# PLACERVILLE UNION SCHOOL DISTRICT SETS A NEW STANDARD FOR EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

## CHALLENGES

- School staff had limited access to emergency announcement system

- Gaps in emergency notification technology left students and staff members at risk

- Antiquated bell system provided no distinction between emergency and everyday announcements

## VALUE CREATED

- Automated emergency notification solutions are easy to activate by phone or with the flip of a switch

- Customized bell and announcement systems give different messages for everyday events, drills and emergencies

- Integrated solutions allow for seamless emergency communication

- Improved emergency preparedness provides peace of mind and healing from tragedy

## With automation and integration, emergency response is as simple as flipping a switch

Safety is a top priority for any school community. But for Placerville Union School District, a devastating incident brought the need for heightened security to the forefront.

Judi Whittington, technology coordinator for the school district, says the 2011 incident opened her eyes to the critical role that technology could play in keeping students and staff members safe.

*"It forced me to look at our communications in a whole different way,"* she says. *"I decided I needed to do something."*

### Security with the Flip of a Switch

Located in Northern California, Placerville Union School District has two elementary schools and one middle school, with about 150 staff members between them.

Whittington had never been invited to the district's emergency planning meetings before 2011. But after the incident, it became clear to her and her teammates that technology and communication were key elements of any effective response.

She started attending the district's emergency planning meetings and working closely with Avaya and Valcom, the district's communication and mass notification solution providers, to streamline the emergency response process.

She'd initially chosen Avaya and Valcom because of their reliable reputations and their integrated, customizable communication solutions. But as she worked collaboratively with their technology support teams after the incident, she realized the companies were truly on her team.

> **"**
>
> *When you're in panic mode, you don't have time to think. That's why it was really important for the office staff to be able to flip a switch and have everything go into action.*
>
> —Judi Whittington, Technology Coordinator, Placerville Union School District

*"I leaned hard and heavy on Valcom, and they were amazing,"* she says. *"They took me in like a family member and did everything they could to make sure we had everything I wanted in place."*

Together, they determined that each school needed automated communication solutions to notify students, staff members, parents and other schools in an emergency situation.

Under every office desk in the district, they installed switches that a staff member can flip to trigger alert announcements and automated calls to emergency personnel. Whittington says the updates have given office staff members a sense of security.

*"When you're in panic mode, you don't have time to think,"* she says. *"That's why it was really important for the office staff to be able to flip a switch and have everything go into action."*

They also integrated the announcement system with the phone system, so that teachers can activate the lockdown bell from any classroom phone.

The alert announcements are customized to sound different than a typical recess bell, Whittington says. In an emergency, an automated message from the superintendent plays through the loudspeakers.

During a drill, a different message from the superintendent assures students and staff that they don't need to be alarmed.

## Technology Brings Peace of Mind, Healing

About six months after Whittington started reaching out to Avaya and Valcom, she had installed automated, integrated emergency communications systems in every school in the district.

Today, Avaya and Valcom's technology support departments keep her updated on the latest emergency communication solutions; they recently updated every office with LED signs that display an automated digital message when a 9-1-1 call is placed.

The heightened security measures have helped her and the rest of the staff members find healing from the trauma they experienced.

*"Hopefully we won't ever have to use these solutions in an emergency situation,"* she says. *"But we have peace of mind knowing that we're more prepared than we were six years ago."*

Placerville Union Superintendent Eric Bonniksen agrees that the enhanced communication technology has made parents, staff members and students feel more secure.

*"If there's an incident on one of our campuses, staff members know that they're in control,"* he says. *"They know that whatever comes at them, they can handle it.*

*"That gives people the ability to breathe."*

## About Valcom

Valcom is a leading provider of IP paging and mass notification solutions. Valcom's customer base includes Fortune 500 companies, US Government facilities, and local government emergency service organizations, as well as over 35,000 schools.

## About Placerville Union School District

Located in Placerville, California, Placerville Union School District provides K-8 students with excellent education and academic preparation, inspiring them to be confident, lifelong learners who strive to realize their potential and make a positive contribution to society. To learn more, visit **pusdk8.us**.

"

Hopefully we won't ever have to use these solutions in an emergency situation. But we have peace of mind knowing that we're more prepared than we were six years ago.

*—Judi Whittington, Technology Coordinator, Placerville Union School District*

### SOLUTIONS

Avaya IP Office™ Platform integrated with Valcom analog and IP Loudspeakers, Intercoms, Clocks, Visual Notification, and IP Mass Notification

## About Avaya

Avaya is a leading, global provider of customer and team engagement solutions and services available in a variety of flexible on-premise and cloud deployment options. Avaya's fabric-based networking solutions help simplify and accelerate the deployment of business critical applications and services. For more information, please visit www.avaya.com.