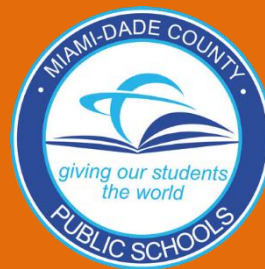# Connect-ED Communication System Guidelines

School Operations – Technical Colleges & Adult Education Centers

Overview

Connect-ED is a telephone communications system that allows schools and District offices to send important messages to students and staff quickly and efficiently. Miami-Dade County Public Schools began utilizing Connect-ED in January 2006.

The Office of Public Relations, in collaboration with School Operations, developed these guidelines to provide District and school-site staff with procedures for the appropriate use of the Connect-ED system in providing important information to students and staff.

Access to Connect-ED

The Chief Communications Officer will manage access to Connect-ED for District-level staff and the Assistant Superintendent for School Operations will handle access for Technical Colleges and Adult Education Centers.

Three (3) staff members at each school will be granted access to Connect-ED; typically the principal, an assistant principal, and a staff member tasked with attendance monitoring. These three staff members are the authorized personnel at a school designated to record and distribute Connect-ED messages to families and employees of that school. The exception is the need to record messages in languages other than English. A principal may designate a staff member to record those messages on his or her behalf.

When employees are transferred or leave the District's employment, access to Connect-ED will be terminated. Please contact Mr. Carlos A. Manrique, Supervisor, School Operations – Division of Adult & Workforce Education, to report new users, transfers or departures. He can be reached via e-mail at cmanrique@dadeschools.net.

Message Types

Using Connect-ED, the District and schools can send four types of messages:

Attendance: Attendance alerts to students regarding school closures.

Emergency: Emergency messages include, but are not limited to: weather-related emergencies and/or incidents and events that impact the health and safety of students and/or employees. Unlike the other three types of messages, emergency messages are sent by Connect-ED to up to six different telephone numbers; the system dials telephone numbers listed for each student until it reaches a telephone that is answered.

      School Operations will send emergency messages that pertain to the entire District or a significant percentage of schools.

In case of an emergency at an individual school, the Principal should consult with the Assistant Superintendent and/or Administrative Director for School Operations to determine the desirability of sending an emergency message. Information submitted to students in a stressful situation should be clear and reassuring.

One advantage of emergency calls is the ability to communicate directly with students regarding an emergency, which may still be underway at the time of the call, without having to rely on the media. A school may be able to allay fears and minimize unnecessary concerns.

Keep in mind that the students' first concern will be their safety and well-being. The script for any emergency call must keep this in mind by providing the most complete information available and addressing typical issues such as special dismissal plans.

Outreach: Outreach messages are sent to students and staff to communicate important news and developments related to the District or a school and to provide information about upcoming events, early registration, testing dates, field trips, etc.

Survey: Single Survey messages allow recipients using a telephone keypad to RSVP for school events or to provide input on school issues. For example, recipients could respond to a survey on registration process, school cleanliness, security, etc.

Text Messages

Text messaging is to be used in emergency situations only **and must be approved by School Operations in advance**. Text messaging allows you to communicate important information to students in a timely manner. Current cell phone numbers must be entered into ISIS in order to take advantage of this valuable communication tool.

Email Messages

When you schedule a message, you have the option to send the message to your contacts' e-mail addresses in addition to sending to their phones. The choice will appear during the message set up process. Simply check off the email option. During the set up process, you will have the opportunity to create an email script that may or may not be the same as your phone script.

The e-mail feature will be automatically initiated on automated attendance notification and emergency messages.

This e-mail option is available for outreach, attendance and emergency messages and is included in the cost of your service. If the message is a voice recording, the e-mail will contain a link to listen to the message on the user's computer. If the message is Text-to-Speech, the full text will be contained in the e-mail. It is highly suggested that you utilize the Text-to-Speech function to increase the effectiveness of the e-mail option.

The e-mail will appear to come from <u>the school with a from address of email@blackboardconnect.com</u>. The title of your message will be the subject. Recipients will not be able to reply to the e-mail. As stated above, recipients are directed to contact your institution should they wish to be removed from the list, thus allowing you to maintain full control of your database.

<u>Message Frequency</u>

M-DCPS pays for Connect-ED on a per-student basis, not a per-call basis. While this arrangement in theory allows for an unlimited number of calls, the company that created Connect-ED has best-practice research that should govern M-DCPS usage.

<u>Attendance and emergency calls should be made by schools and the District on an as-needed basis.</u> This includes reminder calls to select groups of students (a weekly Thursday evening call to students involved in Saturday morning tutoring, for example).

Best practices recommend community outreach and single survey messages to the same group of contacts in a school should be limited to **two calls per month**. Keep in mind that students and employees also receive automated calls from the District. It is helpful to be selective in choosing the recipient of your message. Messages may be sent to specific groups in Adult-Ed levels. **However, you are permitted up to 5 calls per month.**

No more than six districtwide community outreach or single-survey calls should be made in a school year.

<u>Message Length</u>

Messages should last no longer than <u>60 seconds</u>. If a message is longer than 60 seconds, a recipient is likely to lose interest and hang up and an answering machine or voice mail system may cease recording after that length of time. Best practices suggest that messages of 30 to 45 seconds are optimal; this is a good deal of time for a well-articulated message. This allows adequate time to record important points without losing the recipient's attention.

Message Delivery Times

Because Connect-ED will make several attempts to deliver calls that initially meet busy signals or go unanswered, please schedule your calls to be delivered beginning in the afternoon, no later than 8 p.m. This allows for repeat attempts to be completed by 9 p.m. on the date of delivery. As a rule, avoid scheduling messages to be delivered between the hours of 9 p.m. and 6 a.m. (unless the message to be delivered is time-sensitive or is related to an emergency). **When scheduling message delivery on the Connect-ED website, remember to select Eastern Time.**

Message Language Preferences

Messages may be recorded in the three languages spoken by a majority of M-DCPS families – English, Haitian-Creole and Spanish. In general, each school should designate appropriate staff members to translate and/or record messages in languages other than English. If a school has no staff member capable of translating a script, the Bureau of Cultural Communications in the Office of Public Relations may be able to assist a school on first-come, prioritized basis. Given the limited staff in that bureau and its focus on District- and Region-level translations, a school must do its utmost to translate a message before reaching out (for example, a school could provide a rough draft script in Spanish or Haitian-Creole, permitting the bureau's translators simply to edit the script). Should you require this service, please contact the Office of Public Relations at 305-995-1126, at least ten (10) working days prior to the scheduled recording date. The earlier a message is submitted, the more likely it is that the Office of Public Relations will be able to translate it on a school's behalf.

Incorrect Telephone Numbers

Among the information provided by Connect-ED after each telephone call is a list of telephone numbers that are not working and the names of students for which those numbers are listed in VACS. Schools should review these bad telephone numbers no less than once a month and contact students to obtain correct/up-to-date telephone numbers for the District's records. In addition, you will be contacted directly by School Operations – Division of Adult & Workforce Education to update any incorrect phone numbers. If you are contacted by a community member who is <u>not</u> a student of a M- DCPS but is receiving Connect-ED calls and you are unable to identify the student assigned the number, contact Carlos A. Manrique via email at <u>cmanrique@dadeschools.net.</u>

<u>Tips for Recording Messages</u>

Prepare
- Know what you want to say. Make notes or bullets, practice, and then record the message.
- Listen to your message after recording. Rerecord and rerecord until you are comfortable with the message.

Repeat important information
- Repeat important information (e.g. time, date, and location of a meeting) at least twice during the message – at the beginning and at the end of the message.

Grab Their Attention
- Let the recipient know immediately that the message contains important information from the school.
- Begin the message with, "Hello, this is (principal's name), principal of (school name) with an important message for you."

Be Yourself
- Say it like you are speaking to a parent across the table.
- Think about tone, inflection, emphasis, but most importantly be natural.

<u>Sample Messages</u>

Throughout the school year, School Operations will be in contact with Principals to offer suggestions on possible messages to be sent to parents. These recommendations will be sent via Weekly Briefings. Below is an initial set of examples:

Attendance

> *Hello, this is (principal's name), principal of (school name), calling to inform you that daily school attendance is critical to promoting high academic achievement. Please contact (name of attendance clerk or case manager) to discuss your absence. Should you have questions, please call the school at (000) 000-0000.*

Start of School

Hello, this is (principal's name), principal of (school name), with an important message for you. I'm calling to welcome you to an exciting new semester. We look forward to the first day of school on (first day of school). The faculty and staff are excited about the year ahead and partnering with you to help provide a quality education. We look forward to seeing you on (first day of school). In the interim, please feel free to call us at (000) 000- 0000.

Open House

Hello, this is (principal's name), principal of (school name), with an important message for you. I'm calling to invite you to our open house on (day and date), at (time). This will be a great opportunity for you to meet your teachers, case managers, tutors and counselors. We hope that you will make plans to join us. We look forward to seeing you on (day and date) at (time) for our open house. For more information please call the school at (000) 000- 0000.

EVENT

Hello, this is (principal's name), principal of (school name). I'm calling to inform you of a school-wide event we are sponsoring. It is called (name of event). We hope you will support this effort. As always, thank you for your continued support in helping us provide a quality education for your child. For more information, please call Mr./Ms._____at (000) 000-0000.

Online Training

Training and tutoring is available online at www.blackboardconnect.com.