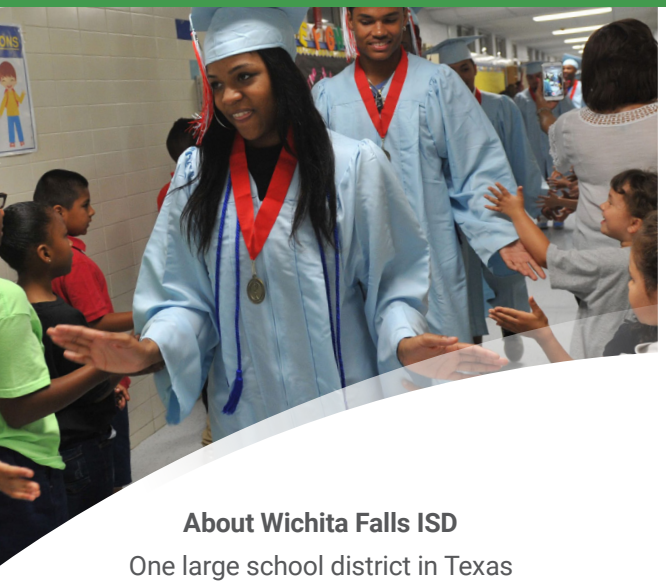

About Wichita Falls ISD

One large school district in Texas implemented the Gaggle student safety platform to protect its students' mental, emotional, and social safety. Wichita Falls ISD has14,100 students with 1,200 teachers and 2,200 total staff across 26 campuses.

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WICHITA FALLS ISD

Once You Save One Student's Life, the Investment Has Paid for Itself

Challenge

Wichita Falls Independent School District (ISD) implemented 1:1 Chromebooks without having a formal system in place to monitor students' mental, emotional, and social health issues.

Solution

Wichita Falls ISD revamped their district culture, implementing new physical, emotional, and social health supports, including the Gaggle student safety platform.

Results

Administrators have intervened in at least 10 different situations where 2:00am phone calls or in-home visits helped thwart potentially dangerous situations.

Once You Save One Student's Life, the Investment Has Paid for Itself

For Wichita Falls Independent School District (ISD), monitoring the mental and emotional health of 14,100 students across 26 campuses was difficult, if not almost impossible. Its most useful tool was the Gallup Student Poll, which was administered once a year to students in the fifth through twelfth grades.

"This will be our third year doing the poll, and that's the only longitudinal data we really had to work with," said Superintendent Michael S. Kuhrt. The poll focuses on questions like "Do you feel connected?" and "When you're at school, do you feel that an adult at the school cares about you?"

In certain instances, the answers gave Wichita Falls ISD administrators the information they needed to be able to intervene when situations arose, and to respond accordingly to those issues. When the district realized three years ago that it needed a more formalized approach to monitoring student mental health issues, it called on Gaggle for help.

Everything Became Real

It's been three years since Wichita Falls ISD rolled out its 1:1 Chromebooks initiative. Relying on a combination of Chromebook filters, it was able to detect when students were visiting prohibited websites and/or otherwise going against the district's usage guidelines.

"We felt pretty safe," said Kuhrt. "Then, when we started using Gaggle to monitor what students were really talking and writing about online, all of a sudden everything became a lot more real."

This happened right around the time the district was putting the finishing touches on its new belief system. The new approach included developing systems that would identify and meet the physical, emotional, and social needs of Wichita Falls ISD's students. "We spent the last year evaluating, adjusting, and looking at the systems that we currently have in place to support those needs," Kuhrt explained.

Today, attention to student health is embedded in everything Wichita ISD does. "We're thinking about what students feel, what they're thinking, and how they're doing emotionally," Kuhrt said, "much like we do with academics and everything else. We've codified it into our strategic design framework."

> "We're thinking about what students feel, what they're thinking, and how they're doing emotionally."

You Can't Afford Not to Have This

Since implementing Gaggle, Wichita Falls ISD has used the student safety platform to intervene in about 10 different situations that could have turned into crises had no one responded or helped out at the right time. In some cases, the Gaggle alerts prompted administrators to make calls to students' homes at 2:00am or to make an impromptu home visit.

"Those are the extremes," continued Kuhrt, "but we also saw some really disturbing things that students were talking about and risks they were taking that just weren't healthy." He said Gaggle raised red flags quickly in these situations, letting the district know that something was amiss and that it needed to act.

In other situations, students intentionally posted comments that would get Gaggle's attention, knowing that it would provide them with a safe place for expressing their fears and concerns.

"They knew we'd catch it and follow up," explained Kuhrt, whose team uses a flowchart to identify the contacting and intervening process that kicks into gear when Gaggle flags a problem online.

To other schools or districts that are considering a student safety platform, he said it should be a natural choice for any institution that wants to keep its students and staff safe from harm. "I don't think you have a choice but to get Gaggle," Kuhrt stated. "Once you save one child's life, the investment has more than paid for itself."