Protecting students online
Districts need to evaluate their online safety plan

Technology in the classroom has generated countless learning opportunities, creating efficiencies for educators and multiplying resources in school communities. But the internet has many dark corners, and the need for online safety is vital.

A recent survey[1] from Morning Consult polled a nationally representative group of nearly 2,500 K-12 caregivers, teachers, and administrators about digital devices in the classroom.

Among the survey's findings:
- **The majority (83%)** of K-12 caregivers, educators, and administrators are highly concerned about student mental health and violence in schools.
- **Almost three-fourths (72%)** of respondents said the internet plays a big role in influencing students to harm themselves or others.
- **More than three in four** respondents think unrestricted internet access on school-issued devices can negatively impact student mental health.

- **Nearly 90%** of all respondents support technology that can detect signs of students thinking about harming themselves or others.

Parents, caregivers, educators, and community members all want schools to protect students. How can IT administrators work with counselors and other school leaders to allow the use of valuable digital resources while protecting the student community?

Supporting student safety at Sunnyside

Sunnyside School District in Washington has achieved a balance between online learning and student safety by implementing GoGuardian Beacon, a solution built for K-12.

When Alex Edwards started working for Sunnyside as a network technician, her first assignment from Dave Peterson, the district's IT coordinator, was to find the right product to administer the schools' Chromebooks. While the district wasn't initially searching for a student safety solution, its adoption of GoGuardian Teacher led to the discovery of Beacon — which

turned out to be what Peterson calls "GoGuardian's biggest bonus."

Beacon — which is intended to be one part of a school's overall crisis prevention program — identifies online activity across search engines, web apps, and more that suggests a risk of self-harm or suicide. The system provides timely alerts to designated staff so they can assess risk level and respond appropriately.

It's not always easy to see when a student is struggling. With school mental health resources often stretched to the limits, some students in need may be falling through the cracks.

"I believe GoGuardian Beacon has saved lives," Peterson says. "School mental health professionals have enormous caseloads, and they can't possibly monitor every student. Beacon alerts are sent to them as soon as the system detects questionable online activity so staff can intervene when they are needed most."

GoGuardian is certified as compliant with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), a law that protects

the privacy of student education records and gives parents certain rights over their children's records. GoGuardian is also a signatory of the Student Privacy Pledge, which outlines commitments on the responsible collection and handling of student data.

In addition, GoGuardian hosts its products on Amazon Web Services (AWS), which offers industry-leading encryption features to protect data in the cloud.

"Our department is charged with keeping student data secure," Peterson says. "With GoGuardian, I know our district is complying with all federal and state regulations, and that means a lot. When our executives ask about student privacy, I say, 'We've got GoGuardian, so that's covered.' But most importantly, GoGuardian's attention to data privacy makes our students' families feel safer."

"The internet is a vast and varied place," Edwards says. "With GoGuardian, it becomes an incredible place to learn."

Six important questions

Here are six questions to ask when deciding which student safety software is right for your school.

1 **What are the vendor's security credentials?** Are they independently certified as compliant with FERPA? Do they host their technology with cloud providers that continually monitor and adhere to the evolving privacy regulatory and legislative landscape?

[1] https://www.goguardian.com/keeping-students-safe-online

Navigating the complexities of student safety and privacy is no longer optional.

2 **What types of data privacy protections do both the school system and the vendor have in place?** What student information should schools be able to access?

3 **Where will the technology be active?** On school-managed devices students take home, school-based computers, and/or school-managed student accounts?

4 **When will the technology be in use?** Will it be active at night, on weekends, and during vacations?

5 **How does the school handle student safety alerts?** Which personnel have access to the alerts? What actions can they take as a result of an alert? How does the school

notify families about alerts related to their children?

6 **Why does the school believe student safety and content-filtering technology is critical to its overall student support and online safety plans?** How will the technology address specific concerns at your school?

Navigating the complexities of student safety and privacy is no longer optional. The increase in student mental health struggles and the proliferation of digital data demand that your school address both.

This piece was produced by the Center for Digital Education Content Studio, with information and input from AWS and GoGuardian.