

MESQUITE INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

THE CHALLENGE

Like those of any large K-12 school district, administrators and managers of the Mesquite Independent School District in the Dallas, Texas area are always aware of their responsibility to provide a safe educational atmosphere. The district's 35,000 students gather in 48 campuses, scattered across the communities of Mesquite and Balch Springs, as well as parts of Garland and Dallas. With 32 elementary schools, eight middle schools and five high schools, the district's facilities add up to more than 70 buildings.

The district team began the process of updating its emergency communication system in 2006. As one of the largest districts in the Dallas area, their major concerns in researching available solutions were adaptability, making sure they could handle all aspects of emergency management, and having the ability to meet any regulations well into the future.

The district's Avaya® phone system handles 5,000 extensions and 3,500 handsets. About one-third are DID lines, but the majority are classroom telephones and are non-DID numbers. By making classroom phones non-DID, their use as a normal telephone is intentionally restricted. For example, a parent cannot call a classroom phone directly to reach a teacher. This limited functionality, however, creates a problem for 9-1-1 calls made from these phones.

Emergency calls in PBX-based systems can quickly result in problems for emergency responders. Without the benefit of an effective, flexible enhanced 9-1-1 (E9-1-1) solution, emergency callers are identified only by their main building address—not the exact room and floor where they are located. Valuable time is lost while responders search for the source of the call instead of providing care in a life-threatening situation.

Over the years the district had experienced situations where it was difficult to pinpoint the exact location of an emergency caller in their widely scattered facilities. Fortunately, none of the incidents

was serious, but they knew that providing enhanced 9-1-1 for their district was the right thing to do. "We knew we were vulnerable," explained Technical Services Manager Clay Cottles. "When the public safety people are standing in front of you and you can't tell them where the emergency is located, you just know you have to do something."



OVERVIEW

Founded in 1902, the Mesquite Independent School District (MISD) has built a record of achievement in instructional program quality, policy development, efficiency of operation and student co-curricular activities.

INDUSTRY

Education (K-12)

BUSINESS DRIVERS

- Automatically provide accurate location information for 9-1-1 calls originating from anywhere within the Mesquite facilities
- Continue to provide all those in broadly scattered facilities with fast response to safety issues

SOLUTION

- Spok® Enhanced 9-1-1

RESULTS

- Established a highly reliable, efficient system for responding to emergency calls
- Accurately and automatically provide location information for classroom and other non-DID lines

CASE STUDY

Cottles said the planning group was especially concerned with what could happen after hours. "A teacher or a coach could be in a building late," Cottles said. "Nobody would be there to help identify the location of the 9-1-1 call. If someone were to call from one of Mesquite's high schools, where there are eight different buildings, it's hard to narrow it down."

They were also acutely aware of the problem of finding the right classroom if that was the location of an emergency call. They didn't want to move to DID phones for classrooms because of the increased potential for disruptions. The district challenged potential providers to help them build a system that could handle their combination of phone systems, as well as their large and growing infrastructure, while allowing them to adapt quickly to changing communication technology.

▶ "Having a phone system that's reliable is a key way for us to make sure our students, staff, and visitors are as safe as possible."

Clay Cottles
Technical Services Manager,
Mesquite Independent School
District

THE SOLUTION

District staff evaluated solutions from Spok and another company. Their evaluation was thorough and particularly focused on two main considerations: the company's service reputation and their technology's ability to handle the district's complex, highly changeable communications infrastructure.

Through reference checks with existing users of each solution, they learned that support from Spok was superior. "We thought [Spok's] support was better, which we have since found to be true; it's great," Cottles said.

The district staff was also impressed with and preferred the way that Spok managed their mix of classroom extension and traditional DID dialing. Spok's dynamic DID feature automates the assignment of location information, wherever in the district a call may originate. When someone dials 9-1-1 from a classroom, for example, the Spok E9-1-1 system detects that, automatically assigning an exact location for the number, such as building three, second floor, south wing, room 218. The Spok solution and the automatic location identification (ALI) database holding this data then pass this location along to the public safety answering point (PSAP).

Another key advantage to the Spok E9-1-1 solution is that the PSAP can quickly call the number back if the call is dropped or whenever they need to verify their information to ensure accurate, fast response. Finally, the Spok E9-1-1 solution and its ability to handle most of their tasks automatically, represents significant time and operational cost savings for the district. Explained Cottles, "The other system we looked at required more user involvement. It was key for us to have more automation."

THE RESULTS

Since implementing Spok's E9-1-1 solution in 2006, the Mesquite Independent School District has been able to quickly and accurately provide complete caller location information to assist emergency responders. The technical and administrative staff in the district trusts that crucial information will be delivered instantaneously, every time.

With the greater awareness of security issues in schools today, technology such as increased use of cameras, door controls, automated door locks, and communication enhancements plays a growing and important role in daily operations. The Mesquite Independent School District relies on providers such as Spok to help them meet the challenges they face. "Having a phone system that's reliable is a key way for us to make sure our students, staff, and visitors are as safe as possible," Cottles said.