

# Emergency Communications

In the face of an emergency – featuring either weather-related or man-made circumstances – maintaining effective communications is paramount. School districts must be proactive in planning how they would respond in an emergency or disaster situation. How would critical instructions be disseminated to the appropriate staff? How long would it take? Are there tracking metrics available to confirm the right people had been notified?

## FIRSTCLASS SOLUTION HIGHLIGHTS

The FirstClass Collaboration Suite is uniquely designed to enhance communication, collaboration and knowledge sharing, by connecting the key stakeholders within the education framework – students, faculty, administration, parents and alumni – within a secure, shared environment.

Some highlights of the FirstClass feature set that support emergency communications systems include:

- Secure email and instant messaging between all users on the system.
- Designated online work spaces to easily circulate email messages, documents, images or sound files to specific recipients.
- A powerful and highly customizable notification service that provides notification of incoming email, voicemail, faxes, and calendar events to a wide range of devices including pagers, mobile phones, and SmartPhones.
- Support for diverse computing environments including Windows, MAC, Linux, and the Web.

FirstClass provides a solution schools can rely on to support ongoing communication and collaboration even in the midst of an emergency or disaster. Some of the specific benefits include:

- **Single, Easily-Accessible Environment for All Staff & Students** – FirstClass encompasses all communications and collaboration tools for students, faculty and personnel with a single entry-point to the system and “anytime, anywhere” access via computer, handheld device, Internet-enabled kiosk, or phone.
- **Quick, Centralized System Restoration** – FirstClass is a highly scalable platform that enables some of the largest school districts in the world to run on only a handful of servers. As a result, the FirstClass system can often be centrally managed by a single staff member – significantly reducing the time required to restore system communications after an outage.
- **Low Total Cost of Ownership** – FirstClass is a leader in performance, reliability, scalability and ease of administration, enabling customers to maximize utilization of the solution, while minimizing investments in the hardware, software and staff needed to support it.

Solution  
Sheet

FirstClass provides a solution schools can rely on to support ongoing communication and collaboration even in the midst of an emergency or school closure.

**CUSTOMER PROFILE: CHARLOTTE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT**

Charlotte County Public School District prepared for disaster before it struck. After Hurricane Charlie hit Florida in 2004, devastating multiple areas within the Charlotte County area, all land line and cell phones failed within the school district and communications between staff were made impossible.

Prior to the hurricane, Charlotte County had deployed FirstClass. Due to its high scalability, FirstClass email does not require a server at every school site. As soon as power was restored, the Administrator for Charlotte County Public Schools was able to quickly and easily re-establish communications capabilities to all faculty and personnel from a central location – without having to waste precious time coordinating efforts amongst distributed technology staff at each individual school.

“One third of our schools were destroyed in this disaster and FirstClass proved to be the only reliable means of communication during the immediate aftermath.”

- Chris Bress

Director of Learning Through Technology  
Charlotte County Public Schools

“The reality of September 11th established the need for an immediate emergency notification to all district sites. Given the fact that all voice and fax communications were not obtainable, FirstClass became the primary medium to distribute emergency information in a timely manner. Without our online collaborative environment, we would not have been able to communicate and ensure accurate information for the safety of our students.”

- Paula Romano

FirstClass Administrator and Manager of  
Internal Communications  
Hillsborough County School District

**CUSTOMER PROFILE: HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT**

In 2001, Tampa-based Hillsborough County School District deployed a district-wide Emergency Notification System, built on FirstClass, to quickly disseminate critical information among staff and response teams in the event of an emergency.

Administrators at Hillsborough County are equipped with pagers. If an emergency occurs, each Administrator receives a page with one of two unique numbers. The first number represents weather-related disasters. The second indicates a general school emergency such as fire, police-involvement, or school lock-down.

The Hillsborough District Assistant Superintendent's office, which is responsible for declaring an emergency, is able to send a single page instructing staff to log in to their FirstClass system. Information is simultaneously uploaded to a FirstClass conference, which is a collaborative online workspace accessible to relevant staff via any computer, handheld device or Internet-enabled kiosk. Within this conference, the district can post details of the emergency – including documents, images or sound files – along with instructions and procedures for personnel to follow. To ensure notification to staff who are near, but not presently at, their desks, the conferences are set to auto-open on each computer desktop and play an accompanying alarm specific to the type of emergency.

Hillsborough can also track the history of all message activity, enabling them to quickly ascertain who has, or has not, received and/or opened the emergency notification message.