

A Life-Saving Layer of Support

# How Gaggle Helped Hancock County Prioritize Mental Health



Hancock County School District, nestled along Mississippi’s Gulf Coast, has weathered more than its fair share of storms—both literal and figurative. From devastating hurricanes to the prolonged impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, Superintendent Rhett Ladner knew his community was grappling with more than just the physical aftermath.

## FAST FACTS



**Superintendent:**  
Rhett Ladner

**Schools:** 7

**Students:** 4,000

**“You can see fences, cameras, and metal detectors,” he said.**

**“But the trauma inside our students and staff—that’s harder to spot.”**

**RHETT LADNER, SUPERINTENDENT  
HANCOCK COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT**

## THE CHALLENGE

Even with safety measures in place, the district faced a difficult truth: the emotional toll of recent years—from natural disasters to the pandemic—wasn’t going away. “We were in a bad place,” Ladner explained. “We had to figure out how to support the mental health of our students and staff with fewer resources and more need than ever.”

Initially drawn to Gaggle Therapy, the district began exploring solutions. A site visit to another district using Gaggle’s ReachOut mental health support platform, however, opened Ladner’s eyes to what was possible. “We saw it in action, and we knew—we needed to implement ReachOut.”

That urgency became heartbreakingly real when a senior in the district died by suicide. “It lit a fire under us. We couldn’t wait.”

## THE TURNING POINT

The district was quick to launch Gaggle’s ReachOut platform. The rollout was fast and simple—shared through social media, integrated into ClassLink, and added to every student Chromebook.

Shortly thereafter, a fifth grader reached out through ReachOut to share that they were being sexually assaulted by a family member and had a plan to end their life. “If we didn’t have Gaggle in that moment, I don’t know what would have happened,” Ladner said. The district was able to intervene immediately and get that student the help they needed.

Even now, the impact is ongoing.

**“Just the other day, a ReachOut counselor emailed us about a fourth grader struggling with the loss of his mom. We were able to connect our behavior team and support him ahead of a tough Mother’s Day.”**

## THE IMPACT

The platform is now being used by staff as well. QR codes posted around the district make accessing mental health support simple and stigma-free. “It’s a statement to our community that we care.”

For staff, the responsiveness of the Gaggle counselors has been a revelation. “One of our ReachOut counselors was even able to help us file a CPS report. That used to fall entirely on our school

teams—our principals and counselors. It’s a relief to have this layer of support.”

What Ladner appreciates most is how aligned Gaggle felt from the start. “You don’t always get that with vendors. But with Gaggle, there was heart. They saw what we needed, and they made it happen.”

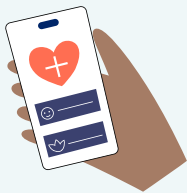
Gaggle is now part of a broader culture of support that Hancock County is building. From initiatives like “ghost hunting” to spot unseen students, to giving out “Dancing Strawberry Awards” for staff who go above and beyond, the district is cultivating joy, visibility, and connection.

## A CALL TO ACTION FOR OTHER DISTRICTS

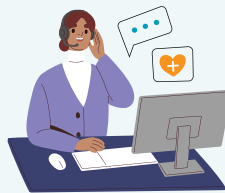
For districts weighing whether to invest in student safety and mental health tools, Ladner is direct: “We spend thousands of dollars on all kinds of things. Why wouldn’t you spend money on this? It’s the most economical safety net you can provide for your students, staff, and community.”

When asked to sum up Gaggle’s impact, Ladner didn’t hesitate: “It’s life-saving. It’s another layer of protection. And it shows we care.”

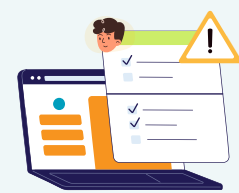
**Learn more about how Gaggle can transform student safety in your district at [gaggle.net](https://gaggle.net).**



24/7 real-time emotional support  
via text, chat, and phone



Trained crisis counselors who  
truly listen and understand



Local resource matching,  
ensuring relevant intervention



Gaggle’s mission is simple yet profound: empower educators to proactively safeguard students’ well-being with innovative, real-time monitoring and a human-centric approach to intervention. As these Ohio districts have discovered, when it comes to protecting students, there is no substitute for vigilance, trust, and an unwavering commitment to care.

**Learn more about the benefits of Gaggle Safety Management.**