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SCHOOL NEWS: OPENING SAFELY WITH THE HELP OF A STUDENT-CREATED APP

School News: Opening Safely With the Help of a Student-Created App

Winter 2021

In 2015, Ephraim Zimmerman noticed that school apps for sharing news and connecting students and faculty members were clunky and hard to use, and he wanted to improve how they were built. When he was in seventh grade, he founded a company called Vision Apps and built a news-sharing app for his school. Now a senior at Roycemore School (IL), Zimmerman drew on his entrepreneurial spirit again to help schools manage re-entry amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

When schools and small businesses like medical offices were closed during the early weeks of the COVID-19 pandemic, he thought about how they'd need to track students' and customers' travel, contact with infected persons, and symptoms once they reopened. Under the umbrella of Vision Apps, he designed the [School Wellness Screener app](#) that could be used at his school and eventually at small businesses. It took him six weeks to design the app, and he first tested it at a Roycemore summer camp. He worked on the project with employees Mark Reiland and Sarah Bloom.

School Wellness Screener helps clear students to enter school each day, tracks attendance, and assists with contact tracing by letting the users know if they've been exposed to COVID-19. Schools purchase School Wellness Screener and instruct students and/or their parents to download the app. Before entering the school each morning, students or their parent answer a customizable set of questions, usually about whether they have symptoms, including a cough, sore throat, or loss of taste or smell.

Zimmerman has been marketing the app—which costs \$750 for every 500 students—to other small independent schools with the help of Adrienne Finley Odell, Roycemore's head of school, who spread the word by emailing fellow NAIS member schools. "At the beginning of the project, my goal was to sign on one additional school," Zimmerman says. So far, 36 schools from the East Coast to

Hawaii are
using the app.

Zimmerman was nervous about the first day of classes this past fall, hoping that the app wouldn't crash. It didn't, even with 9,300 registered users.



Ephraim Zimmerman (left) working in 2019 alongside another student during an Adobe-sponsored creative jam, a two-part event series combining a design competition with creative talks.

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