



### About Meriden Public Schools

Located about 30 miles south of Hartford, Meriden Public Schools is comprised of 8,600 students who attend one of eight elementary schools, two middle schools or two high schools. The school system includes a large minority population with about 15% English-language learners.

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## MERIDEN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

# Leading a Safety-First Digital Transformation

### CHALLENGE:

While launching a 1:1 Chromebook initiative, Meriden Public Schools was looking for ways to keep its students safe when using district-provided technology.

### SOLUTION:

In addition to website filtering and device management, the school district also turned to Gaggle Safety Management for G Suite, which helps protect students from self-harm, cyberbullying, pornography and other harmful situations.

### RESULTS:

Meriden Public Schools continues its digital transformation, adding more grade levels to its 1:1 initiative while experiencing increases in academic performance and positive school climate.

## Leading a Safety-First Digital Transformation

Chromebooks, have the power to transform any school district. Still, a school district's digital journey should be safe, and administrators at Meriden Public Schools take safety and security very seriously.

Meriden's digital transformation started years ago thanks to the leadership of Dr. Mark Benigni, Superintendent, and other administrators who launched a Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) program. "Rather than suspending kids for using phones, we wanted to encourage them to use phones for educational purposes," recalled Dr. Benigni. "We saw significant educational benefits to students having connectivity and access."

The district then decided to implement a 1:1 program at its two middle schools, both high schools and at one elementary school starting with iPads and now mostly Chromebooks. "We listened to our students," said Dr. Benigni. They liked what Chromebooks provided them much more than tablets. The truth is they still all have their phones in addition to what we're providing them."

With a website filter in place, Chromebook asset management, Google SafeSearch and Internet safety lessons built into the curriculum, administrators wanted to be even more proactive. "Our goal is to educate students," said Barbara Haeffner, Director of Curriculum and Instructional Technology. "If they're in a difficult situation or if they have done something that we think is inappropriate or not the best for their digital footprint, then we should provide a learning experience for them."

One reason for the district's success has been the transparent approach it takes throughout the community. After piloting Gaggle Safety Management, Meriden administrators sent a letter home to parents notifying them of the new service and shared results of the pilot with the board of education. "We see our parents as partners," said Mrs. Haeffner, "so this isn't an 'I got you' moment where we caught their child doing something wrong. It's about how we can work together to help students have a positive online presence and teach them the rules of the road as they're going along."

Dr. Benigni believes the district's technology nights—where students show their parents how they're using technology in school—also help build support for Meriden's digital transformation. These events include

demonstrations on how the district protects students when using technology. "We wanted to show that if you're going to go 1:1 and we're going to encourage students to use devices and be connected to a larger society, then we need to support our students and our families," he said.

District administrators made it a priority to work with building leaders to ensure that they were getting information about their students in an efficient and timely manner. Gaggle notifications go straight to contacts at each school with personnel at the district central office serving as backup.

One incident that stands out involved a middle school female student expressing suicidal thoughts in a Google Doc. Due to quick action by the Gaggle Safety Team and administrators at Meriden, the student is safe and has been able to get the help she needs both inside and outside of school.

Lastly, Dr. Benigni and Mrs. Haeffner encourage school district leaders to think beyond the school day, including holiday breaks and summer vacation. "Over the summer, we believe students need to learn so you can't pull tools away," said Dr. Benigni. "I want the devices to go home but I know we continue to still have an obligation to protect our students."