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Consolidation, Customization, and Confidence

Harley School's Strategic Safety Journey with CrisisGo

The Harley School

Harley School
Rochester, NY
Number of Students: 440

Background

When Branden Haskell stepped into his role as Director of School Safety & Security at The Harley School in Rochester, New York, he was tasked with more than overseeing drills and procedures. The private Nursery-12 school was undergoing a significant transformation — one aimed at integrating safety and security into the culture of the school, not just its infrastructure. That evolution led them to adopt CrisisGo three years ago — a move that has since shaped how the school thinks, prepares, and communicates around safety.

Now, with the school recognized as a Silver Tier member of CrisisGo's Safety Innovation Program, Branden sees the achievement as a clear marker that "we're moving in the right direction."
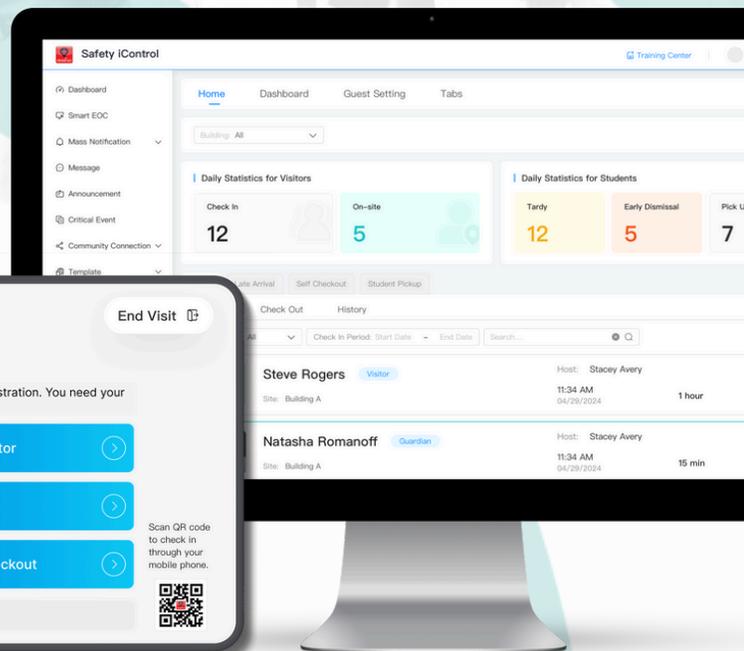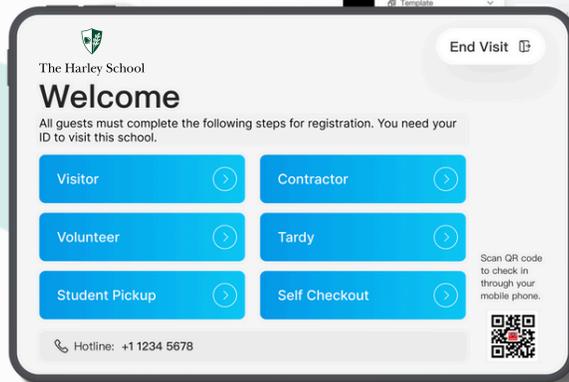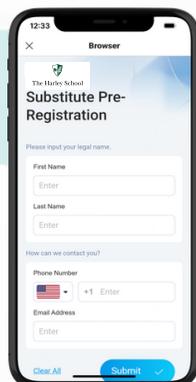
Shifting Culture Before Choosing Tools

Before any technology was chosen, Branden and the Harley administration focused on foundational change. They began implementing the I Love U Guys Foundation's Standard Response Protocols to train staff and students alike on what effective emergency response looks like.

"The main thing was shifting to more safety and security focused in general," Branden explained. "We started right out with the I Love U Guys Foundation standard response protocols... while at the time having technology that really wasn't supporting what we were trying to do."

This gap between procedures and platforms created friction. Instead of technology enabling success, it became a barrier. That frustration sparked Harley's search for a system that aligned with its vision – leading to the adoption of CrisisGo.

A Platform That Supports the Mission

Since implementing CrisisGo, the school has streamlined multiple systems under one umbrella. Branden noted that part of the reason for joining the Safety Innovation Program was to continue that consolidation effort. "We've been trying to consolidate as many different technologies we could under one umbrella," he said.

One of the key additions this year was Gatekeeper, CrisisGo's visitor management solution. Harley rolled it out formally about four weeks before winter break – giving them time to test and train – and it's already solved several long-standing issues. "It's really convenient for me, but also just better technology for the front desk," said Branden. "It kind of closed some loopholes we had, especially with putting substitutes into the alert system for the day."
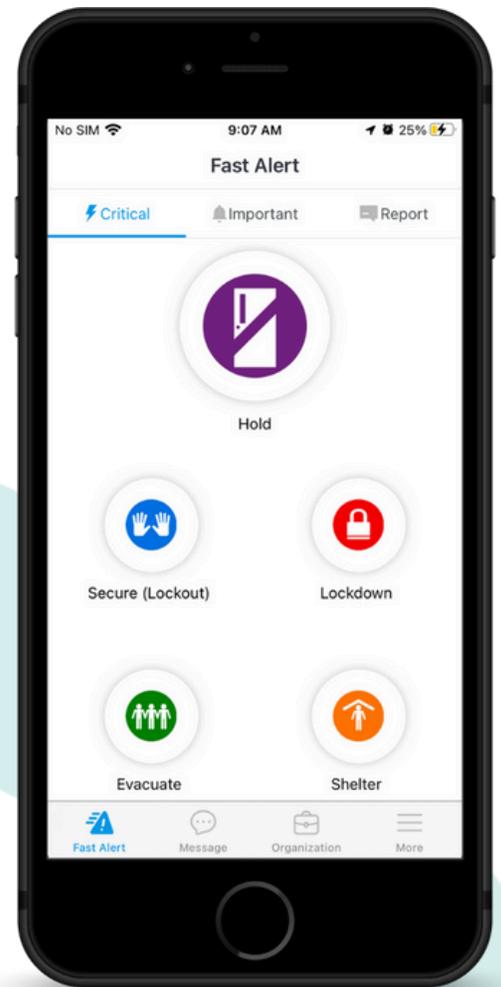
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When the System Was Put to the Test

While drills and planning are critical, it's the unexpected moments that truly reveal whether a safety system works. And Harley didn't have to wait long for a real-life test.

"We actually had an unplanned fire alarm activation twice this month due to a faulty sensor," Branden shared. "It was one of the first opportunities I've had to actually witness the response that wasn't planned as a drill, and was impressed in everybody's ability to quickly utilize CrisisGo, complete the roster event, communicate with each other exactly as they were trained to do."

For Branden, it was more than just a system check – it was confirmation that staff knew what to do and trusted the platform to help them do it.
"It was like a proud dad moment," he added. "Everything worked exactly as it was designed to."

Custom Alerts, Communication, and Community Trust

Beyond emergency situations, CrisisGo has become the daily backbone for communication, accountability, and transparency with both staff and parents. Harley uses the system to notify families about snow days, emergencies, or upcoming drills.

"We use CrisisGo as kind of a community-based alert," Branden said. "If we have a snow day or if there is an emergency ongoing at the school, we use CrisisGo to send out that alert to parents as well... and they are very appreciative that we have that tool to communicate with them."

The team also leverages CrisisGo's customization features to create specific alert types and message groups – such as a designated crisis response team that receives targeted messages without involving the whole building.

"We created an alert that I can send just to those few people to let them know that something might be coming... you don't have to do anything yet, but you need to be on standby for that," Branden explained. "All great tools we didn't have before."

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Gatekeeper and Student Accountability

An unexpected highlight in Gatekeeper's deployment has been its use for student self check-ins and check-outs — especially among Harley's Grade 12 students, who enjoy the privilege of leaving campus during free periods.

To ensure safety and accountability, the school activated the photo capture feature, but turned it into something fun.

"The students ask, 'Can we at least make a funny face at you?'" Branden said, laughing. "Now I have a long list of sign-in/sign-outs with very interesting photos from the students to try and make it fun for them but also get us what we need too."

This approach reflects Harley's philosophy: safety doesn't have to feel oppressive — it can be human, accessible, and even lighthearted, so long as it serves its purpose.

A Marker of Progress

Being named a Silver Tier school in CrisisGo's Safety Innovation Program holds real meaning for Branden. It's not just a label — it's a reflection of long-term progress.

"For me, it's kind of like a sign that the work I set out to do when I took over handling safety and security is paying off," he said. "We're embracing safety and security into the school culture, and embracing the technology that we need to use to be successful in keeping everybody safe."

Looking Ahead: Refining What Works

Next year won't be about major overhauls. Instead, Branden says the focus is on adding convenience and refining the systems already in place. One item on the radar: geofencing, to address questions from staff who may be traveling during planned drills or alerts.

"We always get that question of... 'I might be on vacation, I don't want CrisisGo to go off.' And I think with the geofencing tool... that might help us add a layer of convenience," he explained.

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There's also excitement about further expanding Gatekeeper's potential – especially as CrisisGo continues to develop more features based on school feedback. Branden said he's already seen how even small changes can have big impacts.

Advice to Other Schools: Be Strategic, Not Reactive

Branden's advice to other schools is rooted in experience and practicality:

"Don't have a knee-jerk reaction to a situation… or just jump to acquiring a piece of technology because somebody heard it's great. Technology is excellent, but just make sure it's serving a good purpose and something you really need or are going to use."

He warns against investing in tools that look good on paper but don't integrate meaningfully into a school's existing operations or culture. The right tool, in the right hands, can make all the difference – but only if it's used with intent.

Final Reflections: A System That Works

After conducting more than 50 drills, responding to real emergencies, and customizing alerts for everything from snow days to medical assistance, Branden has no regrets about moving to CrisisGo.

"I don't regret for a moment switching to CrisisGo. It's been phenomenal with all the things that come with it," he said. "The adults being able to check in, accounting for students, all kind of tied together has been great."

Whether it's organizing a response team, handling substitute notifications, or creating alert pathways that only reach those who need to act, CrisisGo has become the hub around which Harley's safety operations revolve.

"It's been great ensuring that our response is timely and appropriate with the right people showing up – and I don't have 20 people showing up to an incident that requires two."

At Harley, safety isn't just about preparing for the worst. It's about smart, strategic planning supported by technology that works – and works well.

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