



THE STATE OF STUDENT SAFETY

THROUGH THE GAGGLE LENS

JULY–DECEMBER 2018

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This report highlights key trends in harmful student behavior as revealed through the Gaggle lens. It shows the frequency of these behaviors among students nationwide, so K-12 leaders are aware of these threats and can take steps to address them.

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At Gaggle, our mission is to help ensure the safety and well-being of all students. We use both artificial intelligence and trained safety experts to proactively assist districts in the prevention of bullying, inappropriate behaviors, school violence, and other harmful situations—24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. Gaggle has helped hundreds of districts avoid tragedies and save lives, while also protecting their liability.



LESSONS FOR LEADERS

K-12 leaders will be surprised to learn how many of their students are acting in ways that pose an immediate threat to themselves or others—and leaving evidence of this behavior in their online activity. In fact, during the first six months of the 2018–19 academic year, Gaggle revealed:

- 5 out of every 10,000 students threatened that they—or someone they knew—were **planning a suicidal act** or were engaging in self harm.
- 4 out of every 10,000 students **shared child pornographic** content on their school account involving themselves or their peers.
- 1 out of every 10,000 students **planned a specific threat** of violence toward others or their school.

In addition, for every 10,000 students, a district can expect Gaggle to identify **49 students experiencing suicidal thoughts** and **29 students considering violent acts** during a six-month period.

These figures (left) come from Gaggle’s student safety management solution, which uses a combination of machine learning algorithms and human safety experts to review students’ use of online tools. The solution alerts school officials when students show signs of self harm, depression, thoughts of suicide, substance abuse, cyberbullying, unhealthy relationships, and other credible threats.

“Experiencing a school shooting or student suicide is every school leader’s worst nightmare. In the first six months of this school year, Gaggle has alerted us to 148 threats of violence among our 14,100 students, and five students planning self harm. We’re grateful that we were tipped off to these threats and could act immediately to prevent a tragedy,” says Michael S. Kuhrt, superintendent of schools for Wichita Falls ISD in Texas.

The data shows that students as young as elementary school are engaging in an alarming number of behaviors that are dangerous to themselves or others. Teachers and administrators might not see the warning signs in their physical interactions with students. However, students are revealing these behaviors through the messages they send, the online documents they create, and the images they share.

Mackenzie Sandack, a safety expert for Gaggle, explains, “Many students who seem fine on the outside are really hurting inside. These students often express their pain in an online journal or confide in a friend via email. School leaders might never know about these cries for help unless they have visibility into their students’ use of school-issued digital tools.”

This report highlights key trends in harmful student behavior as revealed through the Gaggle lens. It shows the frequency of these behaviors among students nationwide, so K-12 leaders are aware of these threats and can take steps to address them.

Methodology

Gaggle has provided safe online learning products to the K-12 market since 1999. Gaggle’s student safety solution analyzes and reviews the use of online tools within Google’s G Suite, Microsoft Office 365, and the Canvas learning management system for nearly five million students across the United States.

Machine learning technology watches for students’ use of words or phrases that could indicate potentially harmful behavior. If a match is discovered, trained safety professionals evaluate the content to determine whether it poses a credible threat—and if so, how serious it is.

Each actionable item is sorted by type. The categories include Suicide & Self



Gaggle has alerted us to 148 threats of violence among our 14,100 students, and 5 students planning self harm.

Harm, Nudity & Sexual Content, Violence Toward Others, Harassment, Drugs & Alcohol, Profanity & Vulgar Language, and Other Inappropriate Content. Gaggle’s team of safety experts use

a threat assessment rubric to rate the severity of each incident as either a Violation, Questionable Content, or a Possible Student Situation.

Violations are the least severe type of incident. Students receive warnings by email for violations of their school or district's Acceptable Use Policy, and administrators can be copied when multiple warnings occur.

Incidents that give cause for concern, but do not reveal an imminent threat to a student's life or well-being, are considered **Questionable Content**. In these instances, administrators are notified of the incident via email.

Incidents that reveal an imminent threat to the student's life or well-being are considered a **Possible Student Situation**. These cases result in direct, immediate personal notifications by telephone to the school or district's specified contact, 24 hours a day.

This report is based on the number of actionable items that Gaggle safety experts identified as Questionable Content or Possible Student Situations from July through December 2018.

Across all 4.8 million students served in this six-month period, Gaggle observed

more than 51,000 instances of student Questionable Content. In addition, **more than 5,100** incidents were deemed serious enough to warrant immediate action by school officials to keep students safe.

Key Trends in Student Behavior

While potentially harmful behavior can be revealed in many ways, one trend that has emerged is student use of G Suite and Office 365 for journaling. Students are creating Microsoft or Google documents to write about emotions and experiences such as suicidal thoughts or a history of being bullied or sexually assaulted.

Students are also revealing troubling secrets to their friends using a school email account or a collaborative Doc.

"One student might ask a friend, 'Hey are you OK? You seem sad today.' The friend might then feel the need to unburden herself, because she can't struggle with her problems alone," says Sandack, who counseled teens at a crisis center before joining Gaggle's staff. "It might be something as simple as, 'I thought about cutting last night.' If we saw that interaction, we would alert a school

administrator that this is what the student was thinking so she could get the help she needs."

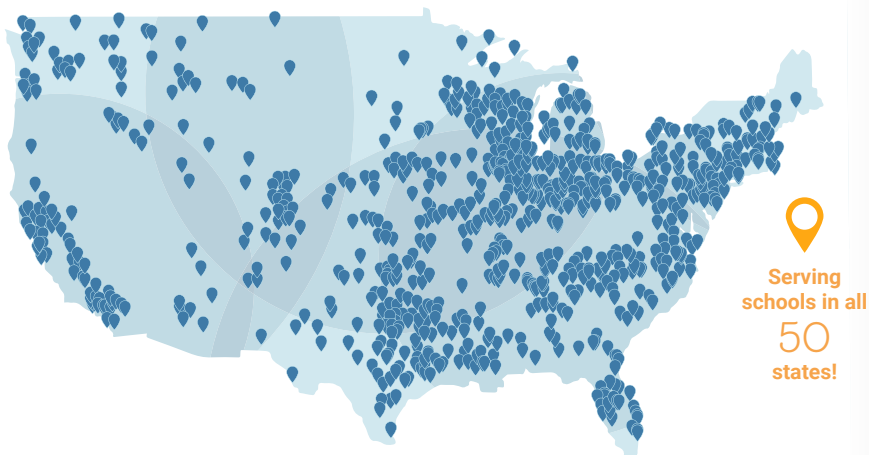
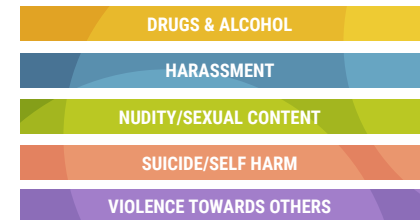
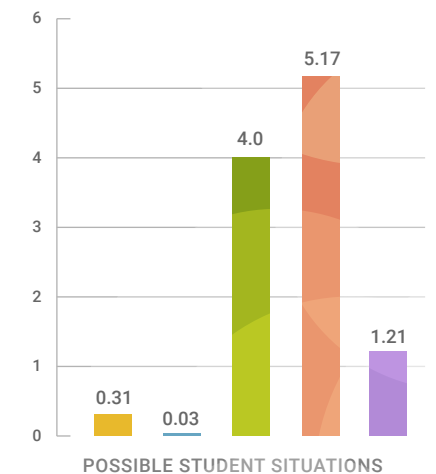
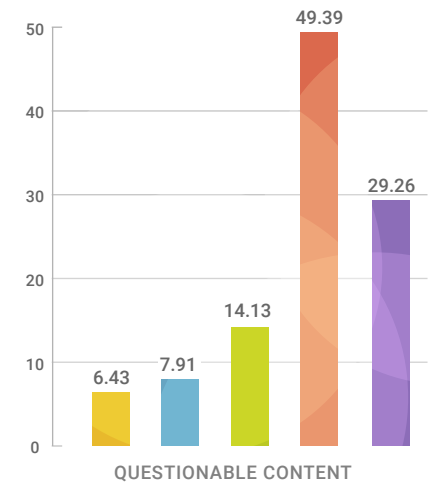
Sandack is one of the trained Gaggle professionals who evaluate flagged content and make sure it receives an appropriate response. She and her colleagues each come across about a dozen examples of Possible Student Situations a day. Most of these involve suicidal thoughts or sexually explicit content, such as students sharing nude selfies or other inappropriate content with each other.

"We see an increase in this type of activity around the holidays, such as Christmas and Valentine's Day," she notes. "After a school shooting, we'll see a rise in potential threats as well. Some of this might be copycat behavior on the part of troubled students, and some is the result of greater awareness, where students are more attuned to possible warning signs."

When Sandack calls an administrator with a warning the administrator is frequently surprised to hear that the student poses a threat to himself or others.

"Often, it's the students you wouldn't expect who are engaging in dangerous behaviors," she observes. "Many students don't want to talk with adults about their problems. They're uncomfortable talking to an adult."

TOTAL NUMBER OF INCIDENTS
Per 10,000 Students, July–December 2018



SUICIDE & SELF HARM

Gaggle looks for signs that students might be depressed, have suicidal thoughts, or are engaging in self harm behavior, such as cutting or burning themselves. When content reveals possible self harm without evidence of an imminent threat, it is characterized as Questionable Content. However, when this activity seems imminent, it becomes escalated to a Possible Student Situation.

Here are some examples of things that students have written in email messages, Google Hangout chats, and documents that suggest a threat of suicide or self harm might be imminent:

- 📄 My depression has gotten to the point that i could not care less how sad anyone is without me, i just need to escape this. this is me giving up. this is me saying goodbye to everything. to all the family i have not yet to meet.
- ✉️ That's it and I'm done. I have had a great life and I love everyone. I wish it could have been longer, but I just didn't want to make any more people's life miserable. Goodbye forever.
- 📄 This is my final suicide note and i won't commit suicide...yet. But, don't cry when i die please. Stay strong okay?

NUMBER OF ACTIONABLE ITEMS BY MONTH

	JULY	AUG	SEPT	OCT	NOV	DEC	TOTAL
QCON	663	1,359	4,209	5,901	5,923	5,503	23,558
PSS	36	55	362	664	748	600	2,465

BLOOMINGTON 87 EARLY INTERVENTION SAVES LIVES

Suicide is the second-leading cause of death for 10- to 24-year-olds, and more than 5,500 young lives are lost to suicide each year, according to the American Association of Suicidology.

With the goal of keeping students safe and intervening to prevent a potential tragedy, School District 87 in Bloomington, Ill., adopted Gaggle as part of its 1:1 computing initiative that encompasses 10 schools and about 5,500 students.

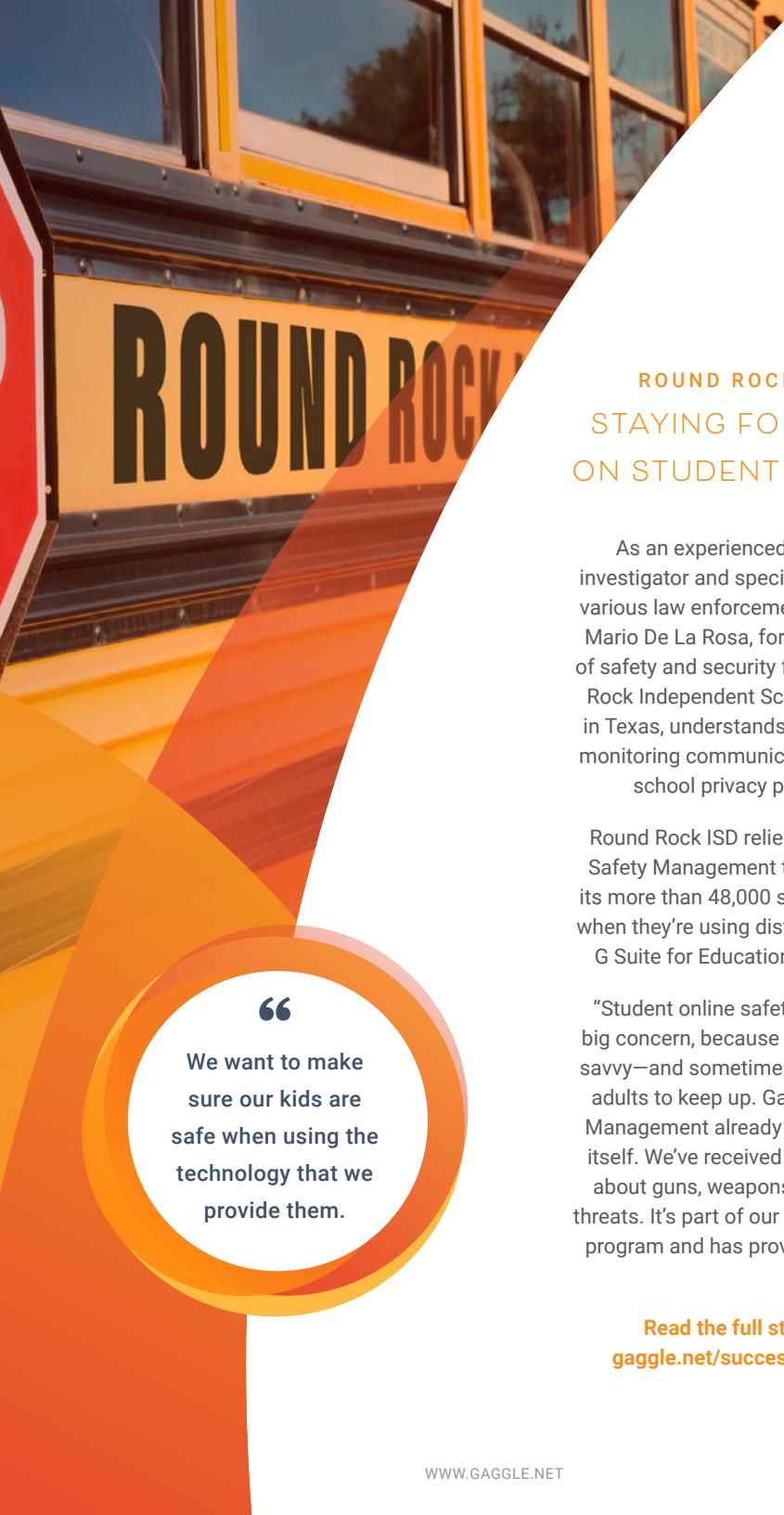
Since implementing Gaggle, the district has identified at least a half-a-dozen cases where administrators believed students were heading down the path to suicide. Thanks to a Gaggle alert, the district was able to act swiftly and prevent catastrophe.

"Of course, you never actually know, because the end result thankfully didn't happen," says Superintendent Barry Reilly. "But I'm fully convinced (that Gaggle has helped us save lives)."



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Read the full story at gaggle.net/success-stories



ROUND ROCK ISD STAYING FOCUSED ON STUDENT SAFETY

As an experienced criminal investigator and special agent with various law enforcement agencies, Mario De La Rosa, former director of safety and security for the Round Rock Independent School District in Texas, understands the value of monitoring communications within school privacy policies.

Round Rock ISD relies on Gaggle Safety Management to help keep its more than 48,000 students safe when they're using district-provided G Suite for Education accounts.

"Student online safety remains a big concern, because kids are very savvy—and sometimes it's hard for adults to keep up. Gaggle Safety Management already has paid for itself. We've received information about guns, weapons, and other threats. It's part of our school safety program and has proven to work."

“

We want to make sure our kids are safe when using the technology that we provide them.

Read the full story at
gaggle.net/success-stories

VIOLENCE TOWARD OTHERS

Regarding violence toward others, Gaggle looks for signs that students might be planning an attack or threatening someone with physical harm. Signs of possible violence include discussions of weapons, bomb threats, or other explicit threats.

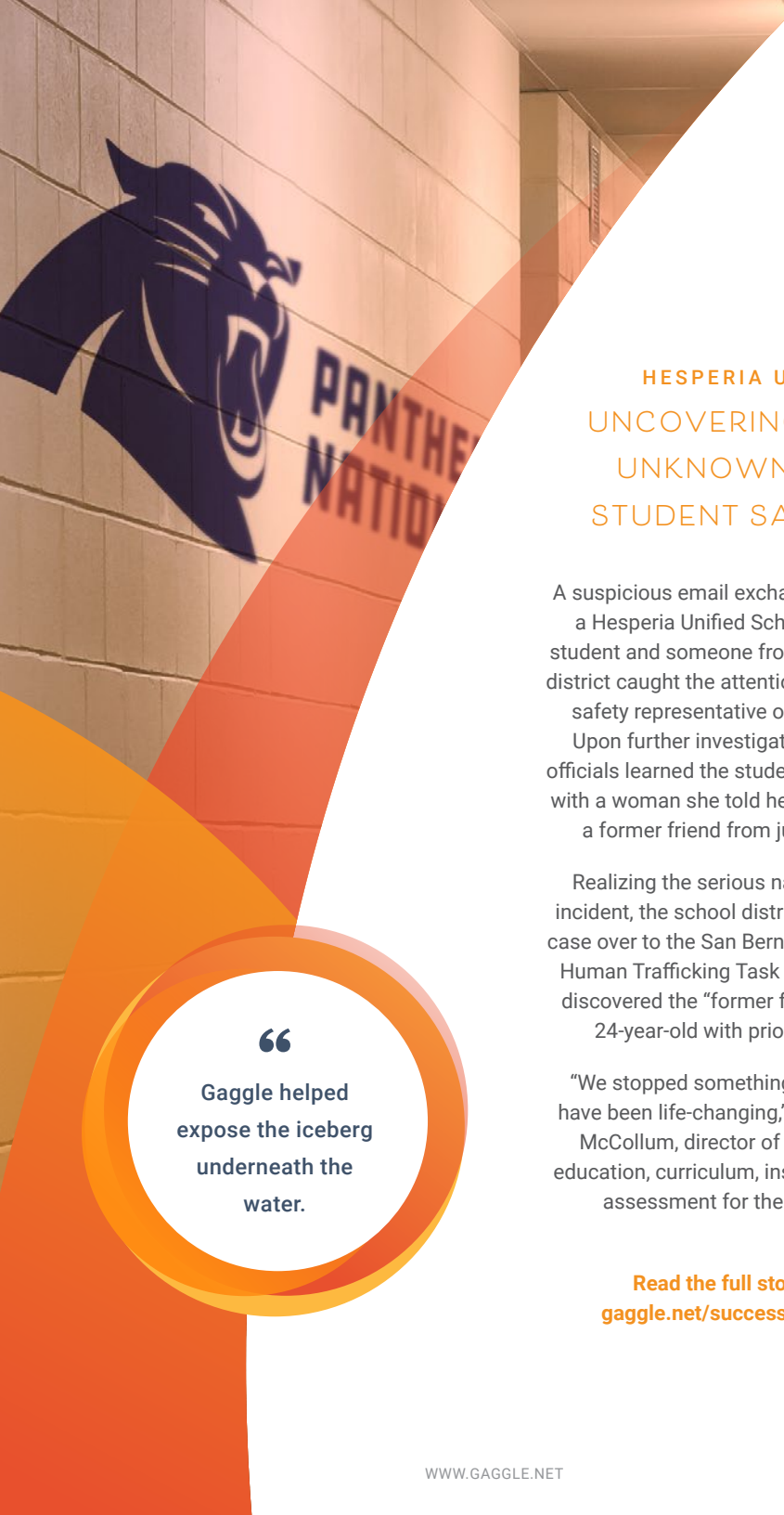
Again, when content reveals possible harm to others without evidence of an imminent threat, it is categorized as Questionable Content. When this activity reveals an imminent threat, it becomes escalated to a Possible Student Situation.

Examples of statements students have written to suggest that violence might be imminent include:

- 📄 I am just simply ending myself and everything I hope you can/will be happy You won't hear or see me Like you said I won't ever matter just ask [Name Redacted] what I did and you will know tomorrow.....Not everyone will be saved
- 📧 Now time for my plans to shoot up the school
- 📧 There's a rumor that someone's gonna shoot up the school during this lunch.

NUMBER OF ACTIONABLE ITEMS BY MONTH

	JULY	AUG	SEPT	OCT	NOV	DEC	TOTAL
QCON	265	866	2,462	3,604	3,450	3,310	13,957
PSS	9	30	104	122	169	143	577



HESPERIA USD UNCOVERING THE UNKNOWN OF STUDENT SAFETY

A suspicious email exchange between a Hesperia Unified School District student and someone from outside the district caught the attention of a Gaggle safety representative one evening.

Upon further investigation, district officials learned the student had met up with a woman she told her mother was a former friend from junior high.

Realizing the serious nature of the incident, the school district turned the case over to the San Bernardino County Human Trafficking Task Force, which discovered the “former friend” was a 24-year-old with prior arrests.

“We stopped something that could have been life-changing,” says Robert McCollum, director of secondary education, curriculum, instruction, and assessment for the district.

Read the full story at
gaggle.net/success-stories

“
Gaggle helped
expose the iceberg
underneath the
water.”

NUDITY & SEXUAL CONTENT

Nudity and sexual content cover a wide range of student activity, such as sharing nude photos of oneself, asking for nude photos from another student, sharing other pornographic images, discussing sex acts, threatening sexual assault, or even revealing instances of rape or incest.

If online content contains professional pornography or reveals inappropriate sexual activity involving a student, it is considered Questionable Content. If it contains pornography that appears to include a minor or an imminent plan of inappropriate sexual activity, then it becomes a Possible Student Situation.

- ✉ My own uncle raped me and I dealt with the pain alone
- 📷 More than 30 self-taken images of an individual's penis. The same folder also contained multiple photographs of a topless female with her face visible.
- ✉ It won't really be rape since we both will enjoy it
- 📺 A video taken of two young men having sexual intercourse in a stairwell. They appear to be unaware of being filmed.
- 📺 A video of a female performing oral sex on multiple males, while the others in the room watch.

NUMBER OF ACTIONABLE ITEMS BY MONTH

	JULY	AUG	SEPT	OCT	NOV	DEC	TOTAL
QCON	507	851	1,110	1,373	1,562	1,338	6,741
PSS	183	171	315	419	484	334	1,906

OTHER HARMFUL BEHAVIORS

Harassment involves teasing or bullying in which there is no threat of physical harm from one student to another. Besides harassment, students also frequently allude to drug or alcohol use in emails, Google Hangout chats, or online documents. If this content reveals possession, intent to sell, or intent to procure an illegal substance, then it is considered a Possible Student Situation.

The "Other Inappropriate Content" category might include a whole host of situations, such as students making plans to run away from home, discussing or planning a crime, sharing instructions for how to circumvent a school's web filter, or responding to an email phishing scam.

- 📄 If my parents come to the school for me read this to them. i thinks its best i leave for good, so i took a train to Spokane. i have hurt you all but clearly im am no longer wanted here.
- ✉️ this weird old guy keeps bothering me and asking me weird questions and it is getting so annoying i also don't even know this dude
- ✉️ I took a little crystal meth yesterday to try it but since i noticed that it engaged me, i decided to do a little more today to get a higher score on the math test.

NUMBER OF ACTIONABLE, JULY–DECEMBER 2018

	HARASSMENT	DRUGS & ALCOHOL	OTHER BEHAVIOR	TOTAL
QCON	3,774	3,067	323	7,164
PSS	14	149	17	180

EDISON TOWNSHIP SCHOOL DISTRICT DIGITAL SAFETY SAVES STUDENT LIVES



Part of the mission of the Public Schools of Edison Township is to provide a safe, supportive learning environment that promotes students' sense of self-worth and encourages productive contributions to a diverse and constantly evolving global society.

The school district, located approximately 30 miles outside of New York City, is home to 15,000 students.

In 2015, Edison Township Public Schools integrated Gaggle into their students' G Suite for Education environment.

As the former Superintendent of Edison Township Public Schools, Dr. Richard O'Malley is quick to point out how difficult it can be to keep up with digital learning opportunities provided by the district. As part of their 1:1 initiative, the Edison Township SD wanted to extend the safety offered in its 18 schools to the home.

"We couldn't monitor the same way at home that we could do within a school building," said Dr. O'Malley. "Gaggle has helped provide that additional layer of safety both during school and outside our school buildings."

As one of four district contacts, O'Malley can quickly recall numerous emergencies uncovered by Gaggle. One incident involved a student who was being bullied and seemingly didn't have anywhere to turn. To Dr. O'Malley's surprise, his students used a Google Doc as an anonymous tipline to help the troubled youth.

Another incident occurred after Dr. O'Malley received a late night phone call on a Friday about a student who was trying to hurt herself. "Many of our students express themselves through writing," he recalled. "[Without Gaggle] we would have never known about that child."

Because Gaggle Safety Management identifies and reviews content 24/7, the district was immediately able to contact local police as well as the students' parents and get both of the children the help they needed.

Edison Township administrators and staff believe that they have the added assurance when it comes to moving their digital transformation forward. "Gaggle provides 24-hours-a-day, 365-days-a-year safety for our students," said Dr. O'Malley. "I know for sure there are many students who we have saved."

[Read the full story at gaggle.net/success-stories](http://gaggle.net/success-stories)

VISIBILITY IS **KEY**

Data from Gaggle’s solution demonstrates that students are not only engaging in potentially harmful behavior at an alarming rate, but they are revealing this behavior using school-issued email accounts and other digital services.

With more than 51,000 instances of Questionable Content over a six-month period among Gaggle’s 4.8 million users with more than 56,000 identified safety issues, it’s clear that K-12 leaders face an enormous challenge keeping students safe.

Yet, if K-12 leaders have visibility into students’ online activity, they can step in and take appropriate action to protect students from harming themselves or others—in some cases, preventing a situation from becoming tragic before it’s too late.

In fact, of the more than 2,400 instances that Gaggle identified as Possible Student Situations regarding suicide or self harm **more than 600** were later revealed to be serious threats in which school officials were able to intervene in time and save lives.



A service like Gaggle is really important because we can’t do it on our own.

“In a world where students are comfortable using technology the way they want, we must be protective and help safeguard them,” says Christina Iremonger, chief digital officer for the Vancouver Public Schools in Washington, which has invested in the Gaggle platform for its 37 schools and nearly 24,000 students. “A service like Gaggle is really important to help us do that because we can’t do it [on our own]. We need that extra far-reaching support.”





CELEBRATING TWENTY YEARS OF SAFETY

Gaggle has been providing safety solutions to the K-12 industry since 1999. Although education technology continues to evolve, our mission remains the same; Ensuring the safety and well-being of students so teachers can focus on the education of our youth.



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