ALERTUS

ALERTUS BACK-TO-SCHOOL GUIDE

Best Practices for Enhanced Mass Notification

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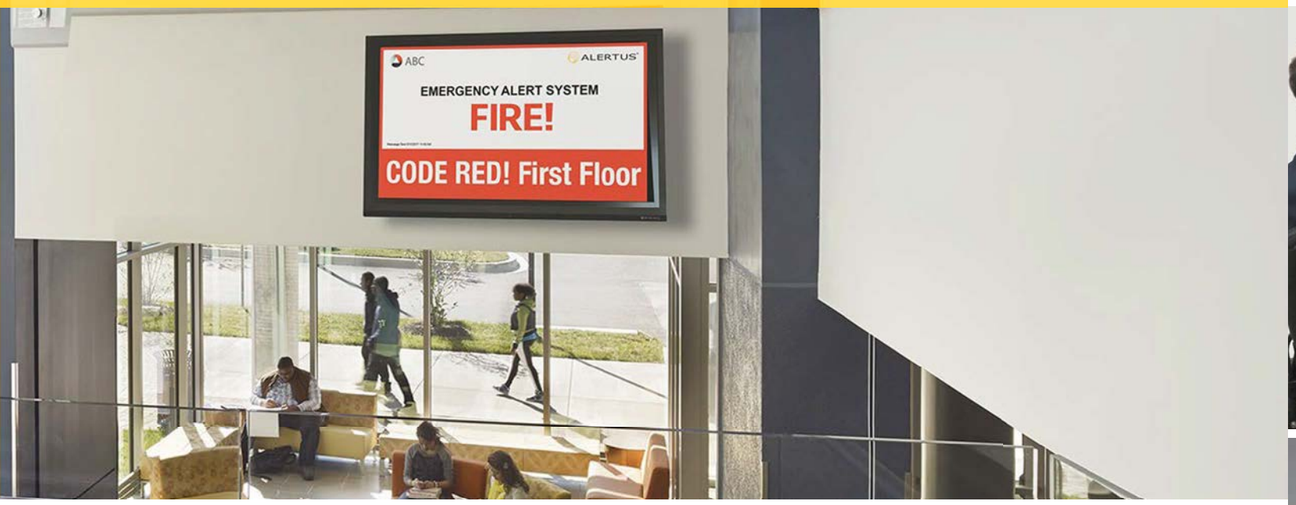
Enhancing **Crisis Communication** for a **Safe & Successful** School Year

Is your school community prepared for any emergency?

When it comes to a time-sensitive crisis — including severe weather events, active shooter incidents, medical emergencies, and more — intervening fast with multilayered, redundant alerting is key to ensuring on-site safety and minimizing learning disruption. In the midst of navigating various COVID-19 challenges, effective crisis communication is more important than ever before as you plan for a safe and successful school year.

In this e-book, we'll explore how you can enhance your school's emergency preparedness strategies and better prepare for future unpredictable situations.



Returning to **On-Site Learning:** Key Considerations

Integration with Existing Investments

Leveraging communication assets already in place is a practical and useful way to not only streamline your school's on-site alerting process, but also to receive a high level of return on existing investments.

A comprehensive and flexible mass notification platform, such as the Alertus System, should easily integrate with a wide range of legacy devices and systems. These may include:

- Text and email systems
- Conventional PAs
- Fire alarm panels
- Desktop computers
- VoIP phones
- Digital signage

By unifying the entire emergency notification process under one integrated and multilayered mass notification system (MNS), your school's emergency response team will be empowered to simultaneously activate an alert to each integrated alerting endpoint.

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School-Wide Reach

Audible and visual notification is essential for achieving school-wide reach during a crisis. Consider implementing audio and visual devices which use emergency tone sounders, voice synthesis, and screen display text to increase your chances of reaching everyone, everywhere. Keep in mind that an effective and reliable MNS will be Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliant to account for individuals with different auditory or visual abilities.

Alertus offers several audible and visual notification devices, such as the ones featured below, for school-wide communication:

Alertus Alert Beacon®

With bright strobes and clear emergency tone sounders, the Alert Beacon serves as an ideal in-building emergency notification device. It also has the power to display a custom message about the specific emergency and how to appropriately respond.

Practical and attention-grabbing, Alert Beacons can be wall-mounted in high-visibility areas and easily used in place of a conventional public address system.

Alertus LED Marquee

The LED Marquee helps schools reach high-occupancy areas, both indoor and outdoor, with immediate emergency notifications or general announcements. Alertus' LED Marquees are configured and activated through the easy-to-use Alertus Activation Software. Alertus LED Marquees, as well as all other Alertus notification endpoints, may also be activated through third party software systems.

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"At Durham College, we take great pride in being an inclusive institution with a strong focus on campus safety. By ensuring we have a multilayered, robust mass notification system that can notify our entire school community during an emergency, we can confidently operate every day. For example, we have visual notifications (strobes, displays, television overrides, and computer overrides) for the hearing impaired and audio-based notifications (Text-to-Speech, automatic audio announcements, sirens, and PA overrides) for the visually impaired. Alertus provided us with the ability to meet the needs of students, faculty, and visitors."

- Thomas Bezruki, Head of Emergency Management, Durham College

Expanding **Emergency Preparedness** with **Powerful Alerting Solutions**

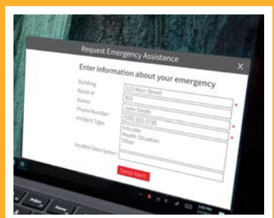
With powerful alerting solutions designed to rapidly disseminate critical information, you can improve incident management for the safety of students, faculty, staff, and visitors.

Panic Buttons

In the event of an emergency, there isn't time to spare in deploying multiple, disparate notification systems. That's why Alertus provides schools with a wide range of one-touch activation options for timely emergency notification at the push of a button:

- **Hard-Wired Activation Buttons** - These wall-mounted devices are simple to install and can be placed in different areas of the school, including front offices, classrooms, and hallways.
- **Desktop Activator** - This software-based panic button, ideal for teachers, staff, and faculty who regularly use their desktop computers during the school day, can be configured to scenario-specific hotkeys and task tray icons for rapid emergency alert activation.
- **USB Panic Button** - The USB Panic Button serves as a hardware-based extension of the Desktop Activator and can be used to facilitate quick and discreet emergency activation.
- **Personal WiFi Button** - Regardless of where the user may be, this WiFi-enabled button sends location-based information to emergency responders, facilitating immediate emergency assistance.

True single point of activation is vital for reducing emergency response times when it matters the most.



IP Audio

For schools looking to leverage or enhance their audible emergency notification, IP-based audio devices help to facilitate real-time, intelligible audio notifications within seconds, without the need for conventional analog cables.

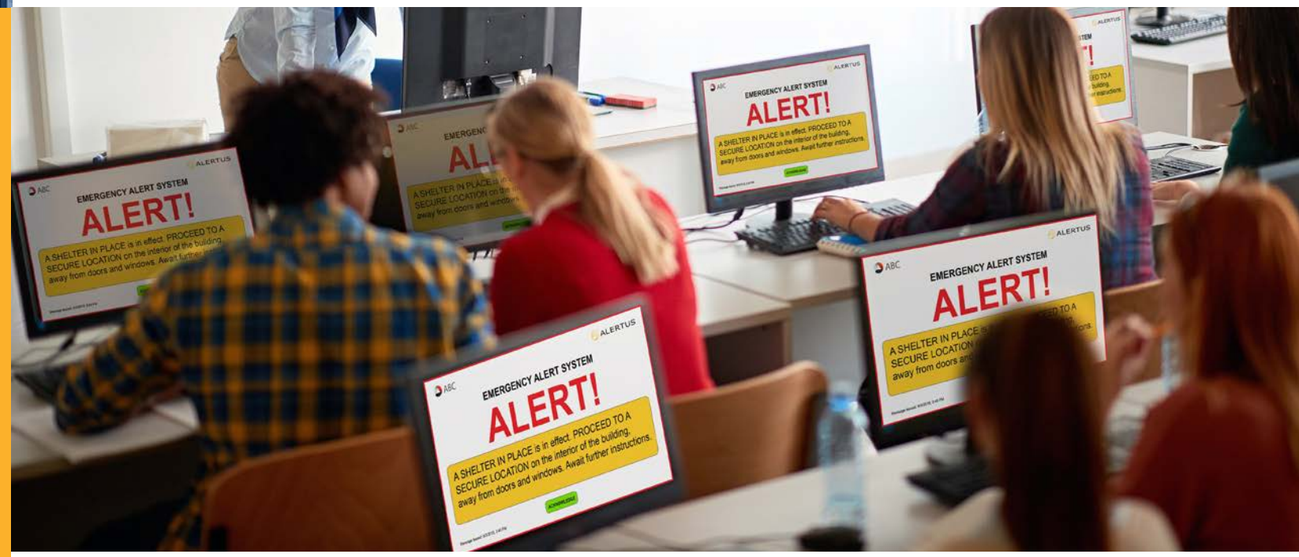
The user friendly, standable, and **highly intelligible Alertus IP Text-to-Speech (TTS) speaker**, for example, comes with a variety of capabilities and features to effectively convey indoor audible messages:

- Latest in voice synthesis technology to deliver spoken instructions during a high-stress situation
- Fully customizable alerting messages
- Integration flexibility with existing audible systems
- Remote management options for word pronunciation, updates, and audio device management

Attention-grabbing audio alerts can quickly heighten awareness, mitigate harm, and minimize business disruption in the face of potentially life-threatening situations.

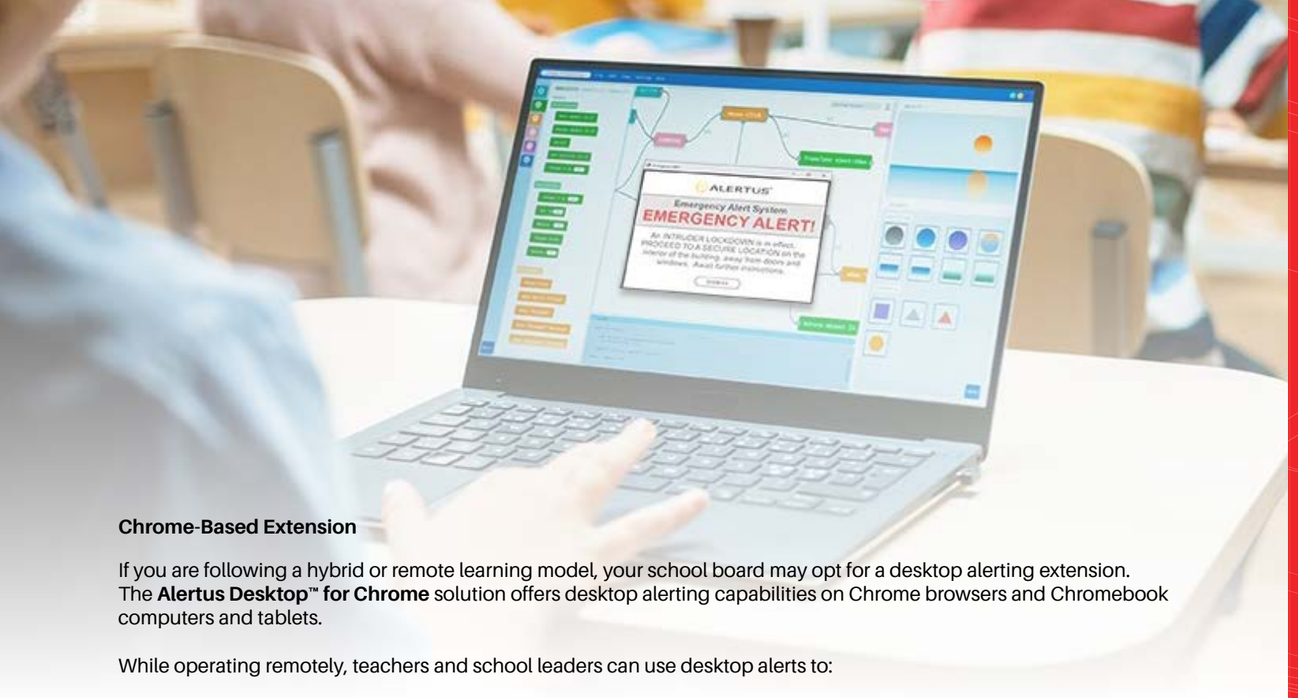
Desktop Notification

Desktop alerts are great for keeping your school community regularly informed about any emergencies or even routine, non-emergency announcements throughout the school year. Unlike emails that may get overlooked in a crowded inbox, desktop notifications capture attention immediately with visible, easy-to-read pop-up messages directly on a desktop computer.



Alertus Desktop™ Notification offers:

- The ability to quickly notify all or select school personnel
- The flexibility to use full-screen or partial-screen computer desktop notifications, depending on the situation
- An option for a less intrusive ticker alert that can deliver critical, yet non-emergency messages such as COVID-19 protocols



Chrome-Based Extension

If you are following a hybrid or remote learning model, your school board may opt for a desktop alerting extension. The **Alertus Desktop™ for Chrome** solution offers desktop alerting capabilities on Chrome browsers and Chromebook computers and tablets.

While operating remotely, teachers and school leaders can use desktop alerts to:

- Communicate about upcoming exams, quizzes, and major projects
- Keep everyone up to date about important on-site changes, including face mask guidelines, new sanitary measures, updated policies and procedures, and much more
- Send frequent desktop reminders and announcements before the transition to full-time on-site learning, without oversaturating email inboxes, to help everyone feel more comfortable and prepared for the return

Mobile Alerting

A mobile push notification allows you to reach your campus, even when they're away from their computer or not checking email, using just a WiFi connection. Through activator and recipient mobile app offerings, the Alertus Mobile App Suite enhances mobile notification between authorized dispatchers and end users.

- With the **Alertus Activator App**, authorized dispatchers can quickly activate and send emergency notification alerts to students, faculty, and staff via Android or iOS tablets or smartphones. These alerts can be planned ahead of time with preset emergency templates and edited on the fly to fit the specific emergency.
- The **Alertus Recipient App** allows end users to receive push notifications and quickly send geo-tagged incident reports to safety personnel via the incident reporting feature.

Mobile alerting via a WiFi connection is particularly ideal during a natural disaster event, when a spike in cellular network usage is likely.

"We started out by implementing the Alertus Desktop Notification, the Alertus Activator App, and the Alertus Recipient App — we began to shift to that as our primary method of emergency notification. We trained the entire faculty to use the Alertus Activator App to initiate an alert. The best thing was that we began teaching them that this mobile activator was their version of a fire alarm pull. If an emergency is happening, they now have that immediate decision making in their hands."

- John Kruzan, Director of Technology, The Wellington School

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Piecing It All Together

Communicating in a COVID-19 Landscape: Tips from Educational Leaders & Experts

Eric Davis-Fernald
Director of Safety
West Coast University

"Many educational leaders may only prepare for major emergencies — earthquakes, tornadoes, hurricanes, water main breaks — but this year we've added other unexpected situations to the mix such as the pandemic and civil unrest incidents. A more expansive plan will account for major emergencies as well as student health and wellbeing. There needs to be a more precise, location-based approach to develop emergency response plans for unpredictable active shootings, student violence, mental health issues, and more."

Grant Azdell
Vice President of Student Affairs and Dean of Students
Randolph-Macon College

"People were really looking for guidance. Information was changing as we learned more about COVID-19 and how it was impacting our community. Providing timely and reliable information was key to keeping everyone headed in the same direction and making things work as well as they did for us on campus. We initiated a schedule of weekly updates to help keep our campus informed. Even if it was to say how we were doing, we sent it out regularly. We also provided a daily dashboard with trackable figures to help our community understand where we stood, as well as how the community around us was doing."

Patrick Dennin
Director of Education Sales
Alertus Technologies

"A long time has passed since some educational populations have been in their respective buildings full time. We want to make sure that organizations not only have an infrastructure to give warning about potential threats, but also a way to internally report red flags or signs of students and staff in distress. This will ultimately serve to get individuals the help they need."

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Emergency Alerting Dos & Don'ts

Don't settle for a simple emergency strobe or horn.

Do implement a comprehensive mass notification system (MNS) to quickly deploy actionable, life-saving alerts during severe weather events, active shooter incidents, workplace violence situations, and more.

Don't rely on just one form of communication such as email or SMS text.

Do integrate your existing legacy devices and communication systems with your MNS for a multilayered, redundant, and unified alerting approach.

Don't waste time.

Do proactively reduce emergency response time with true, single point of activation, preset emergency templates, and targeted communication.

Don't leave anyone behind.

Do account for all individuals, including those with different visual and auditory abilities, by leveraging both visual and audible alerting devices.

Don't wait until an emergency to test your MNS.

Do conduct regular MNS testing to ensure emergency notification reliability and efficiency, and to educate your team on appropriate emergency guidelines.

Resources

For more insight on enhancing and improving your crisis communication efforts, check out the resources below.

Blogs/Articles

- Preparing for the Unpredictable with Mass Notification: Lessons Learned from 2020
- School Panic Buttons for On-Site Safety
- Returning to Campus: How to Prepare and Enhance Safety
- Back-to-School Safety: Tips for Transforming Existing Communication Assets Into Powerful Alerting Tools
- Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief: How to Maximize Funds for a Safe and Successful School Year

MNS Testing Guide

- Download Infographic

Case Study

- Gordon College: Unifying a Single Point of Activation to Notify Everyone at any Location

You can also visit the Alertus.com to learn more about Alertus' innovative and reliable crisis communication solutions.