



## Warm response to cold weather crisis in Shelby County Schools

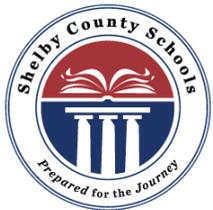
Shelby County | Columbina, Alabama | 30 Schools | 20,000+ Students | 2,660 Staff members

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*Every district needs a notification system. Our stakeholders expected immediate communication during times of crisis, so we knew we needed to update our approach. I can't imagine how we would have handled the weather situation last year had it not been for Blackboard Mass Notifications.”*

**Cindy Warner**

Community Ed/Public Relations



**21,700+**  
MESSAGES  
successfully delivered  
across 2 days

**120**  
USERS

of Blackboard Mass  
Notifications in Shelby  
County Schools

**During Shelby County's first year of implementing Blackboard Mass Notifications, they were able to effectively implement an emergency response strategy during the 2014 polar vortex. Not only does Shelby County successfully use notifications during inclement weather, but they also use it on a more frequent basis to send home messages about academics and school activities.**

### Challenge

With an average of one school shooting occurring each week, it is critical for schools to be prepared in the event that such an emergency should occur. At Shelby County an event of this nature did occur, with a gunman taking five students hostage. While the district had other methods in place to communicate with parents, the one piece that was missing was a rapid notification component. They realized that something needed to change, and that an emergency notification system was no longer a nice-to-have, but a must-have.

### Solution

Shelby County took a holistic approach to their district's mass communication strategy. This included:

- Designating staff members to use Blackboard Mass Notifications from both a district and school level.
- Training principals and registrars to send out regular school-related communications, such as attendance, event, and lunch balance notifications.
- Pre-populating templates and lists to enable the district to promptly communicate during emergency situations.

### Results

Blackboard has helped Shelby County keep their community and parents informed during emergencies and school/student related updates. For example, the area was paralyzed during the 2014 polar vortex, with 12,500 students stranded at school. The district used Blackboard to send frequent updates informing parents that their children were safe and sheltered.

At Shelby County, Blackboard has:

**Improved parent sentiment:** Parents are pleased with the level of communication they receive from schools, particularly in emergency situations where communication is core to calming fears.

**Improved parent engagement:** Parents now gain access to important student information on a daily or weekly basis.

**Eased principal communication:** Previously, principals were sending out messages manually, which accounted for quite a bit of their time. Now principals can dedicate their time to other pressing responsibilities.

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