ST. MARY PARISH SCHOOLS

Safely Preparing Students for Life in the Real World

About St. Mary Parish Schools

St. Mary Parish Schools is a public school district in rural south-central Louisiana. The school system's 21 educational facilities and three administrative sites support its 9,000-plus student population.

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Challenge

After switching from Gaggle safe student email to Office 365, St. Mary Parish Schools wanted to ensure the same controls were in place to protect students from self-harm, cyberbullying, pornography and other harmful situations.

Solution

The school district jumped at the chance to continue to keep students safe with Gaggle Safety Management for Office 365, which combines technology with real people to assure students are safe on school-provided technology.

Results:

While Gaggle Safety Management helps school systems in Louisiana comply with mandatory reporter laws, educators at St. Mary Parish also can have conversations with students that often turn mistakes into valuable lessons regardless of the time of day or day of the week.

Safely Preparing Students for Life in the Real World

Schools were closed for inclement weather. A high school girl from St. Mary Parish Schools exchanged email with a friend in another school system. The messages mentioned how she was cutting herself. Time was not on her side.

Administrators quickly went into action, contacting the girl's parents who were completely unaware of their daughter's distress.

St. Mary Parish Schools is one of many school systems that, after switching from Gaggle safe student email to Office 365, realized it still needed a way to keep students safe regardless of the time of day or day of the week. Today, the high-schooler is safe and getting the help she needs.

The school district chose Microsoft's suite of productivity software to prepare students for life in the real world. "They'll be asked to use tools like Word, Excel, PowerPoint and Access," said Dr. Susan Dupre, District Technology Facilitator. "And when we do our career and technical credentialing, they'll be tested on these tools, so we wanted to put them in our students' hands from the very beginning."

Another incident involved a student assignment emailed to a teacher. "The student seemed to be revealing a story about personal abuse. It was a hard story to read," recalled Dr. Dupre. The teacher responsible for the assignment was both surprised and grateful that her district was able to identify the suspicious content.

In addition to Dr. Dupre, At-Risk Interventionist Gidget Everitt and Lydia Duval, School Nurse Facilitator, are the district's Gaggle emergency contacts. "We're always on call to receive notifications from the Gaggle Safety Team," said Dr. Dupre. "We look at them very carefully and often send them over to principals at the school or to the person who's in charge of the student welfare."

Dr. Dupre shared another story involving a student who used his school email address to register for a dating website during summer break. The district's emergency contacts reached out directly to the boy's parents who were stunned when administrators forwarded the email to them. "We use Gaggle as a teaching tool and not a 'gotcha' tool," said Dr. Dupre. "We want students to know that we expect them to use email and other tools to accomplish professional tasks, and as students, that's their profession at the moment."

St. Mary Parish's Office 365 implementation started with students in grades 5-12 receiving email accounts. "Our teachers were already familiar with Outlook, and it was just a natural step to move to Office 365 for our students, said Dr. Dupre. "We're also now only training on one set of applications."

The district jumped at the chance to keep students safe with Gaggle Safety Management, which combines technology with real people to assure students are safe on school-provided technology. Gaggle's machine learning technology reveals potentially harmful content and then trained professionals will evaluate content 24/7/365, alerting school officials of unsafe situations.

St. Mary Parish hasn't launched specific campaigns about how Gaggle helps keep students safe. Instead, conversations between students and educators become teachable moments that often turn mistakes into valuable lessons.

While Louisiana's mandatory reporter's law requires educators to notify law enforcement about suspected child abuse and neglect, Dr. Dupre believes that school systems should always be thinking about ways they can do more to keeps students safe.

"I don't think I could sleep at night if we weren't using Gaggle Safety Management," she said. "Maybe we could help a child who's being bullied; maybe we could identify a child considering suicide or a child who is being threatened by someone outside the school system. It behooves us to protect our students when they use the systems we provide for them."