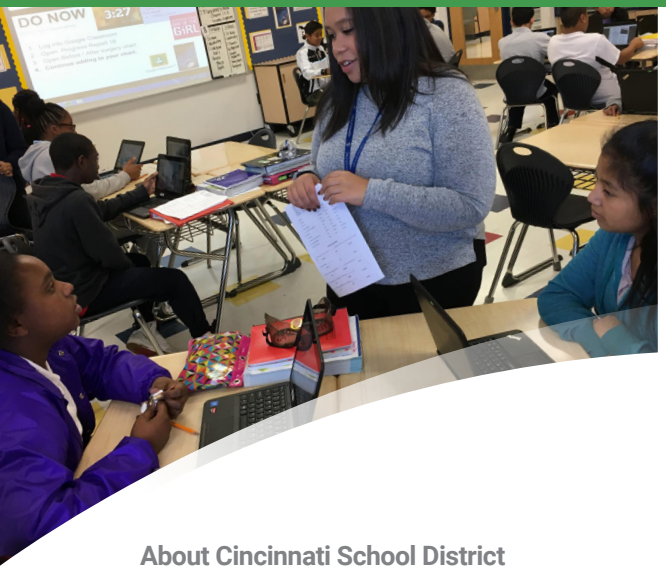

About Cincinnati School District

Serving about 36,000 students in 63 schools spread across a 91-square-mile district in southwest Ohio, Cincinnati Public Schools is Greater Cincinnati's largest school district and Ohio's third largest.

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CINCINNATI SCHOOL DISTRICT

Implementing Gaggle Pays off Year After Year for Large Ohio School District

Challenge

Cincinnati Public Schools has been using Gaggle for years, but the explosion of technology in its classrooms now makes the online student safety platform more critical than ever.

Solution

Gaggle monitors student Google accounts and school-related communication to ensure both physical and cyber safety without compromising student privacy.

Results:

When some grades moved to 1:1, the student safety platform picked up on even more student situations, ensuring that administrators are making the right investment choice year after year.

Implementing Gaggle Pays off Year After Year for Large Ohio School District

Cincinnati Public Schools (CPS) has always been a big fan of Gaggle, having used the online student safety platform for years to monitor students' online activity. When it started handing out laptops to students in grades 4–12 on a 1:1 basis, the district knew protecting the physical and emotional safety of its students would become more important than ever.

"A lot of the issues we're catching are self-harm references, and some of them are clear cries for help"

Along with the 1:1 implementation, CPS is also using a district wide learning management system (LMS) and Google Apps for Education, the latter of which houses content that's filtered through Gaggle. "Technology usage in our classrooms has just exploded over the last five years," said Sarah Trimble-Oliver, CIO. "We've made a very concerted effort to ensure that students learn good digital citizenship and how to act responsibly online."

Using the student safety platform, CPS has caught "some very scary things that could have eventually become bigger problems," said Ms. Trimble-Oliver, who knows that these early catches reiterate the need for online activity monitoring—not only for physical safety, but also for mental health-related incidents. "A lot of the issues we're catching are self-harm references," Sarah points out, "and some of them are very clear cries for help."

For example, at least three times a year, all K-12 students get age-appropriate digital citizenship education that's embedded into the curriculum. The district also has a very interactive acceptable use policy approach that spells out the right and wrong of online activity when utilizing its technology.

"Instead of just sending home a stack of forms that may or may not get read," Ms. Trimble-Oliver stated, "our teachers talk about our acceptable use policy with students at an age-appropriate level and spend face-to-face time talking about what it means with those students."

Knowing that you can't put a price tag on student safety, Ms. Trimble-Oliver said that successful intervention into a single incident is worth any investment CPS has made in its student safety platform. Since implementing the solution, administrators have been alerted to inappropriate online behaviors and other issues that it was able to handle quickly.

Most of those alerts fall into two categories: questionable content (which gets forwarded to the principal for handling) and possible student situations. The latter usually involve self-harm or threats against others (i.e., someone is fighting in the parking lot at 3:00PM today). Those threats are also communicated to the principal, but then quickly escalated to the assistant superintendent or other high-level staff members if necessary. "We don't stop calling until we get hold of someone," Ms. Trimble-Oliver explained.

In rare cases, CPS has had to involve law enforcement in these situations—for example, an after-hours alert when no one else is available or when a wellness check is required. Regardless of whether a case escalates or not, Ms. Trimble-Oliver said having Gaggle to quickly detect and notify is a major benefit for everyone involved.

"If we can catch the issue within the context of school, and with the help of adults who love our students and want the best for them," Ms. Trimble-Oliver continued, "it's much better than having it caught out in the real world."

To districts that are considering a student safety platform, she sees it as a worthwhile investment for any school that values the lessons of digital citizenship and online safety. "A lot of districts are cash-strapped and having to make tough decisions about where to invest their resources," Ms. Trimble-Oliver acknowledged. "For any district like ours that values technology and student safety, I highly recommend this investment."