Communication Systems during Health Emergencies

SS-SWAC-YAC

Introductions

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Past Recommendation:

"Increase communication between Community-School-Families in the event of a crisis. Ensure a coordinated message and response to all members of the educational community"

—pulled from the 2020 School Safety Summit recommendations

Personal Experiences

- Students don't know what's happening or what they need to do
- Families with health concerns don't have the information to make educated decisions to keep themselves safe
- No health instruction
- Lack of enforcement of health protocols

Communication and transparency

Health emergencies, like the COVID-19 pandemic or other contagious disease outbreaks, are as severe as other emergencies, and policy changes can be as important as those surrounding weather events or other emergency situations. That said, our systems do not seem to be set up for them.

- There is a lack of transparency between schools, students, and families
- And a lack of ability for parents and students to ask questions

This leads us to suggest:

- Emails, texts, and automated phone messages to be shared with families
- Updated phone trees and text options for frequent communication
- Digital town-hall type Q&A meetings for families and administration
- A designated person for every district or school who can answer questions from families
  - This person would be more qualified and could work in addition to a PIO

Accessible information and communication

Access to updated information for emergencies is essential. Many families rely on schools for important safety information about emergencies such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The lack of reliable information during the past 18 months has left many families in the dark.

- There is a lack of equitable and accessible information
- And a lack of a unified method of communication

    Suggestions:

    - Information available in a variety of languages and mediums
        - Increases accessibility for non-english speakers and people with disabilities
    - Training for staff, community, students, and families on effective technology use
        - Increases skill in using digital platforms more relied upon in a distance required health emergency

Equitable access to devices

In addition to language and accessibility barriers, we also have to consider other barriers that families may encounter in reaching emergency information.

- Lack of devices at home that can access the internet
- Lack of internet access

Suggestions:

- Funding for school devices to be used at home
  - These devices could also be used for homework
  - Funding for assistive technology for students with disabilities
- Funding for free internet
- Help and training with technology for students and families

Questions

We'd love to hear any of your questions, and we'll do our best to answer them. If we run out of time or don't have an answer for you at the moment, please reach out to our advisor, Ella DeVerse via email (ella.deverse@k12.wa.us)