



THROUGH THE GAGGLE LENS

The State of Student Safety



2020–21 School Year



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, self-harm, suicide, school violence, and other harmful situations—24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. Gaggle has helped thousands of districts across the country avoid tragedies and save lives.

2020–21 School Year

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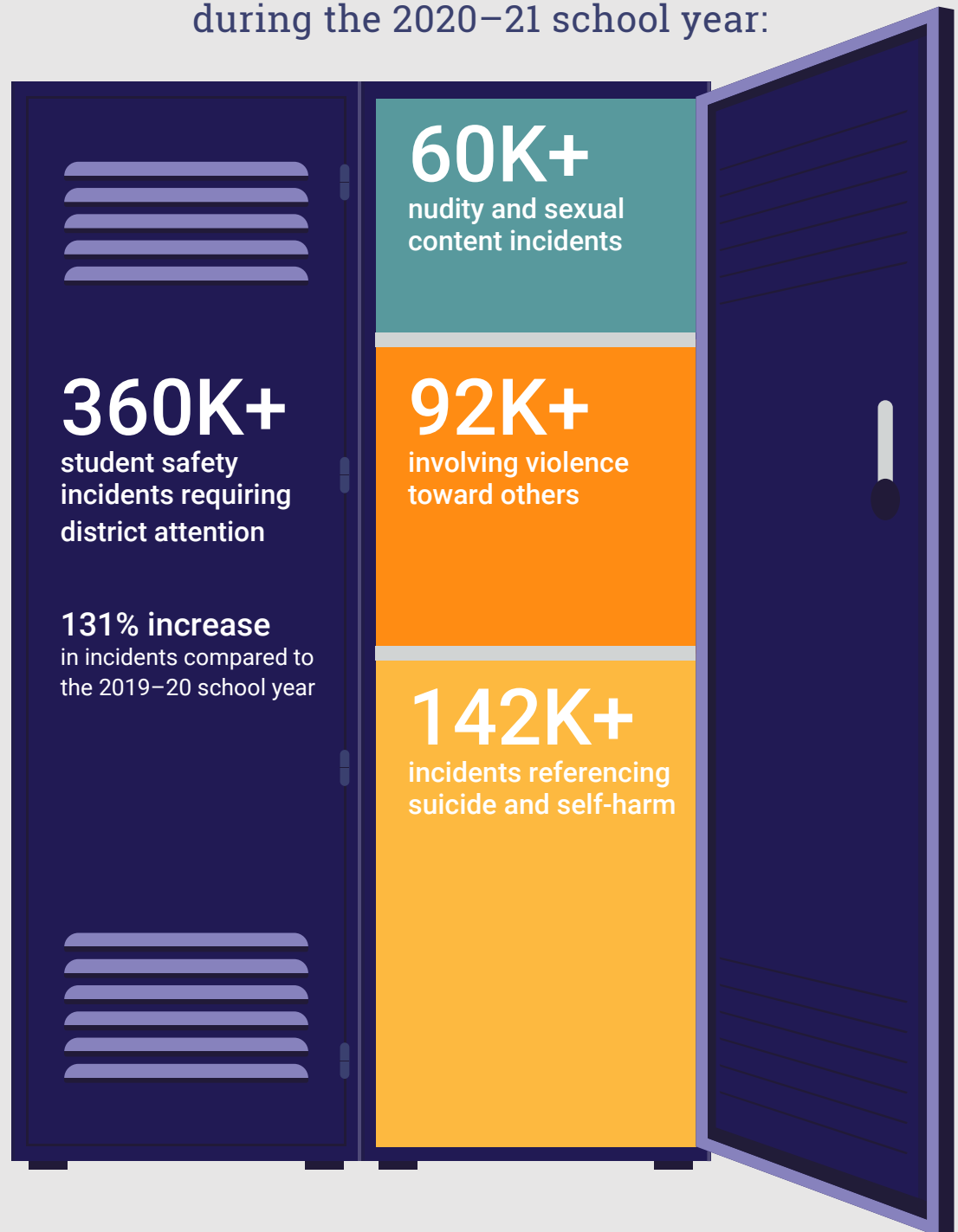
Gaggle is a recognized leader in helping K-12 districts manage student safety on school-provided devices and platforms, currently serving more than 5.2 million students at over 1,500 school districts across the United States. This annual report highlights key trends in harmful student behavior as revealed through the Gaggle lens. It shows the frequency of these behaviors among students nationwide, so education leaders are aware of these threats and can take steps to address them.

Kids in Crisis

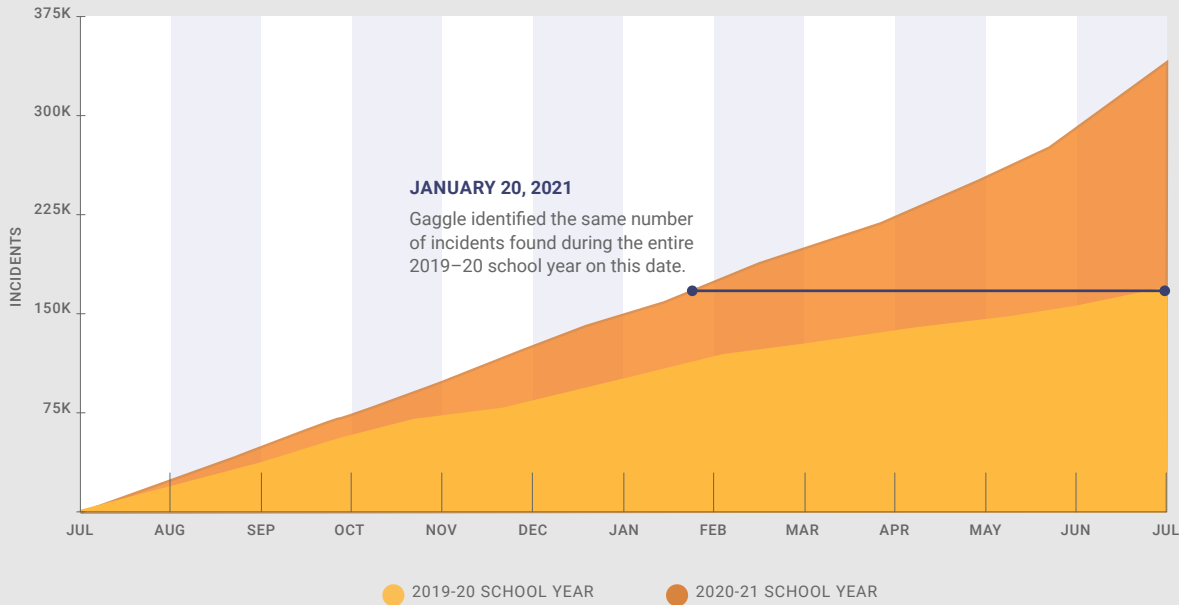
When the 2019–20 school year ended, none of us quite knew what to expect next. Between the openings, closures, health scares, attendance struggles, resource deficits, and a variety of additional hurdles, the 2020–21 school year was even more unpredictable than the year before. As educators and students continued to navigate the COVID-19 pandemic, some returned to in-person learning, some remained in the remote learning environment, and others utilized a hybrid model. Given the volatility of the pandemic, school leaders across the country faced tough decisions about how to keep students engaged in their education while trying to protect the entire school community against COVID-19.

Here at Gaggle, we saw just how much students struggled when the pandemic forced schools across the country to close their doors in March 2020. The latest data confirms that students are still struggling more than a year later.

Here's what Gaggle discovered on school-provided devices and platforms during the 2020–21 school year:



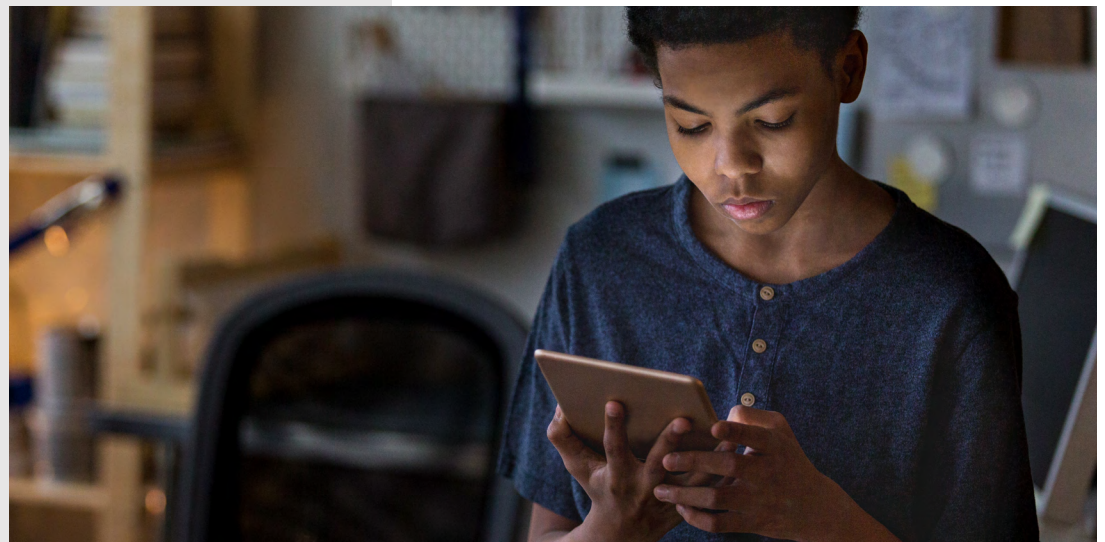
Student Safety Incidents Increased by 131%



As many schools continued to rely on distance learning during the pandemic, having a digital safety net in place proved invaluable. At [Vancouver Public Schools](#) in Washington, student situations—both at home and in school—have been handled quickly and safely. Chief Digital Officer Christina Iremonger said Gaggle has also helped ensure that students can safely access all of the information and resources that they need to learn. “It was absolutely imperative to have Gaggle on board when we went to remote teaching and learning,” said Iremonger. “We are so lucky to have Gaggle in place. It’s become part of our basic infrastructure.”

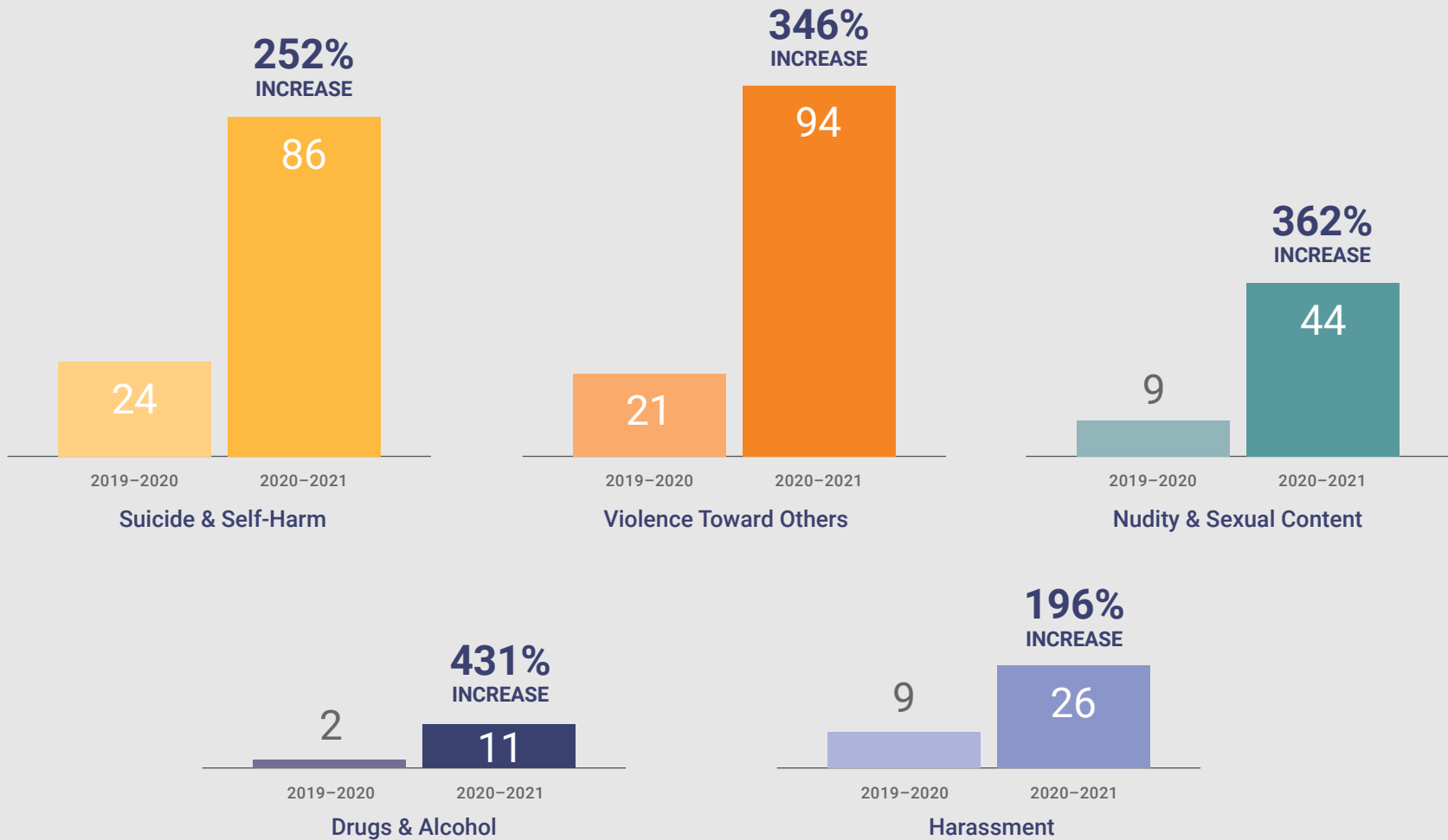
“Gaggle to our district is another set of hands that we don’t have. It allows us to be able to do a multitude of jobs and to keep our children safe when we don’t have the manpower to do that ourselves.”

Leigh Anne Rainey, Chief Academic Officer
Collierville Schools (TN)



Supporting Our Youngest Students

While protecting **21% more elementary students** than the previous year, Gaggle identified drastic increases* in student safety incident rates per 10,000 students across our five main categories:

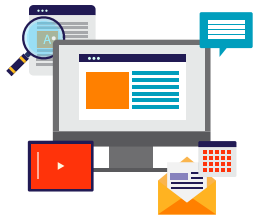


*Increases reflect incident rates per 10,000 students compared to the 2019-20 school year, accounting for growth in Gaggle's business.

What else did Gaggle's data reveal during the 2020-21 school year? This report includes our findings based on data collected from July 2020 through June 2021, offering K-12 educators greater insight into harmful student behavior as seen through the Gaggle lens. Learn about the frequency of these behaviors, what experts have to say about our findings, and how this year's trends compare to the 2019-20 school year.

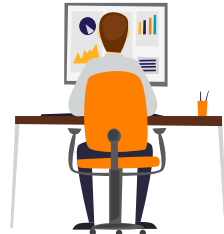
Methodology

Safety in Three Steps



Content Analysis

Machine learning technology flags concerning content in students' school-issued accounts for review and blocks potentially harmful content



Expert Review

Flagged content is reviewed by a minimum of two tiers of Gaggle safety experts in order to verify the content, understand the context, and determine the level of severity



Rapid Response

In severe situations, district-appointed contacts are immediately notified by phone, even after standard business hours



Other companies rely on artificial intelligence to make decisions about student safety.

To streamline the process for K-12 districts, Gaggle's Safety team reviews for context, resolving false positives that clearly do not indicate a threat.

During the 2020–21 school year, Gaggle's Safety team spent more than 357,000 hours reviewing content, only alerting school districts about incidents that required urgent intervention to help ensure student safety and well-being.



Gaggle Integrations

Gaggle's student safety solution integrates with the following online tools, protecting more than 5.2 million students at over 1,500 school districts:

Google Workspace
for Education

Microsoft 365

Chat

Microsoft Teams

canvas



Our Safety team reviews content 24/7/365, removing false positives and alerting school districts about students in need of help.

Our team of trained experts includes:

- Social workers
- Crisis interventionists
- Educators
- AI/technology developers
- Therapists

Content Categories

Each student safety incident is sorted by type according to the kind of content it represents.

The majority of student safety incidents we flag are categorized as:



For incidents that give cause for concern but do not indicate an imminent threat to a student’s life, administrators are notified by email. In the most serious, life-threatening situations, our senior team members will immediately alert the school-designated emergency contact, who can then determine the appropriate course of action for the student and their family.

Key Takeaways

24/7/365 Student Safety

What did Gaggle's data reveal during the 2020–21 school year?



10.1
BILLION

student items reviewed



63%
INCREASE

in student content
from the 2019–20 school year



45%
OF INCIDENTS

occurred at the
middle school level



1,408
STUDENT LIVES

were saved



163%
INCREASE

in content generated per student at
the elementary level compared to
the 2019–20 school year

“

“At the end of the day, you can't put a price on the safety of our students. A lot of these alerts happen late at night or early mornings with students discussing depression, suicide, drugs and alcohol, violence. With previous products, we might not have been alerted until the next morning.”

Josh Shepard

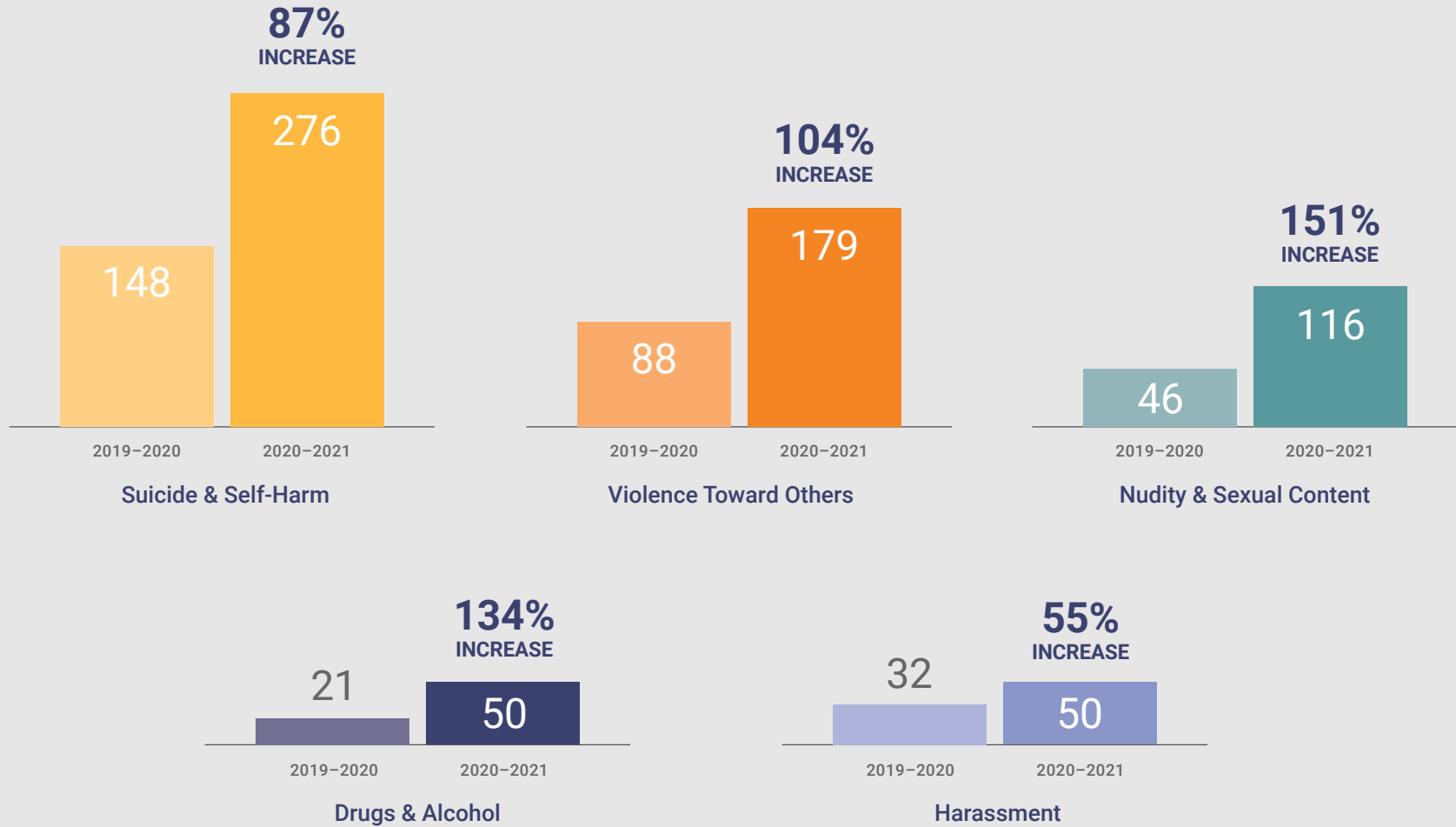
Director of Technology

Oconee County Public Schools (SC)



Student Safety Incidents on the Rise

Along with the uptick in student content generated this past school year, student safety **incidents also increased*** across the board:



**Increases reflect incident rates per 10,000 students compared to the 2019-20 school year, accounting for growth in Gaggle's business.*



“Where there is always a school safety officer walking the hallways in our physical school, Gaggle serves as that protector online.”

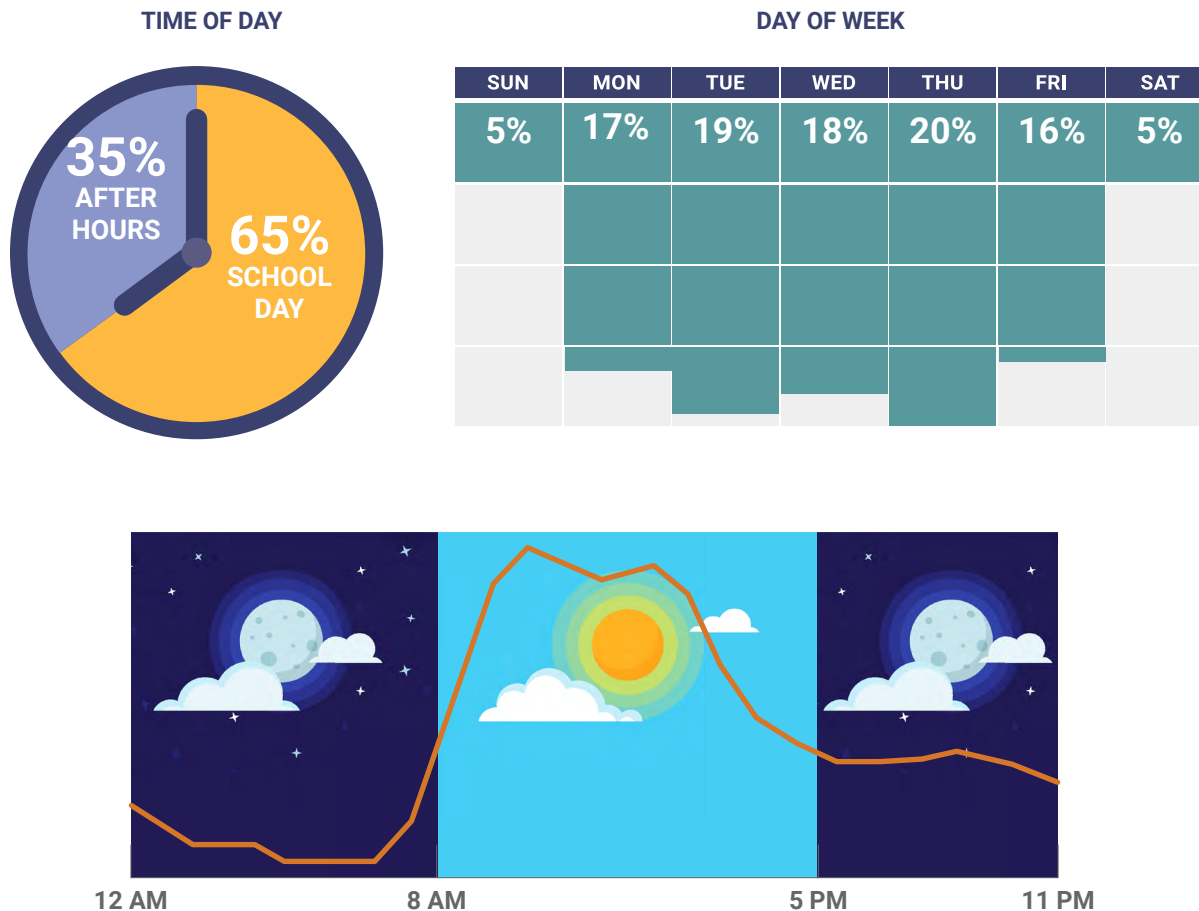


Jim Culbert, CIO
Duval County Public Schools (FL)

Around-the-Clock Support

With students spending so much time in the virtual environment and a significant number of incidents flagged on school-provided devices and platforms occurring outside of school hours, a digital safety net is a vital tool for K-12 school districts. “We can’t just allow the online learning space to be like the wild, Wild West,” said Dr. Diana Greene, Superintendent of **Duval County Public Schools** in Florida. “It needs to be a space that’s respected and no different than it would be for the student who is in a physical classroom. Gaggle is the second set of eyes we need to be able to manage that.”

When Did Incidents Occur?



“I can remember making a phone call at one o’clock in the morning after receiving a Gaggle alert about some self-harm that their student was thinking about doing to themselves. We’re confident we saved that kid’s life. We’re confident that we changed that family’s life.”

Larry Johnson
 Assistant Superintendent,
 Chief of Staff, and Executive Director
 of Public Safety & School Security
 Grand Rapids Public Schools (MI)



Suicide and Self-Harm

During the 2020–21 school year, Gaggle’s data revealed more than 142,000 incidents flagged for suicide and self-harm. Incidents flagged in this category include references to self-inflicted physical violence, threats of suicide, and eating disorders.

Real Students. Real Stories.

What happens when students reach out for help outside typical school hours? While educators can’t be expected to be on the clock 24/7/365, that’s exactly what Gaggle does for schools and districts across the country.

On the Sunday evening of Memorial Day weekend, a worried student emailed a teacher about a conversation with a friend who said they were considering self-harm—either by poison or gunshot. Within 12 minutes of the email being sent, Gaggle had flagged the content and alerted the school’s emergency contacts.

Later that evening, the school’s principal let us know that he had initiated a wellness check, called the mother, and talked with the concerned student to thank them for emailing their teacher about the situation. Given the holiday weekend, the teacher who received the email may not have read about this issue until Tuesday morning—36 hours after the email was sent. When it comes to student safety, every minute counts. By identifying the issue and quickly alerting the school district, our partners were able to intervene and help prevent a potential tragedy.



Expert Insight

As a clinical psychologist, the 87% increase noted by Gaggle in the rate of suicide and self-harm during the 2020–2021 school year for K-12 is not only unacceptable it is also devastating. Even more heartbreaking is the 252% increase in the rates of reported self-harm and suicidal intentions of our young elementary school-aged kids. Our children are clearly facing more challenges than ever before, including online bullying, sexual grooming, as well as the unexpected deaths of loved ones from COVID-19.

Among the most notable findings are the 412 suicide notes found across all ages,

including our youngest cohort. Recent economic consequences from COVID-19 lockdowns have added to the anxieties of families—including children—whether it be loss of livelihood or jobs or reliance on government assistance. Many adults mistakenly believe that if these problems are not spoken about, children will be unaware that they exist. Wrong. **Children see more than adults realize, absorb our pain and challenges, and struggle silently in the shadows. Now more than ever, it is important to listen to our children’s concerns and let them know they are never alone. Support is our greatest weapon against childhood suicide/self-harm.**



Dr. Lisa Strohman
Psychologist, Attorney, Author, Parent, and
Founder/CEO of Digital Citizen Academy

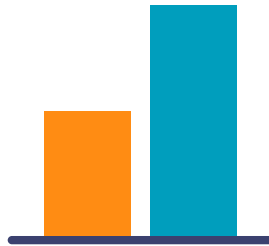
Suicide & Self-Harm: What Are We Seeing?

Incidents in this category have grown about 87% since the 2019–20 school year, rising from 148 incidents up to a concerning 276 incidents per 10,000 students. At the elementary level, incidents have increased by a staggering 252% compared to the 2019–20 school year, up from 24 incidents to 86 incidents per 10,000 students.



142K+
INCIDENTS

referencing suicide
and self-harm



87%
INCREASE*

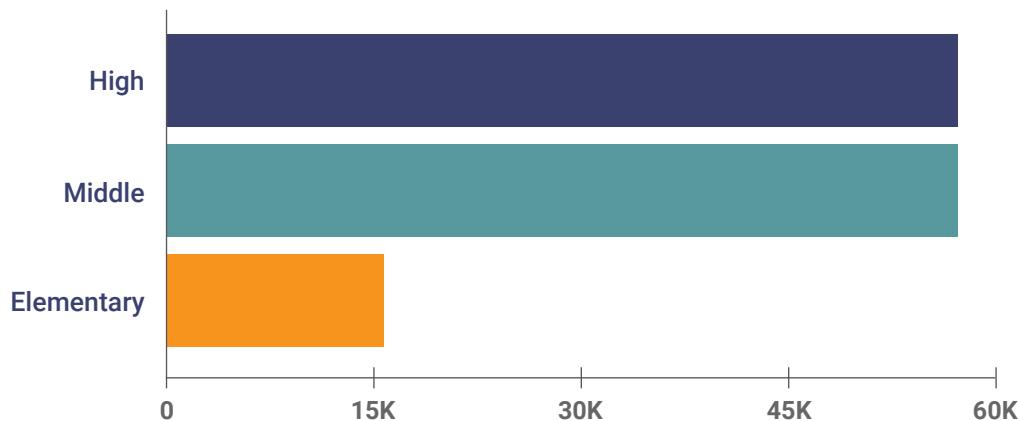
in incidents



252%
INCREASE*

in incidents at the
elementary level

NUMBER OF INCIDENTS BY GRADE LEVEL†



“We had a seven-year-old who was talking about self-harm. Were it not for that alert, were it not for our reaching out to the family, who knows what might have happened? Thanks to Gaggle, we have saved some of our students’ lives this past year. In that sense, it’s invaluable.”

Dr. Susan Enfield
Superintendent

Highline Public Schools (WA)



*Increases reflect incident rates per 10,000 students compared to the 2019–20 school year, accounting for growth in Gaggle’s business.

† Additional incidents occurred outside of traditional grade hierarchies, including K-8 and private/charter schools.

Violence Toward Others

Gaggle flagged more than 92,000 incidents referencing violence during the 2020–21 school year. Signs of possible violence include mentions of weapons, bomb threats, or other explicit threats.

Real Students. Real Stories.

Today's students are no strangers to school violence. There have been hundreds of firearms-related incidents over the past few decades, leading many schools to perform active shooter drills in an attempt to prepare students for the worst. Here at Gaggle, we monitor for words or phrases that could indicate a student is considering or planning such an attack.

In one instance, Gaggle Safety Management flagged a document in Google Drive written by a student who was expressing his frustration with members of the school's football team. He documented his experience of being bullied by his fellow students, then detailed his harrowing plan for revenge. His plan included students he intended to spare from the attack by texting them so they could leave school. He also shared the supplies he would have in his backpack, which period he would launch his attack, and the names of students he planned to shoot. In the document, the student clearly stated, "I don't wish to hurt others, only those who have hurt me."

Our Safety team took immediate action, alerting the district-appointed emergency contacts about the imminent situation. It was clear that this student desperately needed help, and this alert gave the school district the information needed to identify and support this struggling student—and to prevent a tragedy before it was too late.



Expert Insight

Gaggle's takeaways from their recent research could not have come at a more critical time. Our children have been dealing with lockdown measures, lack of social contact, personal losses, and the continued cycle of distress broadcasted online and on television. Additionally, children have witnessed political division, civil unrest, racial tensions, and polarizing ideologies for over a year. I suspect we are facing an environment where risk enhancers are outpacing risk inhibitors.

School leadership, administrators, educators, and those tasked with school safety

and security functions must engage in genuine violence prevention efforts by developing systems to detect concerning behaviors and implementing management strategies to support students struggling to cope with life stressors. Gaggle's detection capability supports prevention programs, including behavioral threat assessment and management, which—based on empirical evidence—can help move children from a pathway of violence and distress to a pathway of hope and success.

It is time to stop responding to violence and start preventing violence.



Bruno Dias, MA, MS, CTM, PCI
Director of Safety and Security,
Mansfield Independent School District (TX)

Violence Toward Others: What Are We Seeing?

When monitoring for possible violence, Gaggle looks for signs that students might be planning an attack or threatening someone with physical harm. Incidents in this category have increased by 104% compared to the 2019–20 school year, rising from 88 incidents up to 179 incidents per 10,000 students. Alarming, incidents at the elementary level have spiked by a staggering 346%, increasing from 21 incidents to 94 incidents per 10,000 students.

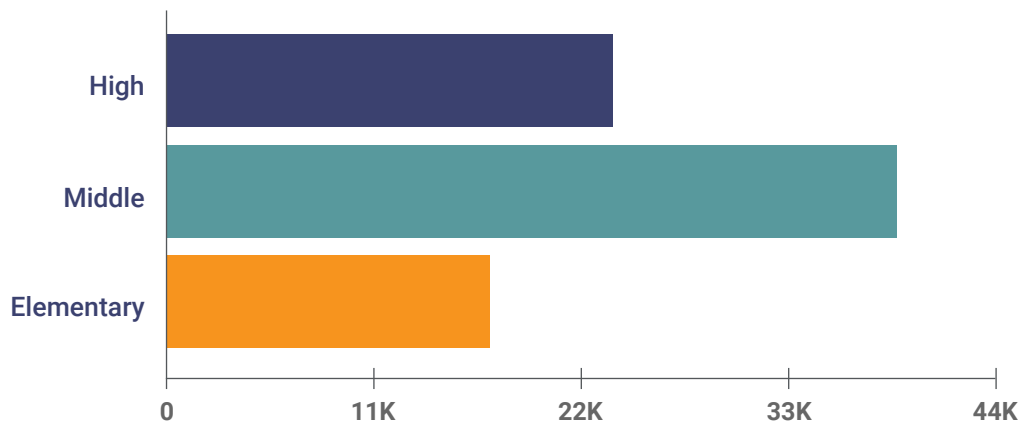


“It’s been a crucial piece of being able to know who those students are at an earlier stage before they’ve gotten into some of that planning and negative thinking that might lead them down that pathway of targeted violence. Gaggle has been an important part of that solution for our school safety in our district.”

Denise Moody
Director of Student Services
 Rochester Public Schools (MN)



NUMBER OF INCIDENTS BY GRADE LEVEL†



*Increases reflect incident rates per 10,000 students compared to the 2019–20 school year, accounting for growth in Gaggle’s business.

† Additional incidents occurred outside of traditional grade hierarchies, including K-8 and private/charter schools.

Nudity & Sexual Content

Student safety incidents flagged for nudity and sexual content span a wide range of activities, such as sharing nude photos, contact with sexual predators, discussing sex acts, threatening sexual assault, or even revealing instances of rape and incest. During the 2020–21 school year, our data revealed more than 60,000 of these incidents.

Real Students. Real Stories.

A seemingly harmless conversation in a shared Google document between a group of 10-year-old girls quickly became a cause for concern. Initially flagged for inappropriate language, our Safety team reviewed the document for context and immediately raised their concerns with the district's emergency contacts.

In the document, the girls were discussing boys they liked. The conversation took a turn when one of the 10-year-olds revealed that she was asked for nude images of herself from a 14-year-old boy she didn't know. The boy in question had already shared inappropriate images with her, and she was looking for help to turn down his request.

Gaggle brought the situation to the attention of district administrators, and our partner shared their appreciation for the power of Gaggle. Being able to intervene, alert parents, and get children the support that they need is invaluable in today's world. Our district partner followed up with us by saying, "This alert ended up being a pretty big deal and probably altered the direction of a child's life. Hats off to Gaggle for the stellar work you all do."



Expert Insight

There is no room for error in understanding our children's intimate needs and connections during the pandemic. When comparing Gaggle's 2020–2021 school year data incorporating over 5.2 million children, there was a 362% increase in nudity at the elementary level from the 2019–2020 school year and a 678% increase from the year prior.

Social media platforms need to be held accountable for this. They have allowed the

porn industry to integrate with their media platforms, training our children to become more sexualized daily and offering online predators more access to our children. According to the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC), in the year 2020, there was a **97.5% increase** compared to 2019 in the organization's CyberTipline reports of online enticement. **This cannot stand. Do we want others blurring our children's sexual boundaries?**



Dr. Lisa Strohmman
Psychologist, Attorney, Author, Parent, and
Founder/CEO of Digital Citizen Academy

Nudity & Sexual Content: What Are We Seeing?

Incidents flagged in this category increased by 151% from the previous school year, rising from 46 incidents up to 116 incidents per 10,000 students. A popular misconception is that these incidents are only happening in the higher grade levels, but our data shows that even students at the elementary level are participating in these activities. Incidents involving students at this young age level increased by 362%, from nine incidents up to 44 incidents per 10,000 students.



60K+
INCIDENTS

referencing nudity
and sexual content



151%
INCREASE*

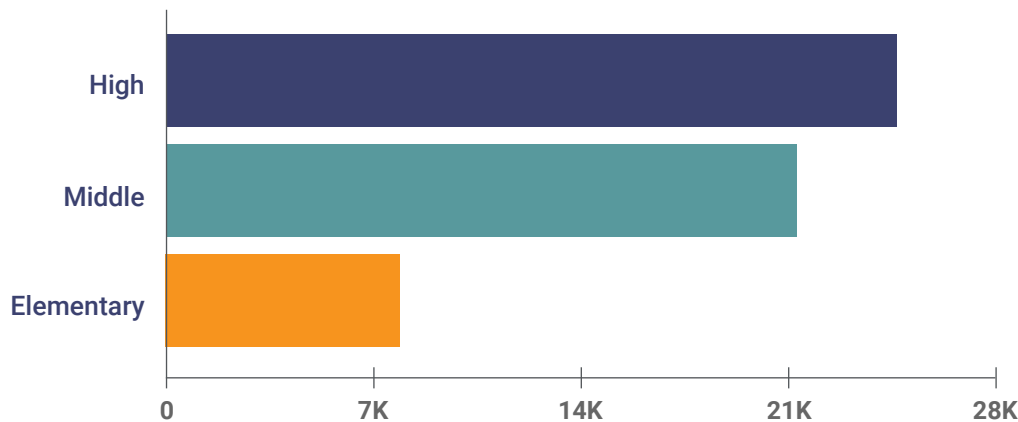
in incidents



362%
INCREASE*

in incidents at the
elementary level

NUMBER OF INCIDENTS BY GRADE LEVEL†



*Increases reflect incident rates per 10,000 students compared to the 2019–20 school year, accounting for growth in Gaggle’s business.

† Additional incidents occurred outside of traditional grade hierarchies, including K-8 and private/charter schools.



“We had a student who was having an inappropriate relationship with an adult, meaning a 30-something-year-old adult ... and we found that, we were able to intervene, and were able to get that child some help and report this individual.”

Michael Kuhrt
Superintendent
Wichita Falls ISD (TX)



Drugs & Alcohol

Gaggle flagged more than 25,000 student safety incidents referencing drugs and alcohol during the 2020–21 school year. When reviewing incidents in this category, our Safety team considers whether the student is referencing past use, present use, or intent to use in the future. Incidents of current or planned use are treated with a greater sense of urgency to help educators proactively intervene.

Real Students. Real Stories.

Relative to other categories, student items flagged for drugs and alcohol result in a comparatively lower rate of serious incidents that require immediate attention since most occurrences refer to past use of substances. But what about instances when students refer to drug or alcohol use at school?

In one incident flagged this past school year, a student shared an encounter he had just experienced with another student in a school bathroom. Writing in a document on his school-issued account, he described how another student showed him a lighter and told him he had marijuana.

Within just five minutes of the student modifying the file, our Safety team flagged the incident and alerted the district. As it seemed as though there may be a student still on the premises with this substance, a timely alert meant intervention was possible. By swiftly notifying the district-appointed emergency contacts about the incident, they were given the ability to proactively handle the situation and support the students involved.



Expert Insight

Drugs and alcohol have been an issue for our adolescents for eternity. However, the pandemic brought this quiet epidemic into our elementary-aged children's lives at alarming rates during the 2020–2021 school year. Gaggle recorded a 431% increase in incidents at the elementary school level compared to the 2019 year, which may not be surprising given the access kids had while at home, but this should clearly be cause for alarm.

The increase in drug use specifically should not be surprising given that

recreational marijuana use is now legal in **19 U.S. states and Washington, D.C.** As our children watch this change in culture around them, they assume that if something is legalized, how bad can it be? Society faces a double-edged problem concerning drug and alcohol use among children: many grow up watching their parents do it and copycat this behavior; others do it believing that those substances will solve their stresses and unhappiness. This is a serious uphill battle, as the 431% increase in elementary school incidences demonstrates.



Dr. Lisa Strohman
Psychologist, Attorney, Author, Parent, and
Founder/CEO of Digital Citizen Academy

Drugs & Alcohol: What Are We Seeing?

Gaggle revealed a 134% uptick in student safety incidents flagged in this category during the 2020–21 school year, increasing from 21 incidents up to 50 incidents per 10,000 students. At the elementary level, the increase is an overwhelming 431% compared to the previous school year, rising from two incidents up to 11 incidents per 10,000 students. While incidents at the elementary level aren't occurring as frequently as the higher grade levels, this tremendous growth in just one school year is incredibly worrisome.



25K+
INCIDENTS

referencing drugs
and alcohol



134%
INCREASE*

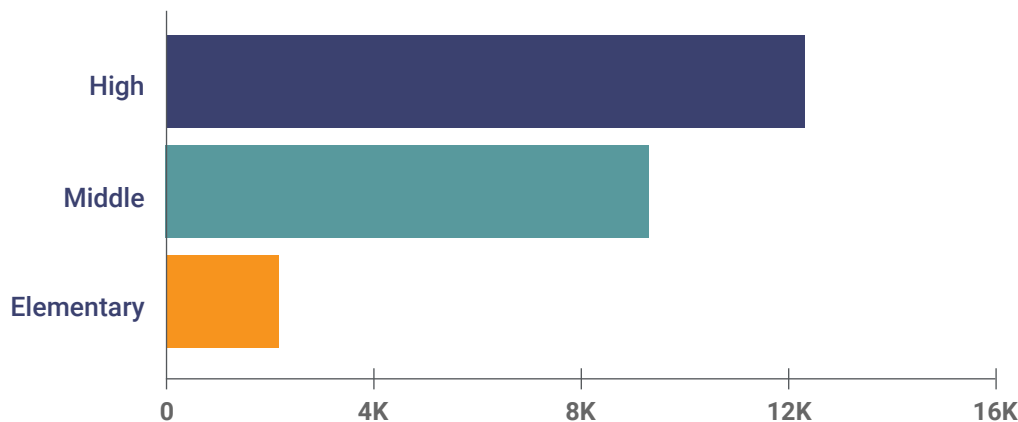
in incidents



431%
INCREASE*

in incidents at the
elementary level

NUMBER OF INCIDENTS BY GRADE LEVEL†



*Increases reflect incident rates per 10,000 students compared to the 2019–20 school year, accounting for growth in Gaggle's business.

† Additional incidents occurred outside of traditional grade hierarchies, including K-8 and private/charter schools.



“A lot of the incidents that we see through Gaggle are students wishing to do self-harm. Whether they're journaling about depression or past incidents that occurred to them or drug usage, it all kind of goes back to self-harm.”

Melissa Craven
Director of Emergency Management
Denver Public Schools (CO)



Harassment

Gaggle flagged more than 25,000 student safety incidents in this category during the 2020–21 school year, which includes incidents involving bullying and cyberbullying. More than four in every 10 incidents in this category were flagged in students' emails, and three in every four incidents occurred during the school day.

Real Students. Real Stories.

For some kids, it's easier to write about being bullied than it is to talk to someone about it. That's one of the many reasons why a digital safety net is such an important tool for educators. If you don't know a student is struggling, it's much more difficult to get them the help they need.

Writing in a document on their school-issued account, one student shared their frustration with being bullied—and how this experience was preventing them from dressing how they wanted, loving their body, and even loving their personality. The student wrote, "I wish others knew that I have struggled with being bullied because it would probably stop me from getting bullied in the future."

Upon seeing this cry for help, our Safety team alerted the school district so they could intervene and get the student the support they desperately needed. By identifying issues with bullying and providing insight into students who are having a tough time, school leaders can be proactive in their approach to student safety and well-being. When struggling students are heard, they can more easily be helped.



Expert Insight

Rather than being another source of stress and potential grievances, schools should be viewed as positive environments where youth thrive. Still, Gaggle's studies show that 75% of harassment incidents occurred during school hours, making detection and management of concerning behaviors a top priority.

The increased use of technology among youth has a silver lining since digital communication leaves footprints making concerning behaviors visible—and what is detectable can

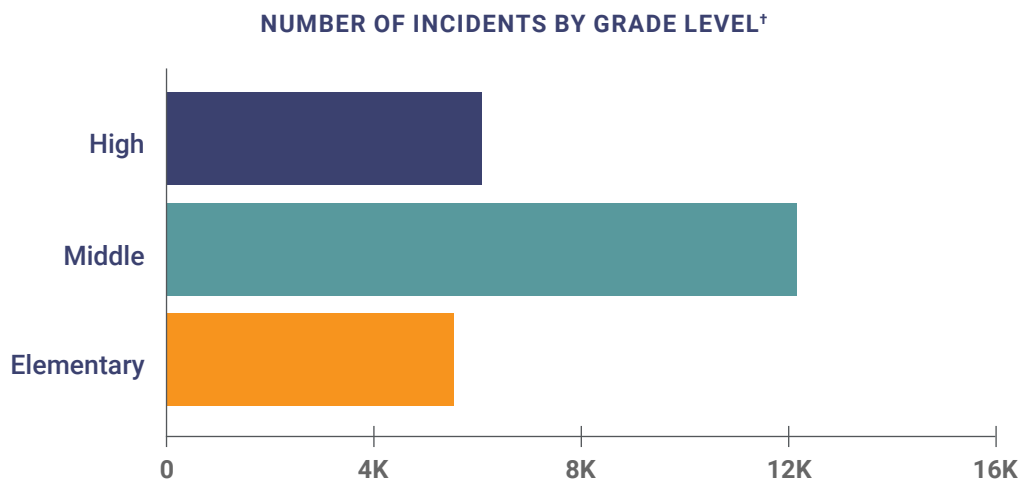
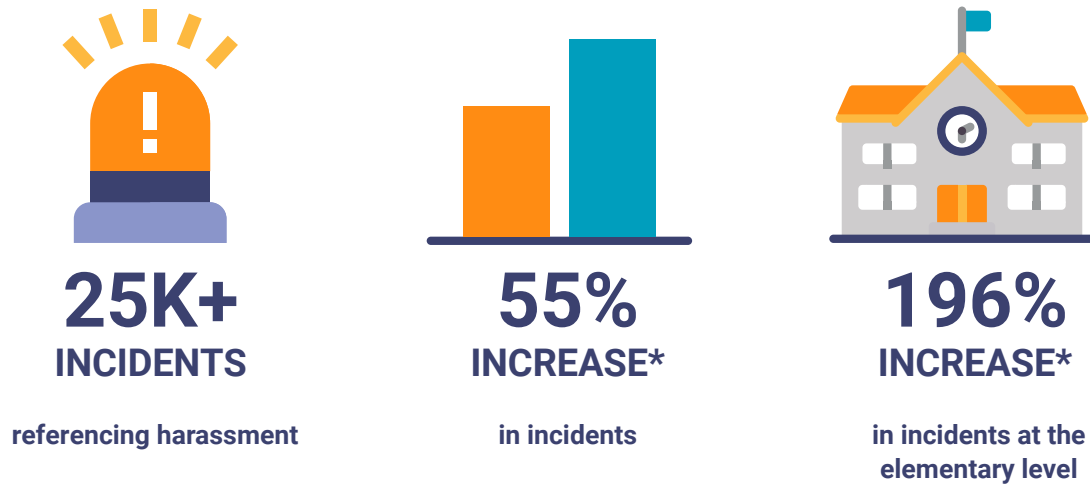
be preventable. Gaggle is leveraging the detection component by shedding light on digital communication, an area that is often unmonitored by school officials. **Programs that promote awareness and partnerships between parents and school officials are better positioned to identify depression, self-harm behavior, and threatening communication associated with third-party harm early on, thus preventing words and ideas from escalating to action.**



Bruno Dias, MA, MS, CTM, PCI
Director of Safety and Security,
Mansfield Independent School District (TX)

Harassment: What Are We Seeing?

Last year, we reported a decrease in incidents flagged for harassment during the early days of the pandemic. This year's data tells a different story; student safety incidents in this category increased by 55%, rising from 32 incidents to 50 incidents per 10,000 students. At the elementary level, incidents flagged for harassment grew by 196%, from nine incidents up to 26 incidents per 10,000 students.



*Increases reflect incident rates per 10,000 students compared to the 2019–20 school year, accounting for growth in Gaggle's business.

† Additional incidents occurred outside of traditional grade hierarchies, including K-8 and private/charter schools.



“It’s not always a life-ending crisis situation, but it could head off a disturbing situation in the building—or cyberbullying. You can see girls talking to each other, communicating back and forth somehow online, and we can get that information and see kind of the ‘mean girl’ situation and try to head that off—especially in the middle school level.”

Leigh Anne Rainey
Chief Academic Officer
Collierville Schools (TN)



Knowledge Is Power

Supporting 5.2 million students across 1,500 schools and districts, Gaggle continues to help K-12 educators keep their students safe year after year. The data from the 2020–21 school year is alarming and heartbreaking, but it also shows how many struggling students were able to receive the support they needed rather than going unnoticed and suffering in silence. Gaggle’s unique combination of technology and human review allows us to catch early warning signs that could otherwise be missed—such as a student writing in a document in white font or using emerging code words or slang—and helps our district partners act on that information quickly.

One of the figures we are most proud of each year is the number of student lives saved. What do we consider a life saved? We either heard back from the district that a life was saved, what the student wrote included a clear and definitive plan, or both.



During the 2020–21 school year, Gaggle was instrumental in helping K-12 educators save the lives of 1,408 students.

This number equates to almost four student lives saved each day across the entire year.

Each life matters, and we remain motivated to work around the clock in support of our vision: **All schools are safe and all students get the mental and emotional help they need.** By combining technology with a human touch, Gaggle offers administrators, teachers, and parents the peace of mind that students are being protected—24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year.

“By adopting a student safety platform, we gained another way to recognize and help students in crisis,” said Mario De La Rosa, Director of Safety and Security at [Carrollton-Farmers Branch Independent School District](#) in Texas. “Like the saying goes, ‘If we only knew,’” he shared. “Well, now we know, and we are using the information to help keep our students safe.”



“We literally have the opportunity to save a student’s life with Gaggle. How could we turn and walk away from an opportunity like that?”

Beverly Miller

**Assistant Director for Administration
and Chief Technology Officer
Greenville City Schools (TN)**





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Gaggle Mission

To ensure the safety and well-being of students and schools by leveraging people and technology.

Gaggle Vision

All schools are safe and all students get the mental and emotional help they need.

