



North Branch Area Schools Improve Emergency Communications with CENTEGIX CrisisAlert™

North Branch Area Schools serves over 2,400 students across 1 elementary, 1 middle, and 2 high schools in the state of Michigan. Situated in a rural region of the state approximately 75 miles north of Detroit, their district is one with a history of pride and continual growth—they're always looking for opportunities to improve.

North Branch Area Schools already had safety as a top priority and had taken steps in the preceding months and years before adopting CrisisAlert to improve the safety of their schools to better protect their staff and students. Their multi-layered approach to safety included ALICE training, a School Resource Officer, walkie-talkies, district-wide safety drills, and more.

Despite North Branch's serious approach to safety and security, when a major incident happened in a nearby district, everybody agreed they needed to do more.

Nearby Tragedy Prompts a Reexamination of Safety Approach

On November 30, 2021, in Oxford Township, Michigan—just 20 miles south of North Branch Area Schools—a mass shooting took place at Oxford High School. After that incident, administrators at North Branch Area Schools knew they needed to do more.

"There were four students killed. Everybody was on high alert when that happened. And so we went out and we looked for the best possible solution to enhance a lot of the things that we had already done," shared Jim Fish, Superintendent of NBAS.

Despite safety already being a priority for everyone, the tragic event prompted administrators to reexamine their approach to safety. "If a teacher had an issue, they would call the office, and **maybe the principal was there and maybe the principal wasn't there.** They'd try and hunt that person down," North Branch Elementary School Principal Theresa Rae stated. NBAS administrators knew they needed something to address these communication issues. They needed something that allowed administrators to respond *immediately*.



"We needed that piece that would [allow us to] respond immediately. And we felt this platform, with everything else that it does, was the best option for us."

Jim Fish, Superintendent at North Branch Area Schools and CENTEGIX customer

Customer Highlight

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Now in their second year of using CrisisAlert, North Branch administrators are able to see the difference it has made across their district. While they're now prepared for the most extreme emergencies, principals across North Branch have seen CrisisAlert used primarily for everyday safety incidents, such as medical emergencies and student behavior.



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Theresa Rae, North Branch Elementary School Principal

Looking for a Safety Solution that Provides an Immediate Response

“We were looking at the ways that we have to communicate, and we have a lot. We have phones in every classroom that can access the PA system, we have walkie talkies, but there still were gaps in how to communicate in certain situations and certain locations. If you’re not near a phone, if you don’t have a walkie, if you’ve got your cell phone laying on your desk, [you can’t get help],” admitted Rae. “So that’s what we were looking for: **immediate communication from anywhere that would get people to you.**”

CENTEGIX was founded in response to concerns that traditional school safety technology didn’t reflect the realities of the classroom or how people realistically can respond in moments of crisis. Conversations with school leaders indicated that school staff needed an effective solution for incident response—physical altercations are more common in hallways, teachers don’t want to have an app for safety on their personal phone, tying a communication device to a classroom left half the staff unable to take action if they saw something that raised a concern—which led to the development of an effective solution built on innovative technology.

North Branch administrators knew that regardless of the emergency, whether it was an everyday medical incident or an extreme event like an active shooter, they “needed that piece that would [allow us to] respond immediately. And we felt this platform, with everything else that it does, was the best option for us,” said Jim Fish.

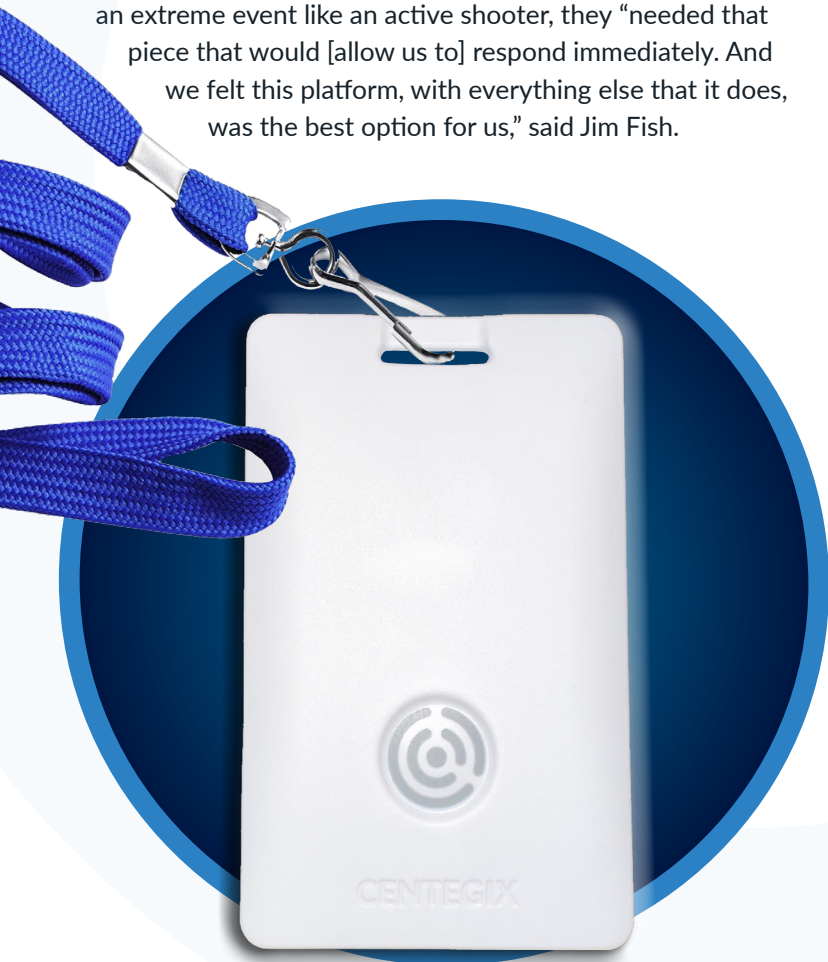
Accelerating Emergency Response with CrisisAlert

CrisisAlert is a badge-based panic button worn like a staff ID that allows any staff member to quickly and discreetly send an alert requesting help that instantly reaches administrators and responders. Three pushes of the panic button on the badge sends an alert to designated on-campus responders—usually an SRO, nurse, or assistant principal—to get an accelerated response to a physical altercation, health crisis, or any situation in which additional staff support is needed. Eight pushes of the button initiates a full school lockdown and notifies the local police department or 911 dispatch.

There were multiple communication gaps that North Branch Area Schools wanted to fill with the CrisisAlert solution, from the ability to send an alert even with spotty cell service or a bad Wi-Fi connection to being able to initiate an alert from any location. “I could be anywhere on the campus, not just in my building, but I could be anywhere. And this reaches everywhere that was part of that [communication] gap,” said Mark Hiltunen, Principal of North Branch High School. “... **Now we don’t worry about those gaps.** [An alert] could be anywhere and everyone’s alerted throughout the district.”

Not only does CrisisAlert solve communication gaps related to location, but it also allows anyone to initiate a lockdown. “It doesn’t have to be an administrator to put us in lockdown. A teacher can do that if there’s something really, really serious,” Fish shared. “So that’s something that we wanted, you know, every employee has it. Our school resource officer has it, our support staff have them, our substitute teachers have them.”

The CrisisAlert wearable badge also helps **accelerate response times.** “It’s integrated with our PA system. [Before, to make an announcement,] our phones were a problem where you had to dial in four digits, hit star, wait a second, then hit another number,” said Dan Terauds, Principal at Ruth Fox Middle School, highlighting the delay in sending a request for help before CrisisAlert. “If you wanted to announce an emergency to the whole building, could we do it? Yes. In the case of an emergency, though, that’s tough. [CrisisAlert] is simple in doing that.”



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- Dan Terauds, Principal at Ruth Fox Middle School

Prepared for the Extreme, Used for the Everyday

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“We’re very excited about all the different possibilities that CENTEGIX provides us, more than just the active shooter part of it,” Hiltunen explains. “We use it almost every day—if a teacher has an issue with a student or there’s a medical emergency. **We don’t have to worry about getting to a phone and calling the office and trying to page someone. [With the badge], we just react automatically and it saves on time.** It’s been very helpful.”

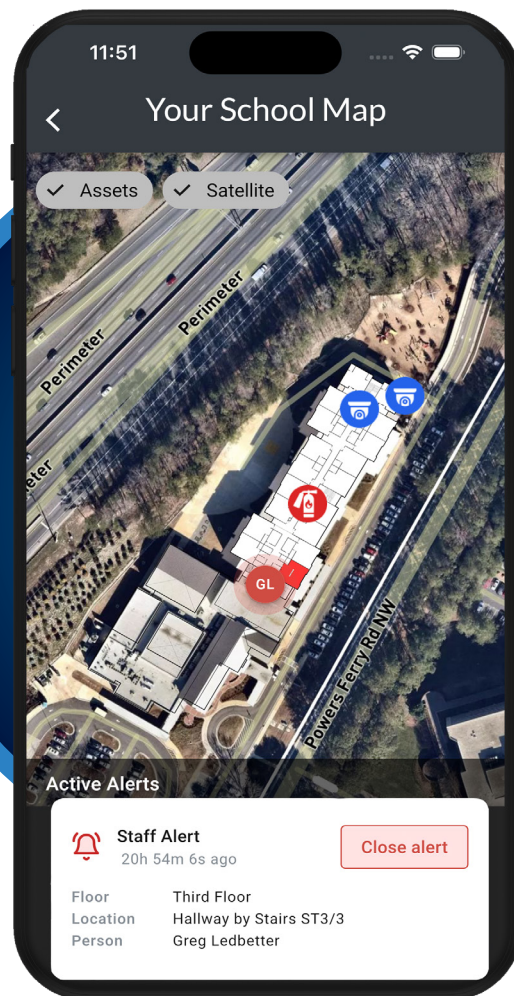
“We had a situation where a student was having a seizure. Our first response team is myself, the assistant principal, the RN, and the dean of students. And so within 30 seconds of the kid going down, all four of us were at [the classroom] door,” shared Theresa Rae. “We had somebody to clear the classroom, we had the RN there to tend to the student. **That was a very positive outcome compared to what that may have looked like prior to CENTEGIX.** It would’ve looked like a teacher making a phone call to the office, the office trying to find the nurse—she also leaves her office to work with some of our diabetic students while they’re eating lunches and monitoring things like that—trying to find her and then sending her, or radioing one of the administrators to send help there.” That’s seconds lost in response time.

Principals on the ground also see the daily behavioral incidents that could benefit immensely from an accelerated response. “We’ve had a few fights. [During one incident,] a teacher got hit in the neck with a bat and another staff member hit their badge because they didn’t have a radio and we were able to get there quicker,” Terauds shared. “Would there have been a different outcome? Probably not, but we were able to respond, get the kids to where they’re out of the situation and be able to attend to what happened.”

These everyday incidents also provide administrators with valuable data. “I ask for the data every three or four months, and I look at it and I see, ‘okay, [is it mainly] medical

emergencies or are we using it for mostly teacher issues with student behaviors or what is it? Why? How are we using this mainly?” said Fish. “I’m glad to say we’ve never used it for an intruder and we hope we never do. But that, again, is to me one of the reasons why we wanted it. It’s insurance. I hope it never happens. But in the meantime, how can I utilize this platform on an everyday basis? And that’s what we’ve been able to do. That to me has been huge.”

Data allows administrators to make informed decisions about their schools, leading to more efficiency. “Here’s my CrisisAlert data for the past month. It might be nothing. It might be a whole list of things, but it’s quick for me to be able to see and then it might trigger me to go, ‘we can do it a little better,’” Dan Terauds said.



The Impact of CrisisAlert on the Community

The impact of CrisisAlert has been undeniably positive across the community. As North Branch administrators look back on how the CrisisAlert solution has been received by their teachers and staff, they remark, "It gives them comfort to know that they can get ahold of somebody in the case of an emergency." Terauds continues, "At first they were very leery because they didn't want to accidentally hit the button too many times. But with training...it is second nature to have it right now, which is a really good thing."

"We used to require our staff to have an ID badge, and most teachers would forget about it or they'd not have it on them," Hiltunen stated. "Everyone wears [their badges] now."

"And in my building, I have younger students. The one thing that my teachers have told me is it's nice to be able to tend to what's happening and not have to leave to go to a phone," Rae said. "We have had a couple students who have had seizures or things like that. It's nice to not have to leave that student to go make a phone call or send a kid running to the office. The teacher is in control of that. I can assist the student and I can get help all at the same time."

North Branch students are also reacting positively to CrisisAlert. "As far as students, there is an awareness that teachers have a button," Terauds shared. "They know it's a way for their teacher to get help if they need it," said Rae.

First responders also reap the benefits of the CrisisAlert solution, as it allows them to accelerate their response to emergencies. "When this goes off, I don't care what's going on. Doesn't matter. Principals are headed right to that area. I'm calling the buildings. I mean, everybody reacts immediately," Superintendent Fish explained. "It's very, very clear where I'm going, who pressed the button. So I already have some insight of what's what, who to know to go to when I get there," added Dan Terauds.

In fact, administrators have been able to leverage CrisisAlert as a teacher retention and recruitment tool. "There's times where we do talk about, in our interviews, stuff gets brought up about how we do things innovatively and so on, and we show them our badge," said Terauds. "Just a tool that we use to support them. So that's been part of it...It comes up in conversation often."



Teachers in Michigan are Saying...

I had a non verbal student having a melt down in the lunch room, I was unable to get her to leave with me. I used my badge and 3 higher up staff members came to assist and get the other students out of the way. This device has been nothing but helpful to our whole school.

– Elementary School Teacher

A student that fell in hallway and was unable to walk. [With CrisisAlert,] I was able to keep safety a priority for all.

– Middle School Teacher

The support and training of the system was easy and clear. The system is created for expediency and ease of use, both of which are necessary in an emergency situation.

– High School Teacher

North Branch Area Schools Meet Emergency Response and Mapping Legislative Requirements with CrisisAlert

More and more states across the country are recognizing the importance of prioritizing school safety and passing legislation such as Alyssa's Law, which requires public and charter schools to have silent panic buttons, and critical incident mapping legislation, which requires schools to provide local law enforcement and first responders with digital maps of their campuses to help during emergency responses.

Michigan legislators are considering both.

As schools look at different solutions to comply with these new and upcoming legislative requirements, leaders should keep in mind these integral components of K-12 safety solutions:

- Easy to use, especially under duress
- Does not rely on Wi-Fi or cellular connectivity
- Immediate notification to administrators and direct notification to 911 dispatch
- Mapping that provides room- and floor-level location accuracy
- Total campus coverage, including outdoors
- Simple to use, simple to train on, and simple to maintain

Creating an environment where staff and students alike feel safe, one where help is just moments away, should be a top priority for every leader—North Branch Area Schools can prove it:

"[Teachers and staff] all realize the time it saves them and how they can get help immediately," shared Mark Hiltunen. **"It's become something they don't want to do without."**

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- Mark Hiltunen, Principal of North Branch High School



For more information on our school safety solutions and how we can help protect your district, visit our CENTEGIX Safety Platform page at centegix.com/safety-platform.

Learn more today. Because every second matters.

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