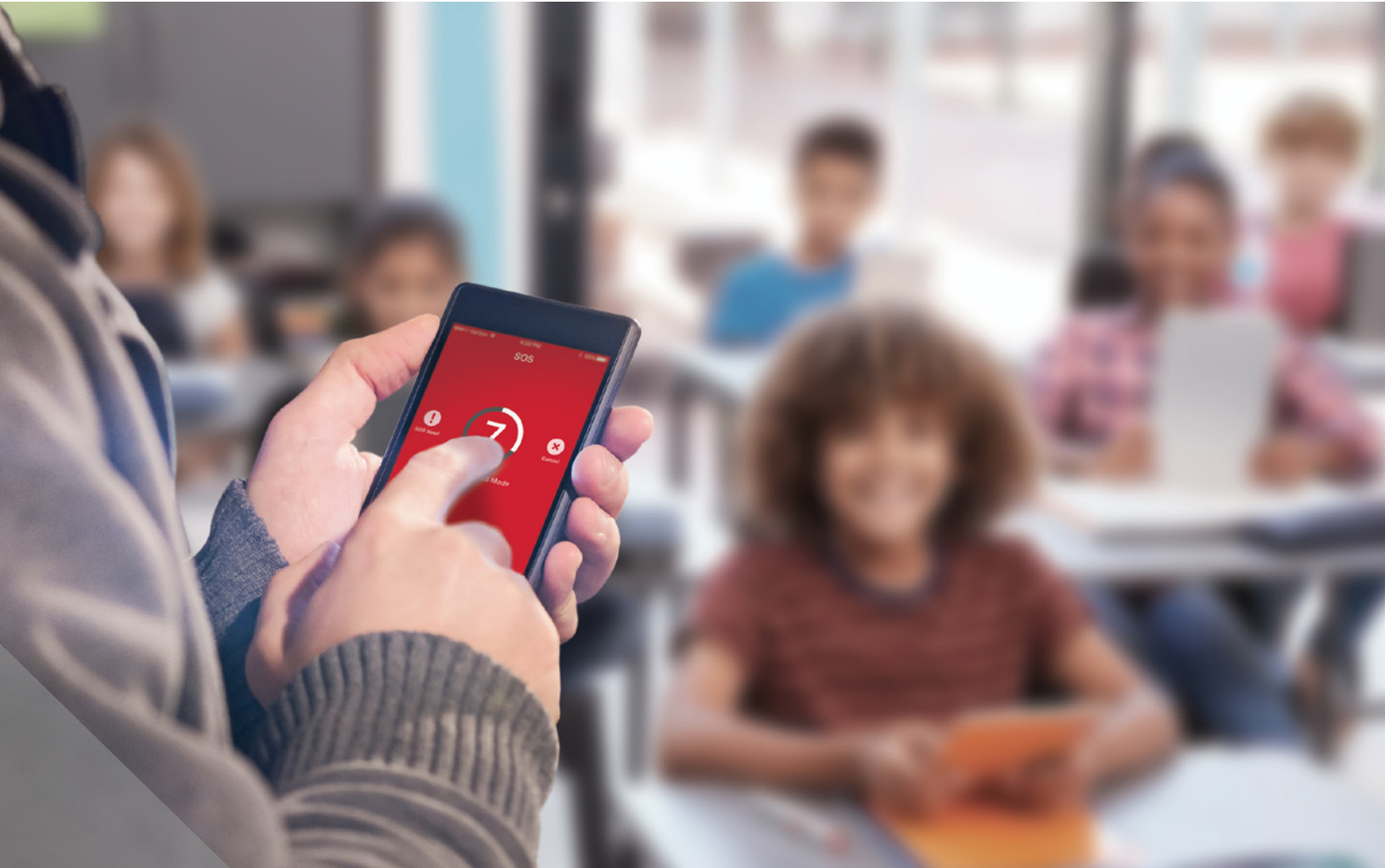


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Campus Safety PARTNER SERIES



HOW PANIC ALARMS CAN IMPROVE SCHOOL SECURITY



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Panic buttons or duress alarms can summon police or campus staff so schools can respond more effectively to all types of emergencies.

Recent tragic events on school campuses have put a bright spotlight on the need for K-12 districts to implement stronger safety and security measures. One of the most effective solutions a district can deploy is a panic alarm system that enables school teachers, administrators and other employees to call for help by simply pressing a button when there is an emergency. Doing so not only provides staff members with the ability to quickly notify law enforcement and other school personnel about a safety or security issue, it also can help reduce the costly litigation related to school violence, not to mention staff turnover and workers' compensation claims.

Panic buttons can summon police and campus staff members about a wide variety of incidents, including fights, medical emergencies, hazardous chemical spills, accidents, non-custodial parent issues, inclement weather, active shooters and more.

Panic buttons or duress alarms can be used by teachers, administrators and other school employees to summon immediate help for medical emergencies, as well as active shooter incidents, inclement weather, intruders and more.

Options Include Smartphone, Fixed and Pendant Buttons

There are several types of panic/duress alarm systems on the market today, and the most traditional is the fixed alarm with a hard-wired (or sometimes wireless) connection. Fixed panic buttons are often appropriate for workers who are in stationary positions, such as a school secretary sitting at a desk in the front office.

Districts can choose between a wired or wireless connection for their panic buttons. However, using a wired solution limits the panic button to only being used in one location, which reduces the solution's effectiveness for staff members whose jobs require mobility.

On a K-12 campus, most staff members are walking around, either teaching in class or perhaps monitoring the hallways during passing periods or outdoor playgrounds during recess. Teachers, administrators and other employees who frequently walk around require a mobile, wireless panic button.

Mobile panic/duress alarm buttons can be carried as pendants attached to a belt or lanyard hung around the neck. Another option is for the panic button to be installed as an app on the staff member's smartphone or wearable Apple Watch.

With a mobile, wireless panic button solution, the alarm can be sent several ways depending on the system selected: WiFi, cellular network, infrared or 900MHz radio frequency (RF). Some wireless solutions have at least two ways their alarm signals can be transmitted, which makes them more reliable.

For example, Everbridge's panic button app on a smartphone can use either the local cellular network or campus WiFi to transmit an alarm. This results in greater coverage because the panic alarm signal is sent via WiFi when the user is inside the building and sent via the cell network when the user is outside (and inside if there is no WiFi).

Panic Alarm System Must Be Flexible

When selecting a panic/duress alarm solution, it's important that it be able to accommodate the various needs of a district. One size does not fit all.

If possible, all teachers, administrators and other staff members (including nurses, front desk secretaries, custodians, etc.) should be issued panic alarms. For many districts, however, the concern over distributing so many panic buttons is cost. Fortunately, a cost-effective way to achieve greater panic alarm distribution is to adopt a solution that allows a panic button app to be installed on employees' personal smartphones or on their personal wearable device, such as an Apple Watch. This lowers the cost of the overall panic/duress alarm system because it reduces the need for a district to buy pendants.

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SPILLS, ACCIDENTS,
NON-CUSTODIAL PARENT
ISSUES, INCLEMENT
WEATHER, ACTIVE
SHOOTERS AND MORE.



Depending on the vendor selected, another benefit of installing a panic alarm app on employees' personal smartphones is that the app not only can send an alarm signal to first responders and fellow staff members, it can also stream video and audio to them. This functionality enables law enforcement and others on the receiving end of the alarm transmission to determine what is happening at the site of the incident so they can respond appropriately. Have shots been fired? Is someone making threats? Is there a medical emergency? A lot of this type of information can be gleaned when video and audio is live-streamed from an incident.

Of course, not every staff member has a smartphone. Additionally, not every situation allows staff members to carry their personal cell phones with them at all times. In these cases, either fixed (wired or wireless) panic alarms or mobile duress pendants are appropriate.

The solution a district chooses should have the flexibility to incorporate all four types of alarm activation devices — fixed alarms, mobile pendants, cell phone apps or personal wearable devices.

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Address These Functional Considerations

Regardless of the type of panic alarm activation device used by an employee, the system should enable first responders and others on campus to locate where the panic alarm is being activated so they can quickly get to the scene of an incident.

The system should also allow the district to designate who receives the alarm signal (and video and audio if the alarm is being transmitted from an employee's smart phone). Will it be local law enforcement? The security department? A call center or central station? The superintendent? School principal? Safety team? Custodian? Someone else?

Once the panic alarm signal is received and the initial message recipients have determined the appropriate response, other stakeholders should be notified of the situation, and the message should be catered to the recipients' different roles. It is a best practice to have these notifications be automated with pre-scripted emergency messages for various types of incidents (shooting, hazmat incident, medical emergency, weather emergency, fight, etc.).

For example, in the case of an active shooter threat, a pre-scripted message should be sent to teachers and staff, telling them to initiate lockdown procedures. A different message can go to parents, letting them know an incident has occurred that has initiated a lockdown. Another notification can be sent to the general public in the surrounding area, informing them that they will see increased law enforcement activity at the school.

Qualified Vendors Can Help

Although the process of creating pre-scripted notifications and complex workflows can be challenging, a well-qualified vendor with experience in complex emergency notification system deployments can help.

For example, with Everbridge's Safety Connection panic alarm solution, Everbridge employees can help districts set up the automation, as well as help create and write notification templates. Additionally, the company has a library of templates school districts can upload.

"In the time of a real crisis, you don't want to have to sit there and type up five or six different messages and then go send each one of those individually. That takes too much time," says Brian Toolan, Everbridge's Director of Government Strategy. "We built in automation so that campuses and districts can reduce their time to action. We want to make sure law enforcement and security have the ability to respond quickly and effectively and not have to worry about how they get a message out or how they corral people. Our automation gives them that flexibility."

Schools that install panic button systems as well as effective workflows in response to the alarms that are transmitted increase their chances of mitigating the wide variety of safety and security incidents that might happen on campus.

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Prevent Emergencies Before They Happen with Anonymous Tip Lines

Although panic alarms are an excellent way to respond to campus emergencies, the goal of any K-12 district is to prevent an incident from happening in the first place. A remarkable number of school safety and security issues can be averted if a district adopts an anonymous tip line and then trains and encourages students, parents, staff members and the community at large to report suspicious or concerning behavior.

The concerns most often reported to these tip lines are mental health issues (particularly if someone is talking about committing suicide or engaging in some other type of self-harm), bullying and threats of violence, but can include practically any behavior that's deemed potentially problematic.

Everbridge's anonymous tip line enables anyone to

report issues they've seen or heard (or even read on social media) via the company's web-based interface or via text. There is nothing to install.

The school sets up a keyword, for example, "Tip Kennedy." A person wanting to provide an anonymous tip texts "Tip Kennedy" to 888777, and then they can instantly relay their tip to law enforcement or call center. Once police get the information, they can respond back to the tipster, having a two-way conversation in case more information is needed. Both the number of the tipster and the police officer remain anonymous.

Combined with *If You See Something, Say Something* campaigns, anonymous tip lines can help students overcome the pressure they may feel to maintain a code of silence among their peers.



A wide variety of concerning behavior can be reported via an anonymous tip line, including threats and bullying.