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New communication system allows district to quickly connect with families, students and staff

SchoolMessenger system allows for emergency messages, student absent calls, and much more

September 17, 2009—When schools are delayed or closed due to inclement weather, parents, students and staff need to know about those decisions immediately.



Likewise, when a student is absent from class, a parent should be quickly notified to help rectify attendance problems that could lead to further absences or poor grades.

Renton School District this year has partnered with SchoolMessenger, an automatic notification service, to deliver personalized direct-to-phone messages for parental outreach, emergency broadcasts, student attendance alerts and other communications to home or mobile phones. The Web-based system allows the district to send thousands of calls and messages within minutes by voice, text and e-mail.

“When schools and families are connected, student achievement increases.” —Dr. Mary Alice Heuschel, Superintendent, Renton School District

Messages can be customized by school or classroom, translated into six languages, and used to remind parents and students of upcoming events, tests, student performances and more. The system allows schools to reach parents quickly in the event of an emergency, and also improve the quality and frequency of communications with families throughout the year. Schools that have already used the system are reporting better attendance at school and school functions. Parents report improved peace of mind and a better connection to their student's education.

Low cost system paid for, mostly, by cutting old program

Cost to operate the system is minimum: \$1 per student, per year (less than \$14,000 annually). Much of the funding comes from eliminating a similar but antiquated system connected to a modem and used at high schools to notify parents when students were absent. The new automated system calls parents when a teacher conducts roll call and enters a student's status into the student database system. Calls are made each day by 5:30 p.m. The automated system eliminates hours of work for school attendance secretaries and other support staff who, in the past, had to manually enter the names of tardy and absent students into the student database, which then turned the information into a telephone signal to pass, one at a time, through a modem.

Make sure your phone number is correct

Parents can ensure they receive these important calls by having the correct phone number—listed as the “primary” phone number—entered in the district's student information system. The system can only call one phone number offered by families. Parents should call or send a letter to school with the number they'd like to have listed in the system.