

## **SOS #3 What Private K-12 Education can learn from the Mobile App “Waze” when making COVID-19 decisions to open school**

Over 130 million users contribute to the success of the Google app **WAZE** to navigate their driving decisions each day. The Waze App popularity grew quickly because the App allows users to assess the data it provides (i.e. best travel route, crash locations, speed trap locations) to make instant decisions in their commute patterns. Waze is a “data driven” app with real-time user data and is managed by the trusted tech titan Google. If you don’t use Waze to help make driving decisions currently, you likely know multiple friends who do.

*Waze is a GPS navigation software app owned by Google. It works on smartphones and tablet computers that have GPS support. It provides turn-by-turn navigation information and user-submitted travel times and route details, while downloading location-dependent information over a mobile telephone network. ([www.WAZE.com](http://www.WAZE.com))*

So, what can K-12 private school leaders learn from this app when deciding when/how to open their schools for in-class instruction in the fall? *Quite a lot!*

In the coming weeks & months Headmasters & School Board Members will be faced with a **CHOICE**. The Choice to open their doors to in-class instruction or to keep the facilities closed and revert to remote-learning strategies like many of their public school counterparts will. Unlike the public school systems, this decision may very well impact the financial viability for private schools which could extend well beyond the COVID-19 pandemic. Simply put, private schools have to make the best possible choice that allows for long-term financial success.

Waze operates off of data driven algorithms that give instant analysis allowing a user to immediately choose to change course, much like when a GPS re-routes a driver after a wrong turn. Waze also incorporates data logic through a set of guidelines that helps to formulate the data-based decision-making process, such as: posted speed limits (55 MPH) or road signs, traffic signals and right of way.

Likewise, schools need to incorporate strong data driven decision algorithms that reflect the medical realities on campus at any given moment. To start, decision makers will need to be collecting vital information to insert into the algorithm for proper, useful analyses. Statistical data can be collected from a combination of **(a) users reporting or (b) school – generated reporting** on a frequent (often times daily) basis. Some useful statistics could include:

- How many students, faculty and staff self-reported their COVID-19 screening results today?
- Which students, faculty and staff displayed COVID-19 symptoms, and did they step on campus?
- Which students, faculty and staff were diagnosed by a doctor and what was the result?
- Who tested positive or negative for COVID-19 and who is in the re-testing phase?
- How is the school maintaining a database of test results & what is the obligation to safeguard the confidentiality?
- What data driven results will act like a GPS to re-route decisions and open or close facilities?

Private school leadership is now faced with the decision to (a) open facilities to in-person teaching or (b) keep the facilities closed and institute remote-learning. The decision selected poses a risk to the very lifeblood that allows private schools to operate – **Tuition**. Depending on the decision, two possible scenarios will play out:

### **Loss of Tuition**

Will parents pay tuition for remote learning, extended delays or failure to open at all?

**OR**

### **Enrollment Growth**

Can you attract families from other schools that elected remote learning, extended delays, or who fail to open at all?

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School choices of this magnitude generally fall into the realm of risk management (prior to school opening) and hopefully not crisis management (after school has opened). Over my 25 years' experience working with K-12 school leadership, educators tend to blend risk management and crisis management together. In doing so they generally focus on two narrow types of planning:

- (1) What will they do in the midst of a crisis? (Communication strategies vs. mitigation)
- (2) How will they demonstrate compliance visibility with standard norms and expectations?

With the stress of the COVID-19 pandemic, too many school leaders are all-in on one side of their risk management coin. They are focused on the guidelines being offered by national (i.e.: CDC), state and local officials, but are failing to create data driven systems that can act as a GPS "re-routing" program as conditions change and data dictates. The reason for this lack of focus, the newness of the challenge, has not produced many creative solutions (programs) to follow. Instead Headmasters are finding themselves relying on pure manpower to staff doorways and screen temperatures to grasp at some sort of data to analyze. Is this efficient? Is this a good distribution of resources? Is the data collection even reliable without experts to interpret the data when much of the data is health related?

After your leadership or executive committee has built their *school opening strategy*, stress-test your plan with a few simple questions.

## **6 Questions Every Administrator Needs To Be Able To Answer**

- (1) What data will you rely on to make and justify your COVID-19 decisions & how will you efficiently monitor it?
- (2) Can you enumerate three (3) solid actions you are taking to protect the health and safety of your staff & how are you communicating this as a strong message?
- (3) Is your response to COVID-19 weighted towards using manpower to address the challenges or weighted towards the efficient use of technology? Why?
- (4) What is your plan to protect tuition, as well as, what is your plan to capitalize on enrollment growth? Don't sacrifice conviction for convenience. In other words, don't under-value the actual risk in favor of understanding the consequences.
- (5) Are you prepared to adjust your thinking and assessments daily as conditions on the ground change, and if so how?
- (6) Are you properly weighted for relying on *guidance/directives* vs. *data driven analysis*?

Risk management in the typical K-12 environment is often a single or bi-annual discussion. When dealing with the health and safety of both children and staff, risk management may have to be assessed regularly, perhaps weekly or even daily. Seek out experts you can partner with to drive solid data-based decisions when managing the success of the entire school community.

After all, you are the GPS for your school and it's better to have constantly updated data to make decisions than just knowing what the speed limit (State, Federal or Local Guidelines) is! The success of your school just may depend on it.

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