

Case Study

Hamilton Township School District

PROFILE:

COUNTRY: USA
INDUSTRY: Education
SIZE: 3,000 students

OBJECTIVE:

Hamilton Township officials were looking to do everything they could to keep students from harming themselves or others.

SOLUTION:

Along with suicide prevention training for staff and students, the district uses ContentKeeper as another tool in its approach to student safety. ContentKeeper scans student web searches for signs of potentially harmful behavior and notifies officials in real time if a match is discovered.

RESULTS:

The district has been able to intervene in a number of situations that could have turned tragic and get students the help they need—before it's too late.

In Hamilton Township, ContentKeeper Is Helping Save Lives

Real-time alerts notify administrators when a student's web search indicates suicidal thoughts or other harmful behavior

Losing a student to suicide is devastating. Losing more than 6 students over a 30-year period is unimaginable. Unfortunately, that's what the Hamilton Township School District, Mays Landing, New Jersey has had to endure over the last three decades.

Amid a spate of teen suicides that left the community reeling, district leaders resolved to do everything they could to keep students safe. Hamilton Township tasked their Supervisor of Special Projects, Jeffrey Wellington, who is also a school psychologist, to focus on mental health and wellness programs. The district implemented a social and emotional learning (SEL) curriculum in pre-kindergarten through eighth grade to teach students how to regulate their emotions. And each year, both staff and students go through suicide prevention training so they know the warning signs and can get someone help if they're battling depression or other mental illness.

Hamilton Township's web filtering solution, ContentKeeper, also plays an important role in the district's student safety initiatives. The district uses ContentKeeper to monitor students' web searches for certain keywords that could indicate suicidal thoughts or other alarming behaviors. If a match is found, an alert is sent in real time to Technology Coordinators Lew Improta and Anthony Poretto or another district official so they can take appropriate action.

"We consider ContentKeeper to be one of the key tools we use to keep kids safe," Wellington says.

Behavioral Analysis

Suicide is the second leading cause of death for 10- to 34-year-olds nationwide, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

K-12 leaders can intervene to protect students from harming themselves or others, but only if they know what students are thinking. Monitoring what students' type into search engines in real time is one way to build this awareness—and that's what ContentKeeper's Behavioral Analysis feature enables.

Included as part of ContentKeeper's next-generation Internet filtering and reporting technology at no additional cost, the technology scrutinizes students' Internet searches for indicators of potentially harmful behavior and delivers real-time alerts to designated administrators if a match is found.

Alerts include enough context for administrators to determine what type of response is appropriate. The designated recipient can see the entire search query a student has used—and the system also records what subsequent actions that student took, such as which content the student accessed after performing the search. What's more, the Behavioral Analysis feature not only monitors queries typed into search engines such as Google or Bing; it also examines searches on websites such as YouTube, Wikipedia, Vimeo, Yahoo and others.

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—Jeffrey Wellington
School Psychologist/Special Projects
Supervisor

Powering this feature is ContentKeeper’s ability to reliably decrypt Secure Sockets Layer (SSL) encrypted traffic on all devices and browsers. Without SSL decryption, web filtering and monitoring tools can only see the top-level domain of a requested website; they can’t see the keyword search terms that are used or what kind of content is returned. Decrypting this information allows administrators to set up automated alerts that could help save lives.

One Piece of the Strategy

Hamilton Township has created alerts for more than 800 different keyword phrases, including at least 50 phrases that could indicate violent intent or self-harm on the part of students. Poretto and Improta monitor these reports and follow up with a principal or school resource officer if they determine that a student might be a danger to himself or others.

From there, school or district officials might reach out to parents to let them know what’s going on. They might have Wellington or a school counselor, social worker or school psychologist sit down with students to assess the danger they pose to themselves or others. If they verify that a student is struggling with depression or another issue, they connect him or her with a medical mental health professional. In one case, the parents of a student whose web search triggered an alert found a gun in their child’s bedroom after being notified by the district.

ContentKeeper is a powerful tool, but it’s just one component of the district’s overall safety strategy. District leaders believe the suicide prevention training that students go through is creating more awareness as well; students are talking more frequently to each other or to an adult when they see their friends’ exhibit concerning behaviors.

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