

OPS Enhances Emergency Alert System

POSTED: 11:50 am CDT April 17, 2008

On Thursday the Omaha Public School District announced it's going to expand its parent notification program for the 2008-2009 school year. The district, which serves 87 schools and more than 47,500 students, will use its new communications capabilities to reach families quickly in the event of an emergency at its schools or security events affecting the school community.

Parents in the community will receive a test of the notification service sometime next month.

The district has partnered with SchoolMessenger, a leading U.S. parental notification company. So if an emergency occurs on any campus in the district, SchoolMessenger's massive calling capabilities will enable thousands of messages to be placed in a matter of minutes.

Superintendent Dr. John Mackiel said the community can rest assured that they will get the emergency information as facts become available.

Mackiel said, "In times of emergency, it's important to send a clear message as quickly as possible. Doing so reassures families that the situation is under control, but also helps curb the spread of misinformation that can cause confusion and unnecessary concern."

Omaha Public School officials said students will be bringing home emergency contact forms home this month. The district is encouraging parents to carefully review them to be sure all telephone contact information is up to date and accurate.

OPS said three emergency contacts from each family can be selected, which will be automatically, regularly updated throughout the school year so that it is always emergency-ready. If at any time contact information changes, parents are encouraged to notify the school immediately so records can be updated.

District officials said it is important to note that the SchoolMessenger solution will not replace current modes of school communications. Principals are still accessible for live visits, and a variety of publications and correspondence will continue to be sent home.

It also points out that any personal information shared between families and the district will remain private, and is protected by multiple layers of data encryption, firewalls and other security measures.