

Case Study

School District of La Crosse

PROFILE:

COUNTRY: USA

INDUSTRY: Education

SIZE: 6,400 students

OBJECTIVE:

When the pandemic struck, the School District of La Crosse in Wisconsin needed a cross-platform internet monitoring and filtering solution that would protect students just as effectively whether they were learning at school or remotely.

SOLUTION:

In ContentKeeper, La Crosse has found a solution that supports all browsers and device types with deep packet inspection, granular control, and full visibility into students' web use from any location.

RESULTS:

ContentKeeper's ease of use and transparency in reporting have simplified oversight for district leaders. In addition, the system's real-time alerts have tipped off administrators on more than one occasion when students have expressed suicidal thoughts—allowing them to intervene quickly and possibly save lives.



ContentKeeper Provides Full Visibility and Control of Students' Web Use, Whether They're at Home or School

The move to remote teaching and learning during the pandemic has changed the game for K-12 school systems. For Michael St. Pierre, Director of Technology for the School District of La Crosse in Wisconsin, it was the catalyst his school system needed to find a new web filtering solution that would protect students when they were learning offsite just as effectively as when they were on school grounds.

La Crosse was already a 1:1 district before COVID-19: Every student in grades 3-8 was given an iPad for learning, and every high school student received a laptop. However, only two of its 12 elementary schools allowed students to take the devices home with them prior to the pandemic. Of course, that changed with the abrupt shift to remote instruction in spring 2020.

"We had been considering a 24-7 filtering solution, and COVID forced our hand," St. Pierre says.

Before the pandemic, La Crosse had been using a popular Internet security program to filter students' web use on site. The district also used a classroom management program that logged students' key strokes to monitor their web searches, but administrators had no way of reviewing this information in real time. Instead, they had to wade through 50 or 60 pages of reports every evening, which wasn't a practical approach. What's more, the program didn't work on iPads, meaning administrators had no visibility into what elementary and middle school students were searching for online.

In looking for a better alternative, La Crosse discovered ContentKeeper—and the difference has been dramatic. In fact, it might have even saved a few students' lives.

Real-time behavioral alerts

ContentKeeper provides deep packet inspection and filtering of all web traffic, and it supports all device types and web browsers. In addition, ContentKeeper integrates with the leading authentication and directory services used by school districts, so it can apply web policies to a device based on the user's system profile, regardless of where that user accesses the Internet. This means the solution works just as well whether students are learning at home or school.

Implementation at La Crosse was fast and straightforward. "Initially, they told us it would take a month to set up and another month to tweak the system," says Assistant Network Manager Joe Olinger. "We had it set up and running in two weeks."

ContentKeeper has worked as advertised, decrypting and inspecting SSL-encrypted web traffic with no noticeable latency and giving administrators full visibility into students' web use and very granular control over the content they can access from any location. "The user dashboard gives us a complete view of what students are doing online," Olinger says.

“Our administrators now have more time to focus on the things that are important. When you add up all of the benefits, ContentKeeper has delivered tremendous value to our school district.”

—Michael St. Pierre
Director of Technology

One of the features the district has appreciated the most are the real-time behavioral alerts that administrators receive whenever a student searches for information suggesting they might harm themselves or others. These real-time alerts allow administrators to be proactive in preventing a possible tragedy.

“In just our second month of using the system, we were alerted that two separate students had Googled the term ‘painless suicide,’” Olinger says. “We were able to meet with those students and get them the help they needed, potentially saving their lives.”

Exemplary support

Another thing that has impressed the IT team at La Crosse has been ContentKeeper’s responsiveness to their questions.

“The support we’ve gotten has been the best of any vendor I’ve ever seen,” Olinger says. “They want to do more than just send an email; they want to have a conversation.”

Those questions have been minimal, however, as Olinger and his colleagues have found ContentKeeper to be very simple to administer. And because the software gives IT staff very fine-tuned control, administrators no longer have to pore over dozens of pages of reports on students’ Internet use. Instead, they can peruse only a handful of pages to ensure that students are using the web safely and responsibly.

“Our administrators now have more time to focus on the things that are important,” St. Pierre observes. He concludes: “When you add up all of the benefits, ContentKeeper has delivered tremendous value to our school district.”