

VANCOUVER PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Gaggle Promotes Good Global Digital Citizenship During Remote Learning



ABOUT VANCOUVER PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Serving 24,000 students across 37 schools, this Washington district utilizes Gaggle to safeguard students on a variety of devices in its 1:1 environment.

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- 🌐 gaggle.net/demo
- ✉ sales@gaggle.net
- ☎ (800) 288-7750

Challenge

Shifting to remote learning presented a variety of challenges, as students faced an entirely new learning environment.

Solution

Students know that Gaggle is in place to monitor their digital activity, and some even purposely triggered the system in an attempt to receive help.

Results

Student situations, both at home and in school, have been handled quickly and safely because administration and students are able to access the resources they need.

Like most schools worldwide, Vancouver Public Schools was caught off guard by the swift and sudden impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. On March 13, Washington's governor ordered all public and private K-12 schools in Washington state to close through April 24—a date that would later be extended through the remainder of the 2019-20 school year.

With a student safety platform already in place for students in grades 3-12, VPS turned up its 1:1 initiative and extended its use of Gaggle across all grade levels. This would not only give the district complete visibility over its students' online activities, it also helps promote digital citizenship and level the digital equity playing field.

Using Office 365 and Google for Education across a variety of devices (iPads, Chromebooks, and laptops), the district must ensure that all of its students are protected in the digital environments where they're interacting, sharing,



Safety Management for Office 365 and Google for Education

and collaborating. This became even more critical when learning moved off campus and into the virtual world as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

GAINING IMPORTANT INSIGHTS

When VPS first rolled out Gaggle in 2016, it immediately picked up on a lot of student-to-student communications about emotional issues and the need for support. “These are things we didn’t have insights into prior to using Gaggle,” said Chief Digital Officer Christina Iremonger. “Using the platform, we’ve been able to work with our counselors and community to get those students access to the services that they need.”

Over the last few years, Gaggle has also surfaced a number of VPS students who were in need of serious assistance and reached out online knowing that their contributions were being monitored—and that their friends would alert an adult to the problem. “That puts the power in the hands of students to help each other,” said Iremonger. “When a friend reaches out and gives us the access that we need to help and support them, that just gives me chills.”

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Jim Gray, VPS’ executive director of teaching and learning, recounted a time when a student was writing about a specific topic for a research paper. The topic was inappropriate for the age/grade level, so when Gaggle alerted VPS to the issue, Gray was able to intervene and suggest another, more appropriate topic. “We were able to intervene before this research paper got too far down a path that wasn’t necessarily school-focused,” said Gray.

DEVELOPING GLOBAL CITIZENS & DIGITAL EQUITY

For VPS, supporting good global citizenship means ensuring students understand that if they are making questionable decisions on a device, they are going

to be presented with a learning opportunity. This isn’t necessarily a “gotcha” moment, but one meant to teach the student to make a more responsible decision the next time around.

From the parental perspective, Tamara Shoup, the district’s executive director of school support services, said that her own child was in middle school when VPS implemented Gaggle. After her son began messaging another student back and forth about guns (he was doing research on World War II at the time), she walked into work one day and faced three teachers who wanted to discuss the information that was being accessed online.

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“He wasn’t in any trouble, but I was able to learn very quickly what he was doing,” said Shoup. “That experience led to a broader conversation about personal responsibility in a time when school shootings can be a real threat to our students and staff.”

BEING PROACTIVE

Iremonger said Gaggle has also helped VPS expand its digital equity by ensuring that students can safely access all of the information and resources that they need to learn. Especially critical in today’s remote learning environment, having a proactive approach to student safety is totally essential for schools.

“It was absolutely imperative to have Gaggle on board when we went to remote teaching and learning,” she added. “We are so lucky to have Gaggle in place. It’s become part of our basic infrastructure.”