

# Back to School during COVID-19 with Keller Independent School District



## Overview

### The Need

A way to connect and organize students and staff to continue school processes amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

### The Solution

A platform for easily and efficiently managing contact tracing and notifying the correct personnel without disrupting daily processes.

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## Background

For many emergency managers, COVID-19 (Coronavirus) has been a defining moment in their careers. All of the playbooks have been effectively rewritten as everyone tries to desperately adapt while complying to ever-changing safety standards and recommendations. Not to mention, "regular" emergencies such as wildfires, hurricanes, and more, have not stopped just because of a pandemic, nor have the norms of everyday life; employees still must work and students must continue to learn.

Maintaining a sense of normalcy for students throughout this pandemic has continued to be a priority. School districts have been doing all that they can to ensure their students can continue with their education while maintaining their safety.

Chris McLaughlin, Emergency Management Coordinator for Keller Independent School District (ISD), and his team have made sure to adjust day-to-day operations to guarantee that not only can students get back to school, but stay safe in school.

This webinar was originally recorded on September 18th, 2020.

## COVID-19 Hits

Keller ISD is a moderately large district in North Central Texas, composed of 39,000 students and staff across 42 schools ranging from elementary to high school. The district, like most of the country, was taken by surprise when schools closed on March 13th, 2020.

When spring break came around, many students and staff were unaware that they were not going to be coming back to the classroom. With the switch to online learning came many struggles, one being that school supplies, teaching materials, and student medications, among other things, had been left behind and were now unavailable.

The summer months brought the opportunity to finally reunite students and staff with their personal belongings. In addition, it was extremely important to continue with distributing emergency meals to maintain some continuity of basic needs for students, as well as maintaining buildings and scheduling safe social opportunities such as outdoor activities.

Keller ISD onboarded with Veoci in April of 2020 to aid in their COVID-19 incident management. Chris described preparing for the summer process as "...a little bit of a learning curve, jumping in with feet first." Planning took three to four weeks, as district employees learned how to use the platform, accounts were created, and forms and dashboards were configured to collect and ultimately display the data.

Forms tracked activity requests and related information that the school district then reviewed, prioritized, and scheduled, all with the goal of containing the spread of COVID-19 in mind. Medical screening forms were made for staff visiting schools and students participating in outdoor events. Providing the information was required to be on campus, shared with appropriate parties (i.e., supervisors and coaches) and collected to aid in contact tracing at a later date, if necessary.

Dashboards provided an opportunity for internal users, as well as the public, to view all of the appropriate data clearly. This helped the individual schools schedule activities at non-competing times, as many families had multiple children that attended different schools within the district. The dashboards provided a calendar for families to coordinate pick-ups, and were key in creating a strong and communal situational awareness.

## Prevention, Mitigation, and Response

Creating the safest processes for students, parents, and staff in the midst of the pandemic was like "trying to build the airplane while you're 30,000 feet in the air," Chris said. After laying this groundwork in the summer, it was time to apply the procedures to in-person learning for the fall semester starting in late August 2020.

Keller ISD eased into the school year over three half days, allowing time to review procedures and ensure stability before moving forward. Three pillars guided the district:

### Prevention

Staff members fill out an extensive screening form each day. This form asks staff everything from location identification, their on-campus interactions, and general questions of temperature and diagnoses of COVID-19 within their close contacts. Chris said a thorough level of detail was not required, and that having the basic information was a great help with recollection in the case of contact tracing.

Parents fill out a screening form for their students as well, though theirs is far shorter; just three questions to be answered by every student, from every family, everyday. The form can be easily accessed on the district's app, or through a QR code that is posted onto the entrances of every school.

Both medical forms track the answers and, after being submitted, display whether or not the staff member or student is cleared to enter the building. If a staff member is denied entry, their supervisor receives a notification. If a student is denied entry, the district asks the parents to keep their child home and to answer a few short follow-up questions that streamline contact tracing.

The data is collected and analyzed to find key influential figures that are used to make informed decisions.

For example, Keller ISD identified a 4% student “Not Clear” rate over a two day period in a single school, which the district considered an early trigger point. Though this was not the only figure used to inspire a public health discussion, it was a threshold adopted from an influenza outbreak study published in the Emerging Infectious Diseases Journal in November 2009. The hope was that this real-time number would reveal a trend before rates of absenteeism and community spread began to increase.

## Mitigation

Mitigation efforts within Keller ISD follow suggested guidelines, including universal mask-wearing and social distancing while on campus. Physical barriers as well as reminders of hand hygiene were posted within the schools. Families were also given the option to have their students participate in hybrid or cohort learning.

## Response

When a staff member or a student receives a “Not Clear” message, a self reporting form is then distributed to the individual. This form asks more in-depth questions, including symptoms, how the diagnosis was made, the last time the individual was on campus, their identification number, as well as other pieces of information that may be pertinent to the case. The completion of the form then begins the contact tracing process.

Every self reporting form is collected and put into one of the three management categories on the assignment team’s dashboard: unassigned, assigned, and triaged. The categories allow for assignment and for situational awareness for each case. Cases are automatically escalated when their progress has been stagnant for 24 hours or more, a fail-safe for ensuring each case is addressed and that necessary updates to each case are made.

Once the contact tracers complete their forms, the campus communications team contacts the families and informs them of the active case. After communication has been made, the figures on the public dashboard are updated. When trackers complete a positive case follow-up and confirm that symptoms have resolved, the active case is then marked inactive, and dashboard reports are refreshed to reflect the changes.

Public health reports are generated weekly for the Texas Education Agency (TEA) and automatically imported into TEA systems. For other state and local agencies, Keller ISD can generate reports internally that answer the exact questions that are being asked in the exact sequence, which in-turn, streamlines the data import process.

## Looking Ahead

As the school year continues, Chris McLaughlin and Keller ISD are hoping to add a fourth pillar to their COVID-19 guide: recovery. Until then, the streamlined back-to-school process that has been put into action is allowing their district to achieve and maintain one of its most important goals: student and staff safety.