

AlertNow Frequently Asked Questions

Below is an overview of common questions and issues regarding AlertNow broadcasts.

How is AlertNow used?

AlertNow allows the Administrative Center and each District 62 school to send important information quickly to parents and staff via phone and email. Emergency situations, school delays or cancellations due to inclement weather are sent by the Administrative Center. During the 2009-2010 school year, each school will use AlertNow to contact parents and staff about special events, testing schedules, report card distribution, open houses, delayed buses, field trips, etc.

As a parent or guardian of a student enrolled in School District 62, will I need to register or sign-up to receive messages from AlertNow?

If you are a parent or guardian of a student enrolled in School District 62, you are not required to register for the AlertNow parent notification system. ALL parents and guardians of students enrolled in the school division are automatically enrolled in this communication system. We encourage you to contact your school secretary when you change your phone numbers or email addresses.

How does AlertNow notify parents/guardians?

As the parent/guardian of a student, it is important for you to understand how messages are delivered to you.

- ✓ For non-emergency messages, you will receive a telephone call most likely to your home phone.
- ✓ Should a school emergency occur, in addition to being called at home, you will also be notified through the various phone numbers you have included on your child's registration form.
- ✓ In addition to being notified by phone during a school emergency, you will also receive messages via email, if listed on your child's registration form.
- ✓ The notification system has the capability of calling five of your phone numbers (home, alternate or cell, and work) and sending messages up to five different email accounts for parents/guardians identified as residing with the student or identified as receiving copies of student reports.
- ✓ Multiple phone numbers and email addresses will only be used to notify you during a school emergency, closing, or cancellation.

How are AlertNow messages delivered to staff?

AlertNow is used to communicate with staff in a timely manner during an emergency, school closing, or cancellation due to inclement weather. For all staff members, AlertNow messages are delivered as follows:

- ✓ Emergency, cancellation, or delay messages - you will receive multiple messages that are sent to your home phone, cell phone, and personal e-mail (if provided). In these cases, such a message would be Administration Center generated. If you have Caller ID, the number 411-000-000 will appear in the display.
- ✓ School generated messages and reminders are sent to your primary phone number and email, if selected by the sender. Your school phone number will appear in the display.

How do I know if I received a message from AlertNow?

- ✓ If you have Caller ID, for an emergency message, 411-000-0000 will appear in the display.
- ✓ If you have Caller ID, for school closings, cancellations, or delays due to inclement weather 411-000-0000 will appear in the display.
- ✓ If you have Caller ID, for general school announcements and reminders the number of your child's school will appear in the display.
- ✓ AlertNow will leave a message on any answering machine or voicemail.
- ✓ If the AlertNow message stops playing, press any key 1-9 and the message will replay from the beginning.
- ✓ If an email is sent the subject line will include the announcement title.

What should I do if I do not receive an AlertNow phone call?

One of the reasons you may not receive a phone call is that your information may be outdated. If you do not receive a call via your home phone:

- ✓ Parents are asked to contact the office staff at their child's school to ensure the phone number is current.
- ✓ Staff should contact District 62 Human Resources, 1595 or limosanij@d62.org, to ensure that contact information is current.

The message started playing and then stopped. Why?

AlertNow utilizes the industry's most Advanced Answering Machine Detection (AAMD) software. The system starts the broadcast immediately upon telephone pickup; simultaneously, it is listening for interruptions. If the system is not interrupted by noise or someone speaking within the first 3.5 seconds, the message is delivered. If the system detects a greeting longer than a few seconds, the system treats this as an outgoing message from an answering machine and will stop playing, wait for silence (usually after the beep), and then start the message over so that it can be recorded in its entirety.

While the software is 98% accurate in distinguishing live vs. machine, errors can occur if the person repeatedly says "hello" or answers in a noisy environment (i.e. traffic, children playing, loud music or television, dog barking, etc.). Generally in these situations, the system stops playing the message. It is waiting for silence to start the message over. In a noisy environment, where silence is unattainable, call recipients can press the number 1 on their telephone and the message will play from the beginning without interruption.

What if the line is busy or there is no answer?

The AlertNow system will make up to four attempts (depending on account settings) to reach each number, with three minutes in between each call. If the message is not delivered by the fourth attempt, the school is notified of such in the delivery report.

Why is my answering machine recording only half of the message?

If the answering machine greeting is sporadic with various periods of silence or does not start playing within 3 seconds, the system may read this as a live person and begin playing the message before the machine has started recording. This will result in a recording of silence (if the AlertNow message finishes playing before the machine begins recording) or of just the last portion of the AlertNow message. Parents can simply re-record their outgoing message so that there are no pauses. Alternately, if the answering machine is set to record for a specific amount of time (e.g., 30 seconds) and the AlertNow message runs longer than that, this will also result in message cut-off. The recommended solution is to set your machine to record for a longer period.

For answering machines or voicemail systems where it is necessary to enter a mailbox number, AlertNow is unable to leave a message.

My caller ID showed that the District or school called, but there was no voicemail. Why?

The system will ring a line up to six times. If your answering machine is set to pick up on seven or more rings, the message may not be delivered to your machine. Therefore, we encourage you to set your machine to six rings or fewer. Another possibility is that there is a break or a substantial silence in your machine's outgoing message, causing the AlertNow message to play prior to the machine actually recording. Please make sure that the greeting is seamless to facilitate successful message delivery.

Why doesn't the school's name and/or phone number appear on the caller ID?

AlertNow passes the caller ID information to the local telephone carriers, but it is up to those carriers to pass it along to their customers. Furthermore, different local telephone companies process caller ID information differently. Some provide the name associated with the number, while others do not. For example, a telephone company may require an individual to subscribe to "Advanced Caller ID" in order to receive the school name along with the phone number. Unfortunately, we have no control over this feature.

Will the system call phone numbers with extensions?

The AlertNow system is capable of dialing extensions, but we cannot guarantee the success of such a call. First of all, strict rules must be followed when entering the number in the AlertNow system. It must be formatted as ten digits, a space, a lower case x, then the extension number. Secondly, if the phone system on the recipient's end requires menu

navigation (such as, “Press 1 if you know your party’s extension”) AlertNow will not be able to deliver the call.

I have a telemarketer screening device or service. How will that affect the call?

Devices such as TeleZapper and services from the phone company such as Privacy Manager or Privacy Director are specifically designed to prevent “unknown” calls from progressing to the customer’s phone. Emergency calls launched through AlertNow display 411-000-0000 on the caller ID, which is a non-standard, “unknown” number, triggering most privacy manager services.

AlertNow’s software is designed to distinguish between a live answer and an answering machine, not to navigate through privacy management services. Parents or staff can contact their phone company and request that 411-000-000 be added to their list of allowed callers.

Have a question, suggestion, or comment about AlertNow?

As a parent or staff member, it is important that you contact us when things go as planned and when we need to make adjustments. Should you have a question, suggestion, or comment about AlertNow, please e-mail us at alertnow@d62.org.

Remember, in the case of an emergency, always check the District 62 website, www.d62.org, for announcements.

