Innovative Tools for Protecting Students Online

Ensuring the well-being of students can be challenging in a time of pervasive technology. But technology also offers solutions.

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MOST K–12 CLASSROOMS, BOTH virtual and in-person, involve students working at computer screens. However, teachers can't always monitor what students are accessing on their devices, and that lack of visibility makes classroom management challenging. It also keeps teachers from intervening in a proactive way when online activity indicates cyberbullying, inappropriate exchanges with adults, or the potential for self-harm or other violent, dangerous activity.

Cyberbullying in particular affects a wide range of students. The StopBullying.gov website managed by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services states that "cyberbullying includes sending, posting, or sharing negative, harmful, false, or mean content about someone else. It can include sharing personal or private information about someone else causing embarrassment or humiliation."

According to the **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**, middle school students report the highest levels of cyberbullying, followed by high school students and then primary school students. In a 2020 study conducted by Justin Patchin and Sameer Hinduja of the **Cyberbullying Research Center**, 49.8% of tweens (9 to 12 years old) said they experienced bullying at school, and 14.5% said

they experienced bullying online. For nearly 70% of the latter group, cyberbullying made them feel bad about themselves. It also had a negative effect on their friendships, physical health, and schoolwork.

Many schools are monitoring their students' online activities so they can identify and proactively help students who are at risk of harming themselves or others. A 2022 report by the **Center for Democracy and Technology** (CDT) states that "the mental health crisis, which has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, and concerns about the increasing number of school shootings have led to questions about the role of technology [in keeping students physically safe and supporting their mental health]. From monitoring students' public social media posts to tracking what they do in real time on their devices, technology aimed at keeping students safe is growing in popularity."

According to the **Future of Privacy Forum**, schools typically use monitoring technology to track student data on school-owned devices, school-managed internet devices (such as take-home Wi-Fi hotspots), and school-managed apps and accounts. The tools then analyze the data and flag any potential concerns. Follow-up actions include sending a warning to the student, blocking access to content, or alerting school staff.

Despite the potential benefits, the CDT report cautions that teachers need adequate training in how to respond privately and securely to the alerts so that they do not inadvertently damage students' well-being. Among other concerns, the researchers found evidence that monitoring caused the non-consensual disclosure of students' sexual orientation or gender identity and made students reluctant to share their thoughts and feelings online.

However, schools can meet the needs of their students in ways that were unimaginable even a decade ago by keeping students' well-being uppermost in their minds when choosing how to use such innovative solutions.

Creating a Safe Learning Environment for Students

Insight into online activities gives schools the capacity to proactively intervene to improve students' well-being and academic performance

SCHOOLS HAVE FACED PRESSURE to keep up with constantly changing technology demands for years, and that pressure accelerated during the pandemic, when teachers and students had to adapt to a new online learning environment.

The majority of technological changes are positive, but they can present a few unique challenges for educators. As schools embrace new technologies and teaching models, they must ensure that they are creating a safe, productive environment for students. Improvements in the way schools monitor students' online activities can lead to better performance by helping students stay focused on their assignments and by ensuring they are free from cyberbullying and other threats.

In the past, bullying was largely isolated to the school and was often evident to the teaching staff. Now the bullying that students might experience while they're at school continues throughout the evening and weekend hours because of their online interactions. Cyberbullying interferes with students' ability to sleep and keep up with their homework, and it can have a lasting impact.

User-Friendly, Customizable Technology

Saasyan seeks to enable schools to proactively intervene in instances of cyberbullying as well as self-harm, threats of violence, and online grooming. Our solution is designed to be used by teachers, counselors, principals, teaching assistants, and anyone else who is involved in students' well-being. A dictionary of curated words and phrases serves to define triggers for advanced alerts. Our team continuously updates the dictionary based on words and phrases added by users around the globe, and artificial intelligence helps us identify patterns and contexts and isolate any issues of concern.

For example, if a student sends a message to a peer that's potentially indicative of cyberbullying, it triggers an alert to the school. A teacher or counselor can then conduct a comprehensive online investigation of the student's activity, such as searches that have

been conducted or videos and websites that have been accessed, to see if there is a pattern of being bullied.

At a recent event in South Australia, Saasyan engaged with about 500 students and learned that more than 70% of them had been impacted firsthand by cyberbullying. It was an eye-opening number, and it prompted us to add a proactive element to our technology that enables a school counselor to set up an alert or run a report for any students who have done a search – for "how to lose weight," for example – that might be innocent on its own but could indicate a more significant issue. The ability to customize alerts has been lifesaving in several instances.

Flexible Classroom Controls

The pervasiveness of technology in the classroom can make it difficult for teachers to monitor what's happening on student devices. With a quick swipe of a finger, students can quickly hide what they're doing if they're off task or accessing something inappropriate.

Saasyan offers flexible classroom controls that enable teachers to override firewall rules and allow access to something that might normally be blocked. Alternatively, they can block specific sites, only allow access to specific sites or even block the internet as a whole. We also offer teachers a classroom view that provides a visualization of all the online activities of their students during the previous 15 minutes.

By increasing opportunities for intervention and improving classroom management, Saasyan helps schools ensure students' safety online and boost their educational success.

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EDUCATION TECHNOLOGY

Implementing Technology in Universities & Schools

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BENEFITS OF INCORPORATING THE USE OF TECHNOLOGY IN SCHOOLS

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TECHNOLOGY FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

Universities are assessing how to support students both on campus and across the country as more classes shift to online or hybrid models. Investing in elements such as cloud capabilities, video conferencing platforms, digital document and learning management systems, and cybersecurity protections are essential for building out an online presence that will attract and support virtual learners.

TECHNOLOGY FOR K-12

With intuitive learning management systems, device management, and student privacy tools, K-12 schools can ensure that online learning environments are intuitive, reliable, and secure. Pairing these capabilities with professional development and support ensures that students, educators, parents, and administrators can navigate the digital learning environment with ease.

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