



Alabama High School Develops Powerful Safety Solution with InformaCast

The Challenge

W.P. Davidson High School in Mobile, Ala., needed to find a new mass notification solution that unified its disparate systems and could be implemented in an older school building to serve as a model for the rest of its district.

The Solution

Working with their school district, Mobile County Public Schools, the high school used InformaCast as the backbone for a new alerting solution that could work with other security and communication technologies from vendors like Extron, Cisco, Industry Weapon, Igor and more to keep students and faculty safe and informed.

Developing a More Effective Solution

Following a shooting incident in 2017, Mobile County Public Schools identified several challenges with their current alerting solution. While tools were in place to help notify people, each tool resided in its own silo. It often fell on the principal to activate the alerts which could be a cumbersome and time-consuming process. District leaders began looking at options for solutions, and selected W.P. Davidson High School to serve as a pilot for a new alerting solution.

The high school is one of the largest in the county with nearly 1,700 students and more than 100 faculty and staff. According to Jason Richardson, principal at W.P. Davidson, since the school was built in the 1960's, district leaders knew that if they could implement an effective solution there, it could work in almost any school that needed an improved alerting program. The lack of an effective tool was also having a negative impact on teachers, resulting in some teachers leaving their positions because they did not feel safe in their classrooms.

Turning to InformaCast

While researching possible solutions, district leaders recognized that InformaCast mass notification software was already in place at W.P. Davidson but was being used in a limited capacity after replacing an antiquated intercom tool. As the school made a list of safety and communication needs, it began working with Singlewire to better understand the features and integration options available with InformaCast and found that it checked many of the boxes they were looking to achieve.

“It could hit all the IP phones and speakers in the school. It could send messages to intercoms inside and outside the building,” said Michael Williams, ITS Unity Solutions Designer. “Messages could be displayed on IP clocks, and we could control door locks, school bells, as well as receive notifications from connected motion detection devices.”

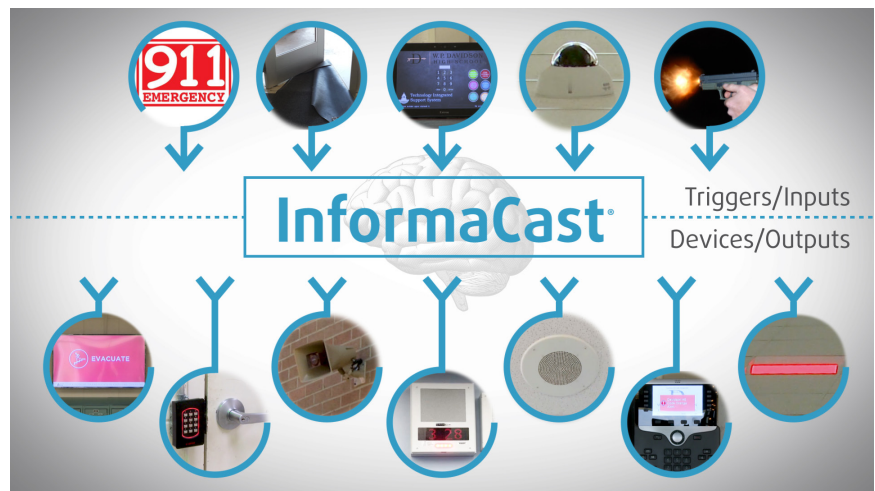
According to David Akridge, executive manager of IT for Mobile County Public Schools, InformaCast could serve as the central brain to handle all of the alerting tasks the school needed. Now they needed to find partners that could work together to pull it off.

A New Alerting Ecosystem

Knowing that InformaCast could connect all of the devices and systems the school wanted to leverage for mass notification, it was time to begin working with other vendors to help bring this idea to fruition.

“The robustness of InformaCast gave the school the ability build on its existing infrastructure without needing to bring in entirely new vendors to accomplish this project,” said Henry Zeigler of the Moore Ziegler Group, who helped coordinate efforts between the school and the vendors.

With a large list of needs, the school looked to partners who were willing to work with them and with each other to deliver the kind of solution they were looking for. InformaCast could already connect with the Cisco IP phones in place around the school, as well as the school’s desktop computers and IP speakers. Extron was able to develop a digital display touch panel and mobile app that the principal and other security team members could use to manage alerts, school bells and door locks. The principal can trigger alerts and bells from the panels with the push of a button and those messages and tones are delivered via InformaCast on the backend. Similarly, once that notification is triggered, it can reach Industry Weapon digital signage that is displayed in hallways and Igor lighting that changes colors depending on the scenario. The solution also leverages cutting-edge gunshot detection to respond to evolving safety threats.



Helping Save Time and Money

The new solution has helped save the school time and money in a number of ways. Before, the school had separate systems controlling cameras, door locks, intercom, phones, and whole host of other safety and communication tools. Now it handles all of the tasks that used to be managed separately and takes a lot of the work off the principle who needs to worry about multiple concerns during an emergency. With the single push of a button InformaCast can take on all the alerting tasks that used to require individual manual activation.

“When you have multiple people trying to perform multiple tasks, especially during an emergency, mistakes can be made,” said Andy Gatewood, director of safety and security for Mobile County Public Schools. “This new solution minimizes the room for error to ensure the right messages are reaching the right people.”

The project was in part funded by a grant from the City of Mobile to help develop a new solution that utilized outside the box thinking to improve safety. The district worked with the mayor’s office and police department to create a solution that would emphasize strong communication and deliver more effective responses in the event of an emergency. InformaCast also offered a flexible means to leverage technology already in place at the school, minimizing the need for additional investments.

“When we started talking about needing to have a single button press solution to activate alerts, our team realized they weren’t using InformaCast nearly as much as they could be,” said Tracye Mathis, telecommunications manager at Mobile County Public Schools. “We weren’t aware of what we had at our disposal, and as soon as they started diving into it, we found out we were sitting on a gold mine.”

Visit www.singlewire.com/informacast-k12-education for more information about how K-12 schools can implement InformaCast to help with their safety and security needs.