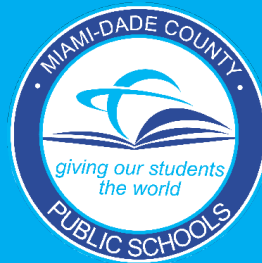


Communication...S
formation...Emplo
nect...Outreach...P
vovement...Comm
School...Informatio
ees...Connect...Out
ents...Involvement.
cation...School...In
Employees...Con
reach...Parents...Inv
Communication...S
formation...Emplo
nect...Outreach..
Involvement...Co
tion...School...Inf
Employees...Con
reach...Parents...Inv
Communication...S
formation...Emplo
nect...Outreach..
Involvement...Co
tion...School...Inf
Employees...Con
reach...Parents...Inv
Communication...S
formation...Emplo
nect...Outreach...P
vovement...Comm
School...Informa
ployees...Connect..
Parents...Involvem
munication...Schoo
tion.....Connect...

Connect-ED Communication System Guidelines



Office of Public Relations
August 2012

Miami-Dade County Public Schools

The School Board of Miami-Dade County, Florida

Perla Tabares Hantman, Chair
Dr. Lawrence S. Feldman, Vice Chair
Dr. Dorothy Bendross-Mindingall
Carlos L. Curbelo
Renier Diaz de la Portilla
Dr. Wilbert "Tee" Holloway
Dr. Martin Karp
Dr. Marta Pérez
Raquel A. Regalado

Superintendent of Schools

Alberto M. Carvalho

Student Advisor

Jude Bruno



Table of Contents

Overview	1
Access to Connect-ED	1
Message Types	1
E-mail Messages	3
Message Frequency	3
Message Length	4
Message Delivery Times	4
Message Recording Options	4
Message Language Preferences	5
Districtwide Messages	6
Automated Messages	6
Message Data	7
Incorrect Telephone Numbers	7
Tips for Recording Messages	7
Sample Messages	8
Frequently Asked Questions	9

Overview

Connect-ED is a telephone communications system that allows schools and the school district to send important messages to parents and to staff quickly and efficiently. Miami-Dade County Public Schools began using Connect-ED in January 2006.

The Office of Public Relations, in collaboration with School Operations, developed these guidelines to provide District and school-site staff with procedures for the appropriate use of the Connect-ED system and practical suggestions on the effective use of this system to provide important information to parents and staff.

Access to Connect-ED



The Chief Communications Officer will manage access to Connect-ED by District-level staff.

Three staff members at each school will be allowed access to Connect-ED, typically the principal, an assistant principal, and another staff member tasked with attendance monitoring. These three staff members are the only ones at a school designated to record and distribute Connect-ED messages to families and employees of that school. The exception is the need to record messages in languages other than English; a principal may designate a staff member to record those messages on his or her behalf.

When employees are transferred or leave the District's employment, access to Connect-ED will be terminated. Please contact Ms. Daiva Z. Fernandez, Media Relations Specialist, Office of Public Relations to report any new users, transfers or departures. She can be reached via email at dzfernandez@dadeschools.net.

Message Types

Using Connect-ED, the District and schools can send four types of messages:

-  Attendance messages alert parents and guardians to student absences on the day of the absence.
-  Emergency messages include, but are not limited to: weather-related emergencies and/or incidents and events that impact the health and safety of students and/or employees. Unlike the other three types of messages, emergency messages are sent by Connect-ED to up to six different telephone numbers; the system dials telephone numbers listed for each student until it reaches a telephone that is answered.

The District will send emergency messages that pertain to the entire District or a significant percentage of schools (for example, an entire Region).

In the case of an emergency at an individual school, the Principal should consult with the Region Superintendent and/or School Operations to determine the desirability of sending an emergency message. As a general rule of thumb, the more clear and reassuring the information we can provide parents in a stressful situation, the better.

One advantage of emergency calls is the ability to communicate directly with parents about an emergency, which may still be underway at the time of the call, without having to rely on the media. A school may be able to allay fears and minimize unnecessary concern in this way.

Keep in mind that parents' first question will be about the safety and well-being of their own children. The script for any emergency call must keep this in mind by providing the most complete information available that can be conveyed by telephone and by addressing typical issues such as special dismissal plans. *Example: A school must go into lockdown just before dismissal because an outsider is being sought by police. Hearing the report over their police scanners, television stations send crews to the school and begin live reports. Using Connect-ED, the principal could contact parents to let them know students are safe in locked classrooms and will be dismissed as soon as is practicable, then follow up with a second telephone call when dismissal begins.*

Community Outreach

Outreach messages are sent to parents and staff to communicate important news and developments related to the District or a school and to provide information about upcoming events, meetings, etc.

Single Survey

Single Survey messages allow recipients, using a telephone keypad, to RSVP for school events or to provide input on school issues. For example, recipients could respond to a survey on mandatory school uniforms.

Email Messages

When you schedule a message, you have the option to send the message to your contacts' e-mail addresses in addition to sending to their phones. The choice will appear during the message set up process. Simply check off the email option. You'll also see the email option is selected on the *Confirm Your Message* page, in the last step of

scheduling a message. During the set up process, you will have the opportunity to create an email script that may or may not be the same as your phone script:

The e-mail feature will be automatically initiated on automated attendance notification and emergency messages.

Please note the following:

1. The sending of the e-mail message confirms that you have obtained appropriate permission from intended recipients.
2. If an intended recipient requests that you withdraw his or her e-mail address, you must contact the Office of Public Relations within 24 hours of receipt of such withdrawal request in order to comply with relevant state regulations.

This e-mail option is available for outreach, attendance, and emergency messages and is included in the cost of your service. The type of message will be indicated to the recipient by the color of the e-mail: outreach messages will be blue, attendance messages will be yellow, and emergency messages will be red.

If the message is a voice recording, the e-mail will contain a link to listen to the message on the user's computer. If the message is Text-to-Speech, the full text will be contained in the e-mail. It is highly suggested that you utilize the Text-to-Speech function to increase the effectiveness of the e-mail option.

The e-mail will appear to come from the school with a from address of email@blackboardconnect.com. The title of your message will be the subject. Recipients will not be able to reply to the e-mail. As stated above, recipients are directed to contact your institution should they wish to be removed from the list, thus allowing you to maintain full control of your database.

Message Frequency

M-DCPS pays for Connect-ED on a per-student basis, not a per-call basis. While this arrangement in theory allows for an unlimited number of calls, the company that created Connect-ED has best-practice research that should govern M-DCPS usage.

Attendance and emergency calls should be made by schools and the District on an as-needed basis. Parents appreciate the timely notice. This includes reminder calls to select groups of students (a weekly Thursday evening call to students involved in Saturday morning tutoring, for example).

Best practices recommend community outreach and single survey messages to the same group of contacts in a school be limited to **two calls per month**. Keep in mind that parents and employees also receive automated calls from the District. It is helpful to

be selective in choosing the recipient of your message. Messages may be sent to specific groups or grade levels. However, you are permitted up to 17 calls per month.

No more than six districtwide community outreach or single-survey calls should be made in a school year.

Message Length

Messages should last no longer than 60 seconds. If a message is longer than 60 seconds, a recipient is likely to lose interest and hang up and an answering machine or voice mail system may cease recording after that length of time. Best practice suggests that messages of 30 to 45 seconds are optimal; this is a good deal of time for a well-articulated message. This allows adequate time to record important points without losing the recipient's attention.

Message Delivery Times

Because Connect-ED will make several attempts to deliver calls that initially meet busy signals or go unanswered, please schedule your calls to be delivered beginning in the afternoon, no later than 5 p.m.; this allows for repeat attempts to be completed by 7 p.m. on the date of delivery. As a rule, avoid scheduling messages to be delivered between the hours of 9 p.m. and 6 a.m. (unless the message to be delivered is time-sensitive or is related to an emergency). **When scheduling message delivery on the Connect-ED website, remember to select Eastern Time.**

Message Recording Options

Connect-ED messages can be recorded in three ways: record with voice, text-to-speech or blend it.

The text-to-speech option is only appropriate for attendance messages. Connect-ED can deliver text-to-speech messages in English and in Spanish; a general attendance message has been recorded by the Office of Public Relations for schools that choose this option for attendance messages. The advantage of a text-to-speech attendance message is the Connect-ED's technology allows it to automatically insert the first name of the student for whom the call is being made. The technology also inserts the date and the school's name in this way. One disadvantage is that the text-to-speech voice is computer-generated and sounds that way. Another disadvantage is that the message cannot be listened to before sending; **when using text-to-speech message recording, always proofread your message carefully.**

In most cases, including attendance calls if a principal so chooses, the District asks that Principals use the "record with voice" option for message recording. Best practice suggests that each school establish a single voice for its messages (or a voice in each language in which messages are delivered if necessary) to make the messages recognizable and more credible. The Principal is the preferred voice for a school. The

“record with voice” option is especially effective when delivering emergency messages. It personalizes the call and lends a familiar, reassuring tone to an emergency situation. Also, a school or the District can listen to a “record with voice” message prior to its delivery to check its accuracy. Another option is blend it, which has a component that allows you to record a warm personal message but also add specific information that makes the message timely and relevant. It combines the elements of “record with voice” and text-to-speech.

Message Language Preferences

Messages may be recorded in the three languages spoken by a majority of M-DCPS families – English, Haitian-Creole and Spanish. Connect-ED provides language delivery options based on the Home Language Survey information for every student stored in ISIS. The message set-up procedure requires the designation of a language for each message; Connect-ED identifies the universe of possible families to which a message should be delivered based on the ISIS information.

In order to comply with parent’s requests to receive automated (Connect-ED) messages in a specific language, the Office of Information Technology Services (ITS) has created a special field in ISIS on the Parent Information screen called “Home Calling.” If a parent of your school wishes to receive automated messages in a language different from the language currently listed in the “Primary-Home” field, you may indicate the preferred calling language in the “Home Calling” field on the Parent Information screen in ISIS.

In general, each school should designate appropriate staff members to translate and/or record messages in languages other than English. If a school has no staff member capable of translating a script, the Bureau of Cultural Communications in the Office of Public Relations may be able to assist a school on first-come, prioritized basis. Given the limited staff in that bureau and its focus on District- and Region-level translations, a school must do its utmost to translate a message before reaching out (for example, a school could provide a rough draft script in Spanish or Haitian-Creole, permitting the bureau’s translators simply to edit the script). Should you require this service, please contact the Office of Public Relations at 305-995-1126, at least ten (10) working days prior to the scheduled recording date. The earlier a message is submitted, the more likely it is that the Office of Public Relations will be able to translate it on a school’s behalf.

Districtwide Messages

The Superintendent of Schools, in consultation with the Chief Communications Officer and other appropriate senior staff, will determine the need to initiate districtwide messages. In the case of emergency calls, these messages may include, but are not limited to, school closings or delays due to natural disasters, inclement weather, or other occurrences that may impact the health and safety of students, faculty, and staff.

The Superintendent will deliver messages to provide parents with information about districtwide events and/or special meetings, such as the Superintendent's Community meetings, college and/or job fairs, etc.

For all other districtwide messages, a request must be submitted in writing to the Chief Communications Officer for review and approval at least 10 working days prior to the requested date of delivery. The written request should include the date and time of message delivery, the target audience, sample script, and a contact name and telephone number. **A request to the Office of Public Relations does not guarantee approval of the message for districtwide delivery.** Written requests may be sent to:

Office of Public Relations
305-995-4638 (office)
305-995-1251 (fax)
WL # 9043, SBAB, Room 250

Attention: Mr. John J. Schuster, Chief Communications Officer
jschuster@dadeschools.net

or

Ms. Daiva Z. Fernandez, Media Relations Specialist
dzfernandez@dadeschools.net

Automated Messages

The District sends three types of automated messages to students. These messages are automatically generated from District reported data and do not need to be manually scheduled by individual schools.

Attendance Messages are sent when a student has been reported absent from school that day. Attendance messages are sent every evening at 6:00 P.M.

Truancy Attendance Messages are automatically generated when a student's absences have reached a certain threshold. Messages are sent when students have reached three, five, eight, or ten unexcused absences, or five consecutive absences.

Cafeteria Balance Messages are sent once a week, on Mondays, to students who have an unpaid lunch balance. The message reports the balance that is unpaid as of the previous Friday.

For the message types above, reports are generated and will be sent to the designated recipient at the school (i.e. Principal or attendance clerk) for necessary phone number corrections.

Message Data

Connect-ED sends detailed information about the receipt of every call to the person originating the message. Principals should examine this data (hang ups, length a listener stayed on the call, etc.) frequently and should measure indicators such as attendance at events about which parents are notified to determine the effectiveness of their Connect-ED messages.

Incorrect Telephone Numbers

Among the information provided by Connect-ED after each telephone call is a list of telephone numbers that are not working and the students for which those numbers are listed in ISIS. Schools must review these bad telephone numbers no less than once a month and contact families to obtain correct/up-to-date telephone numbers for the District's records. In addition, you will be contacted directly by the Office of Public Relations or Attendance Services to update any incorrect phone numbers. If you are contacted by a community member who is not a parent of a M-DCPS student but is receiving Connect-ED calls and you are unable to identify the student assigned the number, contact Ms. Daiva Z. Fernandez via email at dzfernandez@dadeschools.net.

Tips for Recording Messages

Prepare

- Know what you want to say. Make notes or bullets, practice, and then record the message.
- Listen to your message after recording. Rerecord and rerecord until you are comfortable with the message.

Repeat important information

- Repeat important information (e.g. time, date, and location of a meeting) at least twice during the message – at the beginning and at the end of the message.

Grab Their Attention

- Let the recipient know immediately that the message contains important information from the school.
- Begin the message with, "Hello, this is (principal's name), principal of (school name) with an important message for you."

Be Yourself

- Say it like you are speaking to a parent across the table.
- Think about tone, inflection, emphasis, but most importantly be natural.

Sample Messages

Throughout the school year, the Office of Public Relations will be in contact with Principals to offer suggestions on possible messages to be sent to parents. These recommendations will be sent via Weekly Briefings. Below is an initial set of examples:

Attendance

Hello, this is (principal's name), principal of (school name), calling to inform you that your child was absent today. As you know daily school attendance is critical to promoting high academic achievement. Please contact (attendance clerk's name) to discuss your child's absence. As always, thank you for your support in helping us provide your child with a quality education. Should you have questions, please call the school at (000) 000-0000.

Start of School

Hello, this is (principal's name), principal of (school name), with an important message for you. I'm calling to welcome you and your child to an exciting new school year. We look forward to the first day of school on (first day of school). The faculty and staff are excited about the year ahead and partnering with you to help provide a quality education for your child. We look forward to seeing you on (first day of school). In the interim, please feel free to call us at (000) 000-0000.

Open House

Hello, this is (principal's name), principal of (school name), with an important message for you. I'm calling to invite you to our open house on (day and date), at (time). This will be a great opportunity for you to visit your child's classroom and meet your child's teachers. We hope that you will make plans to join us. We look forward to seeing you on (day and date) at (time) for our open house. For more information please call the school at (000) 000-0000.

Fundraiser

Hello, this is (principal's name), principal of (school name). I'm calling to inform you of a school-wide fundraiser we are sponsoring. It is called (name of fundraiser). We hope to use the proceeds to (purpose of fundraiser). On (day/date) your child will bring home information about the fundraiser. We hope you will support this effort. As always, thank you for your continued support in helping us

provide a quality education for your child. For more information, please call Mr./Ms. _____ at (000) 000-0000.

Frequently Asked Questions

- Q1. A parent is receiving messages in Spanish but would like to receive the messages in English? How can the parent receive the messages in the preferred language?
- A1. Connect-ED language changes must be made at the school site. Schools may use the Parent Information Screen in ISIS to change the preferred language for Connect-ED calls. If a parent wishes to receive automated messages in a language different from the language currently listed in the "Primary-Home" field, you may indicate the preferred calling language on the "Home Calling" field on the Parent Information screen in ISIS.
- Q2. How many telephone numbers for a particular call recipient (e.g. a particular parent) can the Connect-ED system hold?
- A2. The system can hold up to 6 telephone numbers per call recipient. However, multiple telephone numbers are called only in emergency situations, as determined by the Superintendent. The primary home telephone number maintained in ISIS will be used for all other messaging.
- Q3. I am a principal at ABC Senior High School. Can I send messages to the homes of students attending the middle schools in my feeder pattern?
- A3. No. Principals are able to send messages to the homes of students attending their school only. However, principals are encouraged to work together to send messages that may be initiated by one school but impact other schools within the feeder pattern (e.g. ABC Senior High School is hosting an information session about upcoming jazz band auditions. Incoming ninth-grade students currently in the eighth grade at the local middle school may be interested in the auditions. The principals at the two schools may choose to work together to make sure the message gets to appropriate students at both schools).
- Q4. Can messages be sent to parents' e-mail addresses?
- A4. The Connect-ED system does have the capability to send messages to e-mail addresses. The choice will appear on the Confirm Your Message page, in the last step of scheduling a message.
- Q5. I am an elementary school principal. The FCAT Writes is just a few weeks away and I want to send a message to just the parents of all fourth-grade students in my school reminding them of this important test. Is this possible?

- A5. Yes. Connect-ED allows you to create subgroups within your school. For instance, you can create groups by grade level, club affiliation, etc.
- Q6. What is the maximum number of subgroups I am able to create?
- A6. With the Connect-ED system, there is no limit to the number of subgroups you may create.
- Q7. From where does Connect-ED obtain student contact information?
- A7. The information is downloaded daily from the District's ISIS system, which means that the information used by Connect-ED is only as good as the information maintained by schools.
- Q8. A resident who does not have children in Miami-Dade County Public Schools is receiving Connect-ED calls. How can this person's phone number be removed from the Connect-ED system?
- A8. Residents who are receiving Connect-ED calls from the District but who do not have children in our schools may call 305-995-3700 and report their ten-digit telephone number for removal from the Connect-ED system. Once the student and school associated with the telephone number have been identified, the principal will be advised and asked to verify and/or correct the information in ISIS.
- Q9. I have just learned that the telephone number listed for one of my students is actually the telephone number for a resident who does not have children in our schools. I do not want the resident to continue to receive Connect-ED calls. How do I ensure that calls are not made to the resident until I can get an accurate telephone number for the student?
- A9. You may wish to replace the inaccurate telephone number with the following number, 305-999-9999, until an accurate telephone number can be ascertained. Using this number will ensure that no calls will be delivered. **However, please remember to get the accurate telephone number for the student as soon as possible and enter it in ISIS.**
- Q10. Does the Connect-ED system provide me with any data regarding the status of calls delivered?
- A10. Yes. Authorized users initiating the Connect-ED call will receive via email reports with detailed information about calls made for their schools. One of the items on this report is a list of bad phone numbers. It is important that principals download/print this list and follow established procedures for correcting bad or inaccurate information.

Q11. What time does Connect-ED send the attendance calls for schools?

A11. Attendance calls are delivered at approximately 6 p.m. daily.

Q12. How do I receive additional help and/or training in the use of Connect-ED?

A12. You may call the Connect-ED® 24-hour help desk at (866) HELP-NTI (435-7684). You may also contact your school's client care representative, who always will be identified at the top right corner of the Blackboard Connect, Inc. home page when you sign in with your user ID and password.

In addition, the Office of Public Relations is eager to help you make the most of Connect-ED. That office can be reached at (305) 995-1126.