

Case Study

School District of Osceola County

PROFILE:

COUNTRY: USA

INDUSTRY: Education

SIZE: 69,000 students

OBJECTIVE:

Osceola County needed a fast and reliable Internet monitoring and filtering solution that could decrypt SSL-protected web traffic at very high speeds, giving administrators fine-tuned control over the types of content students could access. The system also had to work equally well with multiple platforms, including iPads and Windows devices.

SOLUTION:

In ContentKeeper, Osceola County 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 home or school.

RESULTS:

ContentKeeper's powerful functionality has facilitated high-quality teaching and learning within the district, and it supported the shift to remote learning seamlessly. Because ContentKeeper is easy to administer and offers unmatched support, Osceola County IT staff now have more time to focus on other priorities.

With ContentKeeper, Osceola County Has a School Web Filter That's Highly Reliable and Easy to Administer

School district IT leaders have many responsibilities to juggle. They don't have time to reset their school web filter repeatedly, accommodate countless requests from teachers to block or unblock specific resources, or sift through pages of questionable web searches every day to make sure students don't intend to harm themselves or others.

District IT staff need an Internet filtering and monitoring solution that's highly reliable, yet also easy to administer. IT leaders for the School District of Osceola County, Florida, have just such a system in ContentKeeper.

Osceola County was using another web filtering system a few years ago, but "it was causing us issues," says Angel Fonseca, network analyst for cyber security. The old system couldn't decrypt SSL-protected web traffic quickly enough, which slowed down the network. IT leaders also didn't have the flexibility they needed to apply very granular policies for managing students' web use.

In looking for a replacement, Fonseca and his IT colleagues had a long list of requirements. Their new web filter had to be fast and scalable, while also allowing for more fine-tuned control. In addition, because the district uses a mix of Windows devices and iPads for students in different grade levels, the new filtering solution had to work equally well with multiple platforms. ContentKeeper has exceeded this high bar.

Enhanced visibility, more control

ContentKeeper's powerful SSL decryption and its group-based policy settings allow for very precise control: Osceola County IT staff can set different content restrictions for students in various grade levels, and they can block access to certain pages or features within social media sites while allowing access to others. This allows for more effective instruction.

What's more, detailed reporting gives Osceola County leaders comprehensive insight into students' web use across *all* browsers and device types, iPads, and Windows machines alike—with real-time alerting of suspicious online activity. "Now, we have much more visibility into what our students are doing online," Fonseca says.

Fonseca and his colleagues can see exactly what students are searching for online, and they have set up the system to generate hourly reports showing which students have searched for certain trigger words. In conjunction with the district's Safety and Security department, IT leaders regularly review this information—and they contact school psychologists or principals immediately if a threat of violence or self-harm seems credible.

With ContentKeeper, “we now have fewer requests to unblock certain content, which reduces the burden on IT. [And] we have much more visibility into what our students are doing online.”

—Angel Fonseca
Network Analyst for Cyber Security



Support for remote learning

Before COVID, Osceola County was moving toward 1:1 computing in some grade levels. To support a shift to remote learning during the height of the pandemic, the district purchased and distributed mobile devices to many more students. “The pandemic pushed us faster than we had planned,” says Director of Technology Services Shawn Woodell.

Because ContentKeeper works just as effectively on *or off* campus, having the system in place allowed the district to maintain the same degree of visibility and control over students’ Internet use while they were learning from home. This helped make the transition to remote learning much simpler.

“It wasn’t a huge leap for us to keep our students safe,” Woodell says. “ContentKeeper was critical in ensuring our success with remote learning.”

Streamlined administration

ContentKeeper gives Osceola County administrators exceptional visibility and control over students’ web use, regardless of what device they’re using and where they’re connecting from—and it does this without dragging down network speeds. Just as importantly, IT leaders have found the system to be simple to manage and maintain.

For instance, a “dynamic safelisting” feature allows teachers to add YouTube videos and other resources from websites that are typically blocked to their school’s learning management system or a class website. When these resources are being delivered through a trusted source, ContentKeeper safelists them in real time and allows the videos to play without the need for IT staff to intervene. “We now have fewer requests to unblock certain content, which reduces the burden on IT,” Fonseca says.

Also, ContentKeeper’s real-time behavioral alerts can analyze the context of students’ web searches. This helps administrators distinguish between a search for “suicide rates in the United States,” for example, which could suggest that a student is doing research for a class. That is much different than “how to commit suicide painlessly,” which could indicate that a student needs immediate intervention. Instead of having to pore through pages of reports containing false alarms, administrators can bypass all the noise and cut right to the chase.

All these features make IT employees’ jobs easier, giving them more time to focus on other priorities. “Technology is constantly evolving, and we have to keep one step ahead,” Fonseca observes.

ContentKeeper’s proactive support team even helps Osceola County stay ahead of emerging issues. The team meets with Osceola County IT staff on a regular basis to discuss where the district is going and what it might need. When support team members noticed the district’s bandwidth usage spiking, they quickly recommended changes that have allowed its network to continue operating seamlessly.

“They were able to help us with some of our planning,” Woodell says. He concludes: “ContentKeeper is a huge improvement over our previous web filter.”