



Staff Report

INFORMATIONAL REPORT ON THE RAPID NOTIFY EMERGENCY NOTIFICATION SYSTEM FOR BELMONT SAFE SCHOOLS

Honorable Mayor and Council Members:

Summary

The Belmont Police Department, working with public and private schools in the Belmont Safe Schools Program, identified a need for the schools to have the ability to send emergency messages to students, parents, and staff in the event of a significant incident occurring at a school. After conducting research and contacting vendors, the Rapid Notify System was chosen as the emergency notification system for the Belmont Safe Schools Program.

Background

In 1999, the Belmont Police Department, in cooperation with the public and private schools of Belmont, formed Belmont Safe Schools Program. Belmont Safe Schools was originally set up to facilitate the communication link between the Belmont Police Department and the schools in Belmont for disaster preparedness planning. Since its inception, the Belmont Safe Schools Program has expanded to include cooperative educational efforts aimed at improving the safety of the youth of the community. In 2005 the Belmont Safe Schools Program was awarded the League of California Cities, Helen Putnam Award for Excellence in the Public Safety.

The overall goal of the Belmont Safe Schools Program is to give the necessary tools to our schools, so they are as self-sufficient as possible during an emergency or disaster situation. Toward this end, each school has developed an emergency plan for their school and has practiced and drilled those plans both on their own and with the Belmont Police Department as well as Belmont-San Carlos Fire. In addition each school has a direct link to Belmont Police Communications over the Safe Schools radio channel.

Significant events at our schools in recent years, showed a need for a rapid, easy-to-operate system for providing timely & accurate information to students, parents and staff in the event of an emergency/disaster situation. Two such incidents were the March-April 2006 storms, during which Belmont Oaks / Merry Moppet Academy experienced storm damage and had to close during the middle of a school day and the May 2007 multi-casualty traffic collision at Ralston Middle School. In both of these instances, the school's ability to send accurate, concise, and timely information to parents and other affected persons would have been invaluable.

The Belmont Police Department began looking into the various emergency alert systems available and several vendors were contacted:

- Connect-Ed
- 247 Notification, Inc
- e2Campus
- Rapid Notify

Ultimately, the opt-in type system, from Rapid Notify, was chosen. With this system, subscribers (students, parents, staff) sign-up to receive System Management Server (SMS) text messages. This approach was chosen, as it gives subscribers the ultimate choice on participation and eliminates the need for each school to continually maintain and manage a subscriber database.

Discussion

After several meetings with the 15 schools in the Belmont Safe Schools Program, nine decided to participate in the Rapid Notify System. Rapid Notify was chosen as it provided the needed features and had the lowest cost. The nine schools participating in the Rapid Notify System are:

- Notre Dame de Namur University
- Notre Dame High School
- Carlmont High School
- Belmont Community Learning Center
- Immaculate Heart of Mary School
- Charles Armstrong School
- Merry Moppet – Belmont Oaks Academy
- Holy Cross Pre-School
- Cipriani After-School Care

The nine schools participating in the Rapid Notify system account for approximately 5,550 of the approximately 9,550 students enrolled in the 15 schools of the Belmont Safe Schools Program. Notre Dame de Namur University was chosen as the test site during the development of this system and an example of the sign-up screen for the system is shown on Attachment A of this report.

The overall plan is for parents, students & staff at a participating school to go to their school's website and sign-up to receive text message alerts over their cell phone, or other mobile device, capable of receiving an SMS text message. Subscribers have the option of joining or leaving the service at their choosing. In most cases the individual school will be responsible for sending messages over their system, again increasing the self-sufficiency of the school. However, if needed the Belmont Police Department will have the ability of sending messages out over the

system.

The Belmont-Redwood Shores School District, chose not to participate in this project as they are currently testing an alternative system. The Belmont Police Department will remain in contact with the Belmont-Redwood Shores School District during the test of their system. In the event they commit to an alternate system, the Police Department will work with the district to ensure that the Police Department will also have the ability of sending messages over their system, if necessary.

The Rapid Notify system for Belmont Safe Schools is a supplement to the telephone notification system that has been in use by the City for over 15 years. That system, which is map-based, will continue to be used by the Belmont Police Department and other City Departments to send telephone messages to geographical areas of the City with information on incidents and activities affecting residents. In addition to this, all residents of San Mateo County have the option of signing up for the San Mateo County Alert Network text-messaging system. However, by giving the schools their own system, we not only add to their self-sufficiency in an emergency or disaster situation, but also add an important level of redundancy to our community outreach and notification network.

General Plan/Vision Statement

Establishment of the Rapid Notify System for the Belmont Safe Schools Program supports the City's Vision Statement in the following areas:

Distinctive Community Character

- We get involved in town matters because we care about living here.

Thriving Culture

- Belmont is a wonderfully safe and supportive place to raise a family.
- Our schools and library are the pride of our community.

Fiscal Impact

The \$16,834 initial cost for set-up and one-year maintenance, was funded from existing funds in the City's Disaster Preparedness budget and will cover establishment of systems for the nine schools. Further, yearly maintenance charges (\$1 per student) will be funded through the Belmont Safe Schools Program, which is not part of the City budget.

Public Contact

Posting of City Council agenda.

Recommendation

None.

Alternatives

1. Provide other direction to staff.
2. Take no action.

Attachments:

- A. Example of the Rapid Notify Sign-up screen for the NDNU Website.

Respectfully submitted,

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Attachment A



Example Subscriber Sign-Up Screen developed for Notre Dame de Namur University