



DESERT SANDS UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

A Valuable Tool for Encouraging Appropriate Online Behavior

About Desert Sands USD

Desert Sands USD's new digital initiative encourages students to extend their learning outside of the classroom. They are focused on providing equal opportunities to all of their 29,000 students by supplying digital devices through a 1:1 program.



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Challenge

The district wanted more human eyes on its student's safety on a 24/7/365 basis and no longer wanted to rely on just three TOSAs (Teachers on Special Assignment) to handle student situations.

Solution

Adopted Gaggle to work with its G Suite and 1:1, which provides both in-classroom and take-home devices to all students in second through twelfth grade.

Results:

A robust system that monitors Google email and Google drive accounts, provides activity dashboards, and intervenes when students are in trouble.

A Valuable Tool for Encouraging Appropriate Online Behavior

As technology continues to transform the way that K-12 instructors teach; how their students consume and engage with their learning; and how employees, students, and parents communicate with one another, the district is doing its part to help prepare students for success in the modern work world.

But when technology steps in and preserves human life, its value proposition becomes, well, invaluable. That's exactly what happened recently at Desert Sands Unified School District in La Quinta, Calif., where a student safety management platform identified not one, but two, different troubled students.

"We've had two instances where both the district administrators and the students' families agree that two student lives have been saved. That's huge," said Chief Innovation and Information Officer Dr. Kelly May-Vollmar, Ed.D.

"The fact that a person is calling another person and getting a student the help that he or she needs," Dr. May-Vollmar continued, "there just aren't words enough to describe how powerful, and how vital that is."

Desert Sands USD has been using Gaggle's safety management platform for about 2-1/2 years. Previously using a few different student email monitoring systems, the district liked Gaggle's artificial intelligence (AI)-based screening capabilities. Combined with "real human" monitoring, the solution helps the district make quick—and sometimes lifesaving—decisions.

The new platform would also replace a system whereby flagged email was sent to the district's three-person TOSA team. "Three people monitoring a district of 30,000 students when that's not even their full-time job is just unrealistic," Dr. May-Vollmar pointed out. "They were basically expected to monitor email all weekend long on the off chance that someone might threaten to hurt themselves or someone else.

Realizing that approach stood in the way of good intervention at a 1:1 district where students in second through twelfth grade take their devices home at night (PreK-1 have devices but don't take them home), Desert Sands USD adopted Gaggle for student email and Google Drive monitoring. Now, if students create inappropriate emails or documents, they receive an instant warning about it.

School officials are also notified, and use the district's acceptable technology use policy to determine the next step. "A lot of our schools have discipline matrixes," Dr. May-Vollmar added. "So, depending on where that incident falls in the discipline matrix, officials respond accordingly."

In some cases, that could mean helping a student manage a traumatic experience; in others, it means

assisting with a youngster who has made a poor choice and needs reminding of the district's policies. "We've brought all of the right people onboard to help make sure that we're getting every student where they need to be regarding they're safety when using online tools," stated Dr. May-Vollmar.

Knowing that developing brains don't always think about their online digital footprints, Dr. May-Vollmar said Gaggle reminds them every time it sends out an email to students who are acting inappropriately online. It talks directly to students and instills a level of understanding that can be difficult to enforce across a large student population.

Gaggle also gives administrators a high-level view of districtwide activities, all broken down by group (e.g., inappropriate behavior and possible imminent situations). "We can go in and get a snapshot of a school and figure out what needs to be addressed right at the beginning of the school year or even right now, at midyear," Dr. May-Vollmar added

"Gaggle gives us a very useful tool for creating the right climate and culture that we want to be able to help curb behavior," Dr. May-Vollmar continued, "and not just respond to it when it happens."