

# School District relies on NEXEDGE® Radios to Improve Student Safety, Security



**PROJECT OVERVIEW:** Martinsville, Virginia City Public Schools switch to an NXDN® trunked radio system for administration, operations, security and transportation staff communications.

Even though it occurred in 2012, the Sandy Hook shooting in Newtown, Connecticut has never strayed far from the minds of any school administrator. And much of what happened on that day drove the choices in technology for the Martinsville, Virginia School District communications system and their choice of KENWOOD NEXEDGE.

At the system's core is NEXWAN, the NXDN trunked system operated by GCS Electronics & Communications of Martinsville, Virginia. When the school district upgraded from a VHF analog single site system, they reduced infrastructure costs while improving coverage and adding new features with a shift to NEXWAN. When every single radio in the district is on NEXWAN, day to day communications will be easier and all users will be unified on a single system in emergencies, reducing response times.

T.J. Slaughter, Director of School Safety and Emergency Management, Martinsville City Public Schools, is a former law enforcement officer and school resource officer. "My prior experience taught me, plus watching disasters unfold like Katrina and the Sandy Hook shooting, that communications is the key in any kind of crisis situation."

Familiar with the quality and performance of KENWOOD radios from law enforcement, T.J. saw no reason to change brands. He also knew that the staff's familiarity with KENWOOD radios would make it easier to accept and use new tools on the digital radios. "KENWOOD radios make it easy to add many tools to the radios and it wasn't hard for staff to learn something new." The NEXEDGE mobiles and portables on the digital NEXWAN system have created coverage that T.J. calls "completely seamless" with the bonus of radios that are "very durable."

The new emergency panic button feature expanded the number of activation points for system wide emergency response. School bus drivers can use the panic button to signal a bus break down and, because there's a text message and email alert also sent, as T.J. points

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Martinsville City Public Schools

out, "it's easy to open Google maps and pinpoint where the bus is located. It's a great feature to be able to locate the bus right away, whether it's for a medical emergency, unruly student or a mechanical breakdown. The drivers don't have to say what's going on, which may not always be possible anyway, they just hit the button and get help."

Giles Smith with GCS Electronics & Communications added that "school buses report their GPS location back to our NEXWAN GPS server. The server reports the emergencies and locations directly to email and smart phones. In addition, the local 911 center has integrated the NEXWAN GPS server locations into their mapping system so that the bus locations are plotted on the same map with police vehicles, fire trucks and ambulances."

T.J. cited the trust established by GCS' long standing relationship with the school district as a key factor in their decision. "Anytime I

call or text, Giles with GCS is immediately available and his guys are very professional. Plus, Giles and his company are well known and respected for their work with the 911 center and law enforcement in the area. It's a good working relationship."

While the system was built with emergency response in mind, the maintenance department has added GPS to their radios, too, for times when their work takes them outside of the immediate area and need assistance. They are also able to activate the panic buttons if they see something that rises to the level of an emergency that may need intervention from school security or law enforcement.

"My thinking after what happened in Newtown is this. From everything I understand, when the shooter came in, just by chance, the PA system was on and they were making announcements, so that everyone also heard the gunfire" said T.J. "It got me to thinking, what if we had an



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emergency situation? In most schools, the traditional PA system is located somewhere on the other side of the building and what if the principal couldn't get there in time? I wanted all administrators to be able to make an announcement from anywhere, inside or out. Using grant money from the VA Department of Education, we installed wireless speakers throughout the buildings. Now, wherever you can take your radio, you can key up the PA speaker and can make an announcement."

"It turns out that the principals are now using the radios more than the traditional PA," he added. "Also, the speakers have a battery back up,

so even if there is a power outage, administrators can still communicate with staff and students."

"We feel this is the most comprehensive school safety communications system available," said Giles. "This system brings many pieces together for a complete critical communications solution: day-to-day communications, emergency panic buttons, GPS on school buses for locations, wireless speakers and radio-activated PA speaker announcements. NXDN trunked technology can be implemented to solve the communications problems that many school districts are facing."

**CUSTOMER:**

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