



Playing it safe around dangerous heat and lightning

Seminole County Public Schools, Florida

With over 67,000 students and 10,000 employees, Seminole County Public Schools (SCPS) is Florida's 12th largest school district and 60th in the United States. It includes 37 elementary schools, 12 middle schools, nine high schools, and six special centers. The district's high schools range in size from 750 to 4,500 students, and the larger facilities include a stadium field, a baseball field, a softball field, and two practice fields. Typically, these fields are spread across each campus, making communication difficult.

“ The ability to send alerts via text to staff solved the problem of driving around to every field, saving important time in getting kids to safety. ”

Jay Getty, Athletic Director - Hagerty High School, SCPS

“ We could have found a weather company that just had lightning data, but we wanted a full-featured product. DTN gave us [insights into] when the weather would be here and even the ability to consult with a meteorologist to ask questions. ”

Jay Getty,
Athletic Director -
Hagerty High School,
SCPS

What they were up against

Thunderstorms — more specifically, lightning — are a regular threat for SCPS. Central Florida frequently tops the list of locations with the most strikes. In 2022, the state experienced 285 lightning events per square mile, according to Vaisala. In addition, the often hot and humid weather makes heat safety a concern, especially for athletes practicing and playing outdoors.

SCPS not only needed accurate weather forecasts and information to protect its students and staff, but it also wanted to find a uniform method that ensured all schools in the district were on the same weather safety page. Their initial requirements were to find an app that provided timely lightning data, but ultimately, they decided they required a full-featured solution.

“Being able to communicate extremely fast to our group, including the ROTC, band, and physical education classes, was a key factor,” explained Jay Getty, Athletic Director - Hagerty High School, SCPS.

After asking various municipalities who their weather information provider was, SCPS selected the highly recommended DTN, knowing that the company met the needs of large-scale environments. DTN products are also used in collegiate and professional markets, which provided SCPS added confidence.

What we did to help

SCPS selected the company’s WeatherSentry[®] solution, an industry-leading weather alerting and visualization system. Its user-friendly dashboard view offers easy access to critical location-based weather intelligence, including hourly forecasts for the next 72 hours and daily forecasts out to 15 days in the future. Detailed radar, storm tracking, and even Wet-Bulb Globe Temperatures — vital for heat safety — are available, plus patented, customizable alerts based on the staff’s chosen parameters. This includes multiple ranges for monitoring dangerous lightning strikes as they approach.

The solution’s ability to send text alerts to staff is a significant benefit. It saves time previously spent driving to each field to warn people to get off the field — which has also elevated the level of safety as the kids can be moved indoors much sooner.

Having multiple account logins empowers coaches across the district in their decision-making, allowing them to monitor developing conditions first-hand on the system’s detailed, interactive map, which they can customize by toggling on and off different layers of weather data. This is a top-rated feature for SCPS staff.

What the impact was

Now a DTN customer for over a decade, SCPS met its goal of keeping all its schools on the same page around the weather — especially around lightning. It even allows them to extend the technology and safety protocols to those that rent district fields for various events, helping protect everyone on school grounds, even after hours and on weekends.

As an approved provider, DTN also helps SCPS meet the Florida High School Athletic Association's Wet Bulb Globe protocols around heat safety and prescribed breaks for practices and games, at home or away. For example, one of the cross-country coaches uses it when the team travels to ensure athlete wellness.

The time savings has been the biggest return on their investment. No one needs to drive to each field to warn about approaching dangers. The solution immediately relays the information to key stakeholders through its patented alerting tools, giving more time for calm, organized evacuations.

