About Northern York County School District

Located in Dillsburg, Pennsylvania, Northern York County School District serves more than 3,000 students across four elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school.

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NORTHERN YORK COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT

Gaggle Is a Worthy Investment for Pennsylvania School District

Challenge

Northern York County School District was implementing a 1:1 laptop initiative and needed a system to monitor student activity online.

Solution

The district adopted Gaggle to monitor the content that students were posting through their school Office 365 accounts.

Results

One student life has been saved as a result of Gaggle's diligence and immediate alerts, and 36 incidents were flagged as potentially problematic during the platform's first semester in use.

NORTHERN YORK COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT

Gaggle Is a Worthy Investment for Pennsylvania School District

When Northern York County School District (NYCSD) implemented the Gaggle student safety platform, administrators knew that if the solution saved just one life, it would be more than worth the investment. "We've come to a point in our society in which the school cannot be the sole provider and the sole protector of our students; we truly have to work as a community through this process," said Superintendent Eric Eshbach.

"Resources like Gaggle enable us to connect with other aspects of our community—be it mental health providers or local law enforcement," Eshbach continued, "to ensure that we are getting the information that we need about our students and then sharing that information in a secure and confidential way."

That commitment was put to the test recently when a student used his computer to write a suicide note to his family detailing his plan, outlining his struggles, and essentially saying goodbye to them. Gaggle flagged the document as a potential problem and immediately alerted the school's administrators.

"It was clear through the language that this was a unique situation and a very serious one," said Principal Steve Lehman of Northern High School, whose team came up with a plan of action that involved both a call to the boy's family and a welfare check by local police. The student then received the emotional support he needed to address his struggles. "Because of the urgency that was shared through his document," said Lehman, "we definitely believe that we helped save a life that day."

SUPPORTING A 1:1 INITIATIVE

Focused on student safety and security, NYCSD regularly implements new tools and technology to keep its campuses safe. The district installed new security cameras, uses the "see something, say something" system, and utilizes Gaggle to oversee students' online activity. Initially used for email archiving, the platform now serves as the district's core email and document monitoring tool.

Eshbach said Gaggle was chosen based on the vendor's long history of working with over 1,400 districts and the fact that his team was familiar with the product. "We hired a new technology director who had worked in the private sector and with the Pennsylvania State Police. At that time, we were only using Gaggle at one of our schools on a pilot basis," Eshbach explained. "His background in online security led him to believe that Gaggle would be a good addition to the 1:1 laptop program we were rolling out."

Today, when students share documents and questionable material of any kind comes through, the district's administrative team is made aware of it immediately. "We get that information on weekends, holidays, evenings, and all times of the day," said Lehman, "and we have a team that responds to it."

36 REPORTS IN A SINGLE SEMESTER

Having just ended its first semester of using a student safety platform, NYCSD has addressed 31 reports of questionable content to date. It also had five reports of possible student safety issues. The fact that the district handled the 36 additional alerts with ease shows that Gaggle is "not a product that's going to require an additional staff member to monitor," Eshbach said.

"On a day-to-day basis, we don't hear much from Gaggle, but in situations where there is questionable content or a student safety issue, we're notified immediately," Eshbach added, recalling a situation in late 2019 when his team was notified of a student's online activity involving pornographic images.

"He was getting around our filter and getting small thumbnails of pornographic images, screenshotting them, and then putting them in a Word document," said Eshbach. "When he tried to delete one of those images, Gaggle noticed something inappropriate about that and notified us."

Upon further investigation, the district found some "really disturbing images," and was able to work with the student and his parents to resolve the issue and get the student the help he needed.

"I've been around long enough to remember when students brought a magazine to school and hid it in their backpack, but this goes beyond that," said Eshbach, "and into some deeper mental health issues that our student safety platform helps identify and address."

Lehman concurred and said that if the student safety platform only saved one student's life, the investment was well worth it. "It's an investment, but even if it can just help us save one life, which we believe it already has," he said, "then it's well worth the time, energy, and money that it takes to run programs like this to help us keep our students safe."