

Case Study

LearnSafe: A Measure of Caring at Petal School District

Petal School District Profile Mississippi

Petal School District, a public school district in Forest County, MS proudly holds many accolades in academics, arts, and athletics and is consistently ranked as one of the top school districts in the country.

of Students Enrolled: 4,266

of Teachers: 267

Ranked #1 out of 138 School Districts in Mississippi

Challenge

Given the expanded use of computers, Petal School District needed more specificity in the digital student behavior information collected to move from reactive to proactive student interventions.

Solution

By implementing LearnSafe Petal School District effectively enabled the use of accurate and timely information giving administrators the confidence necessary to provide individualized attention and positive support for students.

Result

Petal School District saw tremendous improvement in the areas of student well-being, student behavior, internal communication, and overall school culture.

The call to action...

Mississippi's Petal School District Superintendent & CEO Dr. Matt Dillon leads a 4,200 student school district whose ratio of Chromebooks to students has grown to 1:1 for 7th through 12th (grade) who are able to take their computers home. Pre-K through 6th grade have access to their devices during the school day. It has been a major shift in our district with technology. We needed more specificity than current technology protection measures could provide. Chasing down a rumor and overcoming false information takes time. More broadly, we needed to know how behavior is trending in our schools. As much as we use computer technology, we have to make sure that we are going above and beyond to provide safety measures for our students," remarks Dr. Dillon in our December 2021 interview. Petal School District is not alone as the investment in providing students with more digital resources has become the norm. Now responding to the unintended consequences is the current challenge. Chalkbeat, a non-profit news organization covering the effect to improve schools for all children reports, "Schools across the country say they're seeing an uptick in disruptive behavior". The District's pursuit of meaningful digital behavior data recognizes that students' superior technology intellect diminishes educators' ability to provide necessary guidance.



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What worked before won't work now...

With the rise of troublesome digital behavior at an all-time high across the nation, much like the harrowing self-harm statistics concerning today's youth, Petal School District's administrators quickly realized their approach to digital safety had gaps and needed to pivot. Before the District implemented LearnSafe, district-level IT Leader Travis Ulrich said "It was our content filter that we relied on exclusively to catch some of the problematic issues, but it wasn't nearly as verbose and was not able to provide the insight necessary to understand the situation contextually.

There just wasn't that granular-level information that was very much needed." The District's existing data, while limited, required a technical resource to discover, interpret, and communicate issues to school administrators posing undesired response time. Another District Official, Assistant Principal and Assistant CTE Director James Bowman, discussed the importance of protecting the "digital house with equal vigilance as we inherently implement in physical buildings."

"Every measure we adopt is a measure of caring about our students."

-Dr. Matt Dillon,
Petal School District Superintendent

Conclusions & powerful changes...

In July 2019 Petal School District deployed LearnSafe on their student devices to complement their existing digital safety measures. Mr. Ulrich remarked, "LearnSafe greatly increases our confidence level of meeting the Children's Internet Protection Act because now we know more of what we are missing. It was simple to deploy and LearnSafe's behavior data fits into our leadership communication culture. We are able to talk often, candidly, and without any departmental adversity and focus on coming together to satisfy the needs of our students and staff."

By partnering with LearnSafe, the District has been able to intervene and protect students exhibiting behavior concerning their mental health and safety district-wide. Mr. Bowman recalls many incidents LearnSafe, and its new behavior analyst team, helped to detect. He described specific incidents of preventing self-harm, providing resources for an identified addiction, and dodging a bad outcome by discovering an active chat occurring with a sexual predator. Coincidentally during this interview, he said "LearnSafe is at this very moment in use to help a student."

"With LearnSafe we are able to be proactive and see trends that are taking place-we are able to have conversations with students prior to them making mistakes or life-altering decisions."

-Mr. James Bowman,
Petal School District Official & Asst. Principal

Further evidence of the effectiveness of how the District uses LearnSafe is found in Mr. Bowman's final remarks "With LearnSafe we are able to be proactive and see trends that are taking place-we are able to have conversations with students prior to them making mistakes or life-altering decisions," He goes on to add that not all issues are punitive and "each time we provide guidance helps our classroom culture and that's going to improve the school's culture. Students are nowadays spending five times more time on computers and you'd expect more issues, but we are not seeing a rise in cases."

A standard of recognized excellence...

In a time where school districts are at a loss as to how to approach digital safety, Dr. Dillon and his team stand out in the crowd. Petal School District takes pride in selecting partners and protecting their students. As you hear from Dr. Dillon's words, "Every measure we adopt is a measure of caring about our students." Since the implementation of LearnSafe, the District continues to be a hallmark of achievement and excellence. "Our state auditor's office recently visited us to learn more about our approach, including our partnership with LearnSafe, and how it's benefitting our students and staff," Dr. Dillon remarked, "I will finish how I began. Safety and security is critically important to the life of any school district. We have success stories, we have testimonials, and I guess the biggest thing is that we keep renewing every year because we see the value in what we are getting from it (LearnSafe). That's where we are and we are so proud to be able to partner with LearnSafe to protect our kids."

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