



## Plum school board approves parental alert system

By Kristie Linden      TRIBUNE-REVIEW NEWS SERVICE      *Monday, August 4, 2008*

Plum Borough School District has a new way to keep in touch with parents during emergencies.

The school board approved a three-year contract with AlertNow, a system that will use phones, e-mails and text messages to contact every parent when the district needs to quickly send out information.

Dawn Check, district information officer, said the system offers parents up to 11 options on how to receive the alerts.

"This would give us the capability to tell parents anything, even that Bus 170 broke down. Only those parents affected by that bus would know about it," Check said.

The system will not replace the district's Electronic Mustang.

If there is a two-hour delay or a fire alarm has been pulled, the system immediately will begin contacting parents. Anything from severe weather, power outages or gas leaks, to any situation that causes a school to evacuate, relocate or lock down students could prompt an alert.

AlertNow makes about 1,000 phone calls every few seconds and will not stop calling until the parent is reached.

It will include the entire student database in all seven school buildings and all employees. Ed Hela, director of technology, has been working to create different groupings for the system, for example the parents of Bus 170 would be one group.

Distribution groups can be customized for parents of children based on bus route, grade level or athletic teams, according to the AlertNow Web site. Voice or text messages are delivered to recipients, based on the recipients preferred method of delivery.

For example, some parents might prefer an e-mail or phone call to their home phone for routine communications but want a phone call to a mobile phone for emergency situations, the Web site states.

The cost to the district is \$2.25 per student or a little more than \$9,000 annually. Check is working to get a \$15,000 state grant to help pay for the service.

The district has a three-year contract with AlertNow, but the price will hold for nine years if district officials want to continue service. There are opt-out options.

AlertNow requires no hardware, software or additional phone lines, according to the company Web site.

Any authorized district administrator will be able to record and send a message with one phone call or by using a secure, password-protected Internet site.

AlertNow's communication services send more than 1 million messages each month for more than 2,500 schools across the United States.