

# Dismissal runs smoothly with high-tech system

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Cheryl Murzyn, principal of St. Elizabeth School in Rockville, remembers when end-of-school dismissal there used to be “not real safe, chaotic and cumbersome.” “We were dismissing 400 kids every day at 3pm. We would have parents come at 2:15 just to get into the ‘conga line’ to wait for their children.” Murzyn said. “We used walkie-talkies to summon the children, and sometimes it would take 45 minutes to dismiss all the children.” Now, the school uses state of the art technology that allows dismissal to go smoother, faster and safer.

Mark Ruiters, a parent of a student at St. Elizabeth School and founder of MHR Technologies in Gaithersburg, developed an E-Z Pass type system that identifies cars as they arrive at the school parking lot, and notifies students that their ride is waiting outside. “Our research revealed that student pickup – particularly at private schools – is considered the number one ‘pain point’ and concern for both parents and school administrators.” Ruiters said. “The goal (of the new electronic system) is to have the student and vehicle arrive in the pick-up area at the same time. We call this technology ‘pickup synchronization.’”

Under his system, a parent places a tag inside their vehicle and “the tag is associated to a carpool record in the system,” Ruiters said.

“When the parent or vehicle enters the school lot, the tag is authenticated, and students linked to the tag are scheduled for release at a very specific time, based on the parent’s arrival time, number of vehicles in the lot, and the traffic flow rate,” he explained. “The student names are displayed in the classrooms using a standard Internet browser.”

The system has been in use at St. Elizabeth’s School since November, and, according to Murzyn, it is successful.

“For me it is a safety concern, which will always be a paramount concern. The kids don’t leave their classroom until their car is here, which means they are literally supervised at every moment,” she said. “They are not dismissed from the classroom and wander about until their parents come, and we have no more kids waiting on the curb.” She added that the system also requires “far fewer staff people, so (school dismissal) is less labor intensive than it was before.”

Ruiters said that in addition to making dismissal easier and safer for parents, students and school officials, the electronic system also has additional benefits. “Parents can also make pickup and absenteeism changes online, and even watch the pickup from their home or office,” he said. “The school also has the ability to send emergency text messages to parent cell phones from a single console. Scheduling students for bus boarding is also part of the system.”

He said that in the few weeks St. Elizabeth School has used the technology, his studies have found that “200 percent less students” are released into the pick-up area at the same time; dismissal time has been decreased by 30 to 50 percent, parent wait time has been decreased by 25 to 35 percent; staff overseeing dismissal has been decreased by 50 percent; and there has been a reduction in “traffic impact” on Montrose Road.

He also noted that the system would save parents more than 25 hours of waiting each school year.

Because of the success of the program, Ruiters said, “we are currently implementing at a second school in Rockville.”