

# Emergency Communications Improved Throughout K-12 School District with **NEXEDGE®** Radios



**PROJECT OVERVIEW:** Rock Hill School District, Rock Hill, NC relies on the Fleet Talk NEXEDGE regional system to provide reliable day to day and emergency communications.

"You can't beat a two-way radio. You cannot manage a critical incident with a cell phone. Been there, tried that. It's impossible. With radios, there's no more game of telephone, when meanings gets changed as the message goes from person to person. It's right there, live. With a radio, everyone knows the same thing, at the same time, the exact same message, and, no dropped calls," according to Kevin Wren, the head of Risk, Security and Emergency Management for the Rock Hill School District in Rock Hill, South Carolina.

The Rock Hill School District's 180 bus mobile radios, 46 emergency base stations and 825 portables are all KENWOOD NEXEDGE. That decision was made when NEXEDGE technology was the only one to successfully meet the district's bid spec requiring 90% coverage in all buildings. "Actually, we guarantee and deliver 95% coverage to Rock Hill in all their buildings," said Jon Rock of Rock Communications, LLC, KENWOOD authorized dealer in Rock Hill. The school district's communications operate on Rock Communication's Fleet Talk NEXEDGE system, a 62-site system with continuous coverage throughout North

and South Carolina and extended coverage with 128 sites extending to Georgia and Tennessee.

## **A NEED FOR COHESION**

When Wren joined the school district, one of the first things he did was to assess the existing communications system throughout the K-12 schools. After three months, he saw a need for improvement and, specifically, cohesion. He gathered the District Cabinet, a group of school district leaders, to run a table top exercise simulating a winter weather incident. He asked the Cabinet to manage the incident with their current system. "They quickly realized that we need radios," remembers Wren. "I worked in Charleston before coming to Rock Hill, and there we did not have a district wide system, and I wasn't getting traction with the need for radios. Unfortunately, an officer was shot, two blocks from a school, right at dismissal time. Everything was on lockdown and I managed that incident with a cell phone and the school's wireline telephone. I was ready to pull my hair out. Right after that, we made radios happen in that district."

"I came from public safety and was not looking at KENWOOD as an option when I came to Rock Hill. I have been pleasantly surprised with the excellent coverage and how the radios hold up. They may be economically priced, but they are not built that way," said Wren. "We're three years into this system and facility guys are hard on radios; we are simply not having to replace these KENWOOD radios."

"I don't even know how you operate a transportation system, a facilities department, administration, without radios. The number one issue every time after an incident is lack of communications. Radios work in an emergency," observed Wren.

### EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS MADE EASY

With the new system, every school now has the same radio model and at least one base station and every bus has a mobile, which achieves Wren's goal of cohesion. Every school has its own frequency for teacher to teacher communications using portables. There is also a dedicated security channel just for the police officers in each school.

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— Kevin Wren, Head of Risk, Security and Emergency Management, Rock Hill School District

The principal and the front desk have access to one or more base stations and a portable with a special emergency channel. It is also a feature of the mobiles on the school buses. If one gets high jacked, the driver uses that button to open the mic and call specific people in the district. When that emergency channel is keyed up at a school or by a bus driver, it automatically flips all system radios over to a district-



wide assigned emergency channel. That means that if one school goes on lock-down, all other schools hear that information simultaneously and can decide to go on lock-down, too, based on their proximity to that school. If there is a fire truck coming to a school, bus drivers can immediately reroute to avoid that school until there is an all clear announcement. Many of the private schools surrounding Rock Hill schools have requested to be tied into the Rock Hill system, so that they too can have live information to go into lock-down quickly during an emergency.

“Anyone in the district can key up the emergency channel and that call goes out to superintendents, Cabinet members, so that everyone knows the live information at the same time,” said Wren. “For medical issues, that may not be a big deal, but if the police department calls and says they’re chasing a suspect near a school, that school has to go on lock down. And the other schools have the opportunity, based on real time information, to decide how that incident will affect their school and make the appropriate decision for their students’ safety. It’s also an easy way for everybody to be on board. The cavalry can head to that school with additional transportation, security, anything that’s needed.”

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As Wren points out, “KENWOOD radios let us address any kind of emergency. Everyone can work together quickly to solve any problem.”

### COORDINATING A RESPONSE TO SEVERE WEATHER

The radio system is at their heart of Rock Hill’s coordinated response to ice storms and other dangerous weather conditions. When severe weather threatens, the NEXEDGE radios make it easy to coordinate with emergency management. If district wide school closings are needed, “We simply key up the radio and announce it,” says Wren. Wren points out that this capability means “No one is hearing this information from Facebook or Twitter. In the past, without radio, sometimes parents and kids knew about the decision to close before principals did.”

Intercom systems, as Jon Rock points out, are “old and expensive.” As an alternative for the district, Rock Communications set up KENWOOD radios to act like intercoms. A school administrative office can call one teacher at a time on the radio, and it’s tied into the existing overhead speakers so it will also talk across all of the radios and through the speakers. If an intercom system goes down, the school can hand out radios to the teachers until the system is up again. “Best of all,” said Rock, “you can buy radios for a fraction of the price of a new intercom system.” As Wren points out, “With the classic intercom system, you’re married to your classroom location. Now, the intercom system is on your hip.”

Wren, who was recently named Campus Safety Magazine Director of the Year for K-12, expresses that he’s happy with coverage and quality of the KENWOOD radios and also, “they understand that we are a school district. We are a public-school district. We don’t have gold bars laying around. Here’s the decision we made. We can get a system that performs better than the others available, and this one is less. It’s an easy decision to buy KENWOOD.”

**CUSTOMER:**

Rock Hill School District, Rock Hill, NC

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