

Texas School District Joins FirstNet to Increase Student Safety and Security

How Lindale ISD Responded to a Critical Emergency Using Priority Connectivity

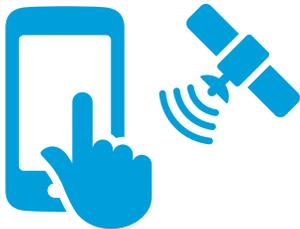


Lindale Independent School District (ISD) provides education to 4,200 students across six campuses in northeast Texas, just outside of Dallas. And 1,900 of those students and their parents depend on its transportation system to safely travel between home and the classroom.

Operating 53 bus routes, communication is essential to ensure every student is accounted for and transported securely. Dispatchers and bus drivers used cell phones to coordinate transportation, but due to limited capabilities and a poor connection, vital information was often delayed or missed.

A District-Wide Solution

Deputy Superintendent Jamie Holder knew it was time to upgrade the district's communication tools. After researching several options, including bulky and expensive radios, the district found a solution in FirstNet—a wireless broadband network that provides 24/7 priority and preemption.



“Safety is our number one priority,” said Holder. “FirstNet provided us with smartphones equipped with Push-To-Talk and GPS features, and we have priority over other network users when there’s an emergency.”

Lindale ISD immediately worked with the FirstNet team to integrate the innovative technology with existing processes to improve transportation operations.

Timely and Effective Technology

Shortly after FirstNet was implemented, it was put to good use when an emergency arose at one of the district's elementary schools. Students and faculty needed to be quickly and safely transported away from the facility due to a nearby unexpected gas leak.

Using the Push-To-Talk feature on his FirstNet device, the transportation director dispatched an alert, asking all bus drivers to respond immediately. The GPS tracking enabled in each device allowed him to track expected arrival times and communicate those to school staff.

“With the help of FirstNet, we were able to safely evacuate 550 people, including faculty and students, to another campus in approximately 12 minutes,” said Holder.

This coordinated response wouldn’t have been possible with previous methods of communication, which would have entailed calling each driver individually to survey availability and bus location. Access to group communication and vehicle location was critical to implementing such a time-sensitive response.



Improving Daily Operations



With these technology improvements, transportation management can effectively address day-to-day needs. For example, using GPS to locate groups of students in transit and re-routing buses due to weather.

“I can track buses to ensure we’re running on schedule daily, and in the event of an accident, it’s much easier and quicker to send help,” said Operations Manager Angel Ragland.

Additionally, management can communicate securely over the network in real-time with bus drivers for one-on-one communication and additional awareness of status and availability.

“Push-To-Talk allows us to both call one bus at a time or get in touch with an entire fleet in an emergency situation,” added Transportation Director Pete Ridge.



Moving Forward in Uncertain Times

Lindale ISD has already experienced major wins with moving to FirstNet in the year since they’ve implemented — from unforeseen emergency situations to modernizing transportation processes.

Even with the COVID-19 pandemic’s impact on the district’s academic calendar, Holder and his team are looking ahead to prepare for another successful school year.

Hopefully we’ll open campuses in August,” he said. “In the meantime, I’m working with our police, transportation and maintenance partners to determine ways to expand our FirstNet usage.”