

CASE STUDY

# How a Technical School Improved Its Emergency Communications to Combat Wildfires

Armadillo Technical Institute (ATI), a public charter school located in Phoenix, Oregon, serves as an alternative setting to continuing education. In the past, ATI has used numerous modes of communication to relay messages and disseminate information to families and students. The school realized that it needed to implement an all-in-one communications platform that optimized its ability to communicate critical emergency information during wildfire season. ATI found that solution in SchoolStatus Connect, which assisted the school in staying connected to families when the community was hit by one of the most destructive fires in Oregon's history.

## Armadillo Technical Institute



### Use Case

School-wide communication & emergency alerts



### District Size

110 students



### Products Used

SchoolStatus Connect



## Challenges

ATI was juggling a multitude of communication platforms. In an attempt to convey important information to families, the school had an electronic notification system in place and also used paper correspondence to alert the school community about attendance concerns as they related to safety protocols. ATI's website and social media channels were used for more general, school-wide announcements. Staff made phone calls and sent text messages to contact families when all other methods were unsuccessful.

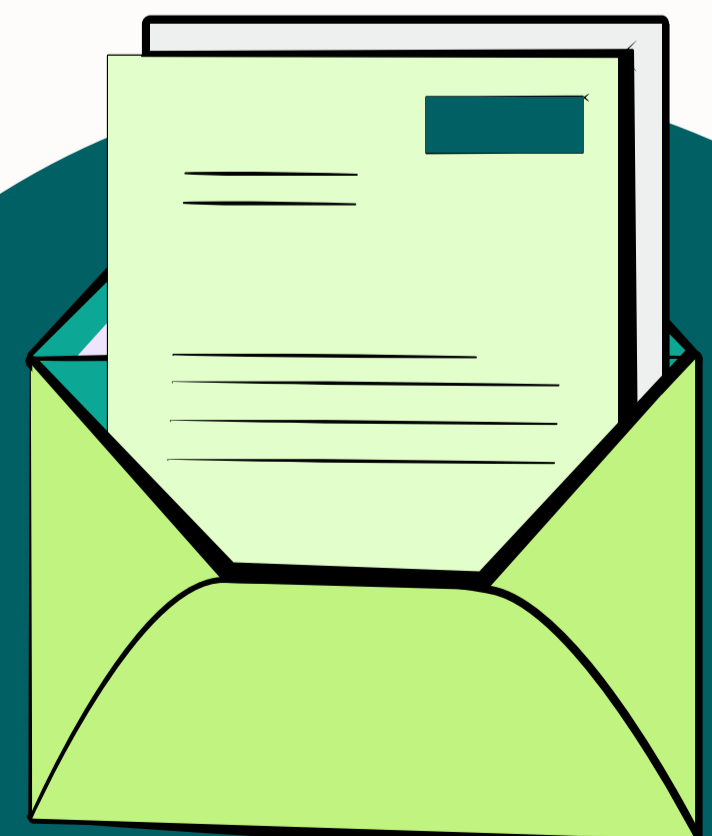
The situation was untenable. Members of the school community found it difficult to send the same message to various groups and keep track of what communication was going back and forth. As ATI Executive Director Summer Brandon put it, there are "a million systems in education, and it's overwhelming to have to have different ones in use."

ATI had been fairly successful in engaging families, but it would often take staff multiple attempts to connect with a family member. They needed a unified system that could effectively and simultaneously communicate with families and students.

## Solution

ATI's communication needs came to the forefront on September 8, 2020, when the Alameda Fire ignited on the first day of the 2020-2021 school year. The school's small staff urgently needed to get in touch with students and families about the unfolding disaster. Fortunately, ATI had already adopted SchoolStatus Connect after administrators had set the goal of finding what Brandon described as a "unifying communication system."

By the time the fire broke out, SchoolStatus Connect was serving as the school's sole emergency notification system. With SchoolStatus, ATI was able to update families in real time with evacuation notices, power outage information, and food, housing, shelter, and mental health resources. In addition, SchoolStatus Connect announcements to staff kept them updated on what information families and students were receiving, enabling them to follow up with clear, consistent, and vital information.





## **SchoolStatus**. Connect

SchoolStatus came to the rescue in this highly challenging situation. There were many families displaced by the fire who were without a reliable internet connection, but because SchoolStatus offers a mobile-friendly app, those families were able to receive messages on their cell phones, providing them a lifeline of important updates.

Many of the families spoke Spanish as their primary language, and so SchoolStatus Connect's translation tool, which automatically translates messages for users, ensured that they would receive and understand every update





# Outcomes

**The Alameda wildfire affirmed ATI's objective for what Brandon called an "unforeseeable need to have a lot of quick, clear and consistent information sharing." She added, "That's really the big win with SchoolStatus Connect."**

The school has enjoyed other ongoing benefits after implementing the solution. With SchoolStatus Connect, ATI was able to take all of the once-fragmented messages, posts, and phone calls and bring them together in one place, so they were easily accessible by staff and families.

"I really cannot imagine that first month of school [without SchoolStatus Connect]," said Brandon, adding that SchoolStatus Connect ensured that everyone in the community had access to efficient and timely communication.



## Summary

Even though ATI's first communication successes were realized during a tragedy, it no longer struggles with a lack of family engagement throughout the school year. With SchoolStatus Connect, ATI is in a stronger position to communicate about fires and other issues they encounter by taking advantage of its simple, effective, all-in-one communication platform.

**"Having good communication was a literal life saver," said Brandon. SchoolStatus Connect "helped make what was already [a] chaotic and crazy [time], survivable...for learners and our community."**



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