

County school district makes the grade with FirstNet

**Agency/organization needs**

A better way to communicate and coordinate response during emergencies, safety incidents, and everyday operations

**Networking solution**

FirstNet Rapid Response Push-to-Talk provides secure and reliable communication for Rossville Consolidated School District staff and public safety during emergencies and large-scale events

**Agency value**

Enhanced communication, coordinated decision making and response

**Industry focus**

Education

**Size**

920 students and 117 staff members across 2 campuses

A school safety leader made better through technology

Public education has undergone a lot of change in recent years. For the Rossville Consolidated School District in rural northwest Indiana, these changes extend beyond learning and technology to include the safety of students and staff. It's an area that's become increasingly important for district officials despite shrinking budgets and rising costs.

What hasn't changed is Rossville's commitment to its students and their wellbeing. The district is a longtime leader in safety for the entire state. "We focus on academics, arts, athletics, and safety," said Superintendent Dr. James Hanna, now in his twenty-sixth year. "We've taken a proactive and comprehensive approach to ensuring the safety of our students and staff."

That approach includes a robust emergency response system made up of a clear communication network, a trained response team, and strong partnerships with first responders. This enables Rossville officials to expedite emergency response and coordination.

After the Columbine tragedy in Colorado, administrators revisited district security measures and added FirstNet to its communication and safety network. "We have taken a lot of pride and put a lot of work into improving our safety here over the years," said Dr. Hanna. "FirstNet has helped us move the safety process forward."

FirstNet is public safety's dedicated nationwide communications platform

Safe, secure communication

FirstNet is public safety's dedicated nationwide communications platform. It provides first responders, healthcare facilities, schools, and other organizations with a highly reliable, high-speed broadband network reserved exclusively for public safety.

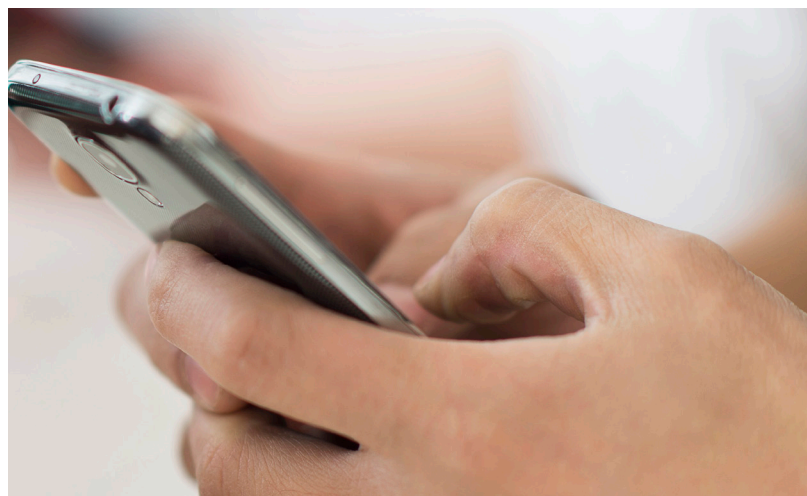
Hanna's district uses the platform in many ways. School bus drivers and district staff rely on FirstNet to stay in contact on rural routes that range anywhere from 7 to 25 miles. A driver may encounter hazardous road conditions, witness suspicious activity, find a parent isn't home, or that a child isn't able to enter their house safely. Should a student medical emergency occur, drivers can quickly coordinate with the district and law enforcement so that the student receives timely assistance.

"In each of these scenarios, direct and secure communication supports faster decision-making and enhances student protection," Dr. Hanna said.

Priority access, rapid response

Before adding FirstNet, Rossville district bus drivers relied on land mobile radios (LMRs) to communicate. However, buses traveling to school-sponsored events would lose contact once outside the district radio signal repeaters used to amplify LMR communications. This left a big gap in safety and protection. Instead, officials looked for a solution that would provide comprehensive and dependable coverage in and out of their local area.

They chose FirstNet Rapid Response, a highly secure and reliable mission-critical push-to-talk solution built on the FirstNet network. FirstNet Rapid Response offers priority access to voice, data, and location sharing using a cellular band separate from public traffic. It's compatible with many smartphones and tablets which makes it easy to adopt and use. Features like Radio over Internet Protocol (RoIP) technology even enable communication with LMRs to enhance coordination across agencies and personnel.



"FirstNet Rapid Response Push-to-Talk technology has proven to be a critical component of our overall safety and communication strategy."

Dr. James Hanna
Superintendent, Rossville Consolidated School District

Delivering in every way

Before they could deploy FirstNet, school officials conducted a district-wide test to ensure they'd be able to communicate where and when they needed. "We understood that implementing the system would come with learning curve," Dr. Hanna said. "However, we were confident that our team could adapt and grow with the new technology."

FirstNet message encryption helps keep critical safety information private

Officials were surprised how much better the FirstNet coverage was, especially in the rural areas where buses travel. “That broader reach meant we no longer needed a radio in every auxiliary vehicle, which helped us reduce equipment costs without sacrificing communication,” Dr. Hanna said. “What we have now is a more efficient, reliable system that has truly improved how we communicate across the district.”

Hanna was especially pleased to learn FirstNet encrypts messages, so they’re heard only by those who need access to that information. Maintaining staff and student privacy is essential, particularly in situations when sensitive details are shared.

Many Rossville Consolidated School District employees now carry FirstNet phones, including bus drivers, administrators, maintenance and custodial staff, and members of the emergency response team. FirstNet phones are also found in special education classrooms. “It became clear that this was a fiscally responsible next step that would significantly enhance our day-to-day communication as well as our response during emergencies,” said Dr. Hanna.

Connecting when it counts

Aside from the cost benefits, FirstNet has significantly enhanced district-wide connectivity. It enables faster and more reliable communication and coordination between the transportation department, building administrators, and district leadership.

The district has seen a reduction in transmissions and unnecessary chatter, which has freed up channels for more urgent or critical needs. “In urgent situations, the ability to instantly connect with the right personnel, without relying on congested radio channels, has enhanced our capacity to respond quickly and effectively,” said Dr. Hanna.

When a Rossville student experienced a medical issue on the bus, the driver was able to use a FirstNet radio to notify the office of the emergency despite forgetting to disclose his location.

“Fortunately, because FirstNet radios are equipped with GPS tracking, district staff were able to pinpoint the location quickly and send emergency responders to the exact location,” Dr. Hanna said. “This incident highlighted the real-time, situational advantages FirstNet provides, combining voice communication and GPS tracking to support a faster, more coordinated response during critical situations.”



“We view FirstNet not just as a tool for today, but as a foundation for a more connected, responsive, and secure future.”

Dr. James Hanna
Superintendent, Rossville Consolidated School District

Quick, smart collaboration

FirstNet continues to be a valuable tool for the Rossville district, enabling them to carry out their safety plan effectively. “Staff have several ways to call for help,” Dr. Hanna said. “Some use a FirstNet radio if one has been assigned, but most dial a specific extension that rings multiple phones throughout the building.”

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FirstNet Rapid Response is a mission-critical push-to-talk solution

The person who answers the call takes on the role of dispatcher and contacts the emergency response team using a FirstNet radio. That team includes a school resource officer, a firefighter, an emergency medical technician (EMT), the school nurse, and a school administrator.

“They respond right away to assess the situation. From there, the office can either call 911 or use the 800-megahertz radio to talk directly to central dispatch, which helps speed up the emergency response,” Dr. Hanna said. “This process allows us to respond quickly, stay organized, and make sure students and staff get the help they need as fast as possible.”



“FirstNet has helped us move the safety process forward.”

Dr. James Hanna
Superintendent, Rossville Consolidated School District

A team you can count on

Although Hanna is thrilled with FirstNet devices and communications, he's equally pleased with the support he's received from the FirstNet team. “The FirstNet team has been fantastic to work with. They understood what we needed as a school district and made the setup process smooth from day one,” he said.

Hanna is highly aware of the impact the FirstNet team has had on his district even as that support continues. “Any time we had a question or needed help, they were quick to respond and walked us through it without any hassle. They've truly been a partner in helping us keep our students and staff safe,” he said. “I'd recommend FirstNet to other districts. It's made a big difference for us.”

Reaching forward

As a leader in staff and student safety, Hanna and district officials know they're in an even better position going forward thanks to FirstNet. “Rossville Consolidated School District is in a strong position when it comes to communication, thanks to our adoption of the FirstNet system,” he said.

FirstNet users are also able to upgrade the system remotely. This flexibility makes it easy to add radios and scale the communication network to meet future needs, whether it's for Rossville staff or other districts.

“We hope to see more schools within the county transition to the FirstNet system,” Dr. Hanna said. “We view FirstNet not just as a tool for today, but as a foundation for a more connected, responsive, and secure future for our district—and potentially the entire county.”