

### Rapid Communication System Connects Home and School

Traverse City is located in Northern Michigan on Grand Traverse Bay, a protected waterway of Lake Michigan. This region is known for its spectacular natural beauty, and rolling, wooded terrain interrupted by acres of cherry orchards. Traverse City Area Public Schools (TCAPS) is a high-performing district that provides PreK-12 curriculum across 13 elementary schools, two middle schools, two high schools, and an alternative high school. With an enrollment of more than 10,000 students across a geography spanning 300 square miles, this district is as vast as the deep waters of nearby Lake Michigan.

#### **Challenge:** Communicating across a Large District, Competing with Private and Charter Schools

With size, however, comes a pressing concern about engagement. In surveys, residents expressed concern that a large school district meant less communication, less ability for parental involvement, and less individualized attention for students, all of which translates to possible underachievement for students. Within the past few years, TCAPS began experiencing direct competition from charter and parochial schools in the region, in addition to a challenging statewide economy.

As a result of these concerns, TCAPS sought to implement a mass communication tool to efficiently reach school families and staff on a regular basis to build stronger school-home relationships. TCAPS explained in a stated purpose “all communication will increase support and engagement among students, staff, parents, and community for improved relationships and student achievement.”

“In today’s environment, parents, teachers, the community and all stakeholders of public schools expect instantaneous communications regarding events going on at their local schools,” said Alison Arnold, director of marketing, communications, and volunteer services in the district. “Instant communications is considered a basic service, not an extra.”

#### **Solution:** AlertNow

The district implemented the AlertNow rapid communication system in November 2008. AlertNow, a Blackboard company, is a comprehensive rapid communication service specifically designed for the education community.

#### Quick Facts

- 1) *More than 10,000 students*
- 1) *Traverse City Area School system contains 13 elementary schools, one Montessori school, two middle schools, two senior high schools and one alternative high school*
- 1) *Located in Northern Michigan on Grand Traverse Bay, a protected waterway of Lake Michigan*



AlertNow delivers voice, e-mail, and text messages in multiple languages to keep parents and staff informed of both urgent and non-urgent situations. Recipients may set their own preferences by selecting the best device or mode for receiving certain notifications, so messages are fully deliverable. Blackboard mass notification solutions deliver 60 million messages each month on behalf of more than 5,000 schools and districts in all 50 states.

Communication surrounding attendance is a frequent concern. "AlertNow has helped to reduce the number of unverified absences among students," said Arnold. "This information has increased dialogue between parents, students, and teachers to communicate in a timely manner for resolving unverified absences."

**Result:** Engaged Parents, Higher Attendance, Student Achievement

AlertNow has assisted TCAPS in improving community outreach especially during times of considerable concern for parents, students, and community leaders alike. "In 2009, TCAPS school district was forced to close for five days due to an H1N1 Influenza epidemic," Arnold recalled. "There was a need at that time for immediate communications to school families regarding school closures, vaccination clinics, and announcements from the County Health Department. The Health Department relied on TCAPS to disseminate critical information. Our school district was consistently cited as a key partner in promoting effective and timely communications during the epidemic by using AlertNow."

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Alison Arnold  
*Director of Marketing*  
*Alison Arnold, Director of Marketing,*  
*Communications, and Volunteer Services*  
*Traverse City Area Schools*

AlertNow has become integral in supporting TCAPS in its quest to improve attendance, achievement, and communication. "Now that we have fully incorporated rapid communications tools into our strategies, I cannot imagine life before AlertNow," Arnold said. "It is a vital resource that we cannot do without."

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