



THE STATE OF STUDENT SAFETY  
THROUGH  
THE GAGGLE  
**LENS**

2018-19 SCHOOL YEAR

# THE STATE OF STUDENT SAFETY

JULY 2018–JUNE 2019

This annual report highlights key trends in harmful student behavior as revealed through the Gaggle lens. It shows the frequency of these behaviors among students nationwide, so K-12 leaders are aware of these threats and can take steps to address them.

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At Gaggle, our mission is to help ensure the safety and well-being of all students. We use both artificial intelligence and trained safety experts to proactively assist districts in the prevention of bullying, inappropriate behaviors, school violence, and other harmful situations—24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. Gaggle has helped hundreds of districts avoid tragedies and save lives, while also protecting their liability.



# KIDS IN CRISIS

Suicide is the second-leading cause of death among youth ages 10-24. Each day, more than 3,000 U.S. high school students try to end their own lives, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. But schools using Gaggle to review their students' use of online tools were able to intervene in more than 6,000 cases of possible suicide or self-harm during the 2018-19 school year alone, saving at least 700 lives.

Gaggle detects more than just these threats. An astonishing number of K-12 students are acting in ways that pose an immediate danger to themselves or others and leaving evidence of this behavior online. From July 2018 through June 2019, Gaggle discovered...

**52K** references to suicide or self-harm in students' online activity. Of these, more than **6,000 were serious enough to merit immediate attention** by the district.

**34K** references of violence toward others. Of these, more than **1,600 warranted an immediate call to prevent a potential incident.**

**15K** instances of nudity or sexual content, of which **5,100 required immediate action.**

These figures come from Gaggle's student safety management solution, which uses a combination of machine learning algorithms and human safety experts to review students' online activity. The solution alerts school officials when students show signs of self-harm, depression, thoughts of suicide, substance abuse, cyberbullying, unhealthy relationships, and other credible threats.

Since implementing Gaggle, School District 87 in Bloomington, Ill., has identified at least a half-dozen cases where administrators believe students were headed down the path to suicide. Thanks to a Gaggle alert, the district was able to act swiftly, intervene, and prevent catastrophe. "Of course, you never actually know, because the end result thankfully didn't happen," says Superintendent Barry Reilly, "but I'm fully convinced."

The data shows that students as young as elementary school are engaging in an alarming number of behaviors that are dangerous to themselves or others. Teachers and administrators might not see the warning signs in their physical interactions with students. However, students are revealing these behaviors through the messages they send, the online documents they create, and the images they share.

Mackenzie Sandack, a safety expert for Gaggle, explains, "Many students who seem fine on the outside are really hurting inside. These students often express their pain in an online journal or confide to a friend via email. School leaders might never know about these cries for help unless they have visibility into their students' use of school-issued digital tools."

This report highlights key trends in harmful student behavior as revealed through the Gaggle lens. It shows the frequency of these behaviors among students nationwide, so K-12 leaders are aware of these threats and can take steps to address them.

## Methodology

Gaggle has provided safe online learning products to the K-12 market since 1999. Gaggle's student safety solution analyzes and reviews the use of online tools within Google's G Suite, Microsoft Office 365, and the Canvas learning management system for nearly five million students across the United States.



Bloomington, Ill., has identified at least a half-dozen cases where administrators believe students were headed down the path of suicide.

Machine learning technology watches for students' use of words or phrases that could indicate potentially harmful behavior. If a match is discovered, trained safety professionals evaluate the content to determine whether it poses a credible threat—and if so, how serious it is.

Each actionable item is sorted by type. The categories include Suicide & Self Harm, Nudity & Sexual Content, Violence Toward Others, Harassment, Drugs & Alcohol, Profanity & Vulgar Language, and Other Inappropriate

Content. Gaggle's team of safety experts use a threat assessment rubric to rate the severity of each incident as either a Violation, Questionable Content, or a Possible Student Situation.

**Violations** are the least severe type of incident. Students receive warnings by email for violations of their school or district's Acceptable Use Policy, and administrators can be copied when multiple warnings occur.

Incidents that give cause for concern, but do not reveal an imminent threat to a student's life or well-being, are considered **Questionable Content**. In these instances, administrators are notified of the incident via email.

Incidents that reveal an imminent threat to the student's life or well-being are considered a **Possible Student Situation**. These cases result in direct, immediate personal notifications by telephone to the school or district's specified contact, 24 hours a day.

This report is based on the number of actionable items that Gaggle safety experts identified as Questionable Content or Possible Student Situations from July 2018 through June 2019.

Across all 4.8 million students served, Gaggle observed nearly 120,000 instances of Questionable Content.

**Of these, nearly 14,000 incidents were deemed serious enough to warrant immediate action by school officials to keep students safe.**

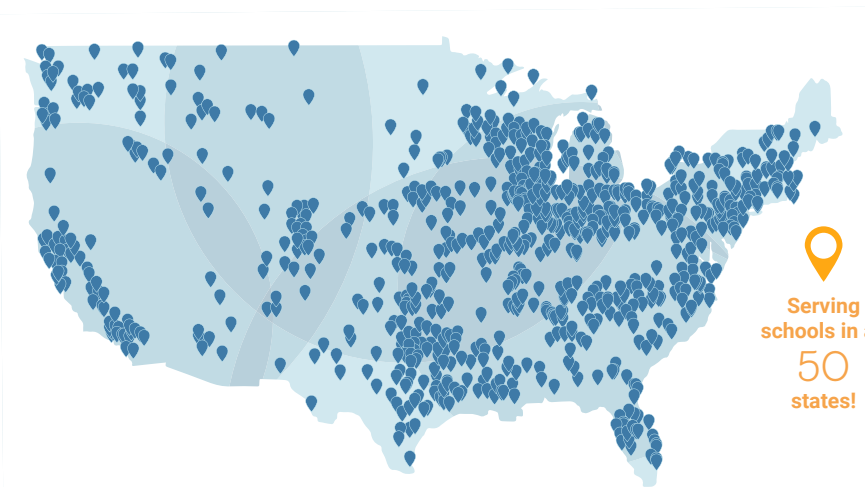
### Key Takeaways

**The number of students who struggle with thoughts of suicide or self-harm is alarming— and it's on the rise.**



Kids are more open in communicating about it online. This has gone from something we initially saw once every few weeks to a part of our everyday experience.

"We're seeing the number of instances we uncover grow quite a bit from year to year," says Alex Beck, Manager of Gaggle's Safety Team. "Kids are more open in communicating about it online."



This has gone from something we initially saw once every few weeks to part of our everyday experience."

While students are revealing their thoughts in online journals or in communications with their friends, they aren't often doing so to an adult.

"Talking with an adult is another step they would have to take," Beck says. "They would have to acknowledge that the pain they're dealing with is something an adult should be aware of, and many students don't know that or don't want to do that."

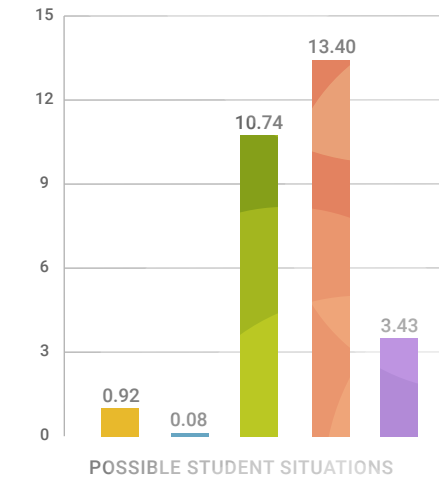
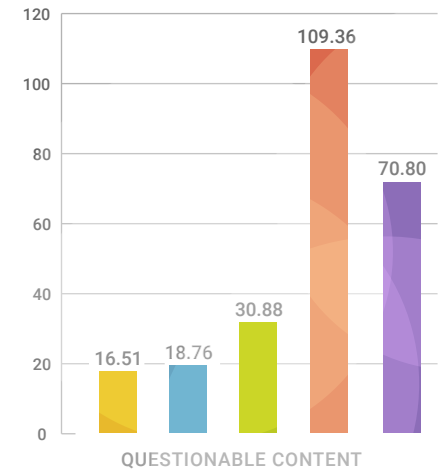
**41 percent of all Possible Student Situations happen outside of school hours. 10 percent occur after 10 p.m. local time.**

Many instances where students reveal they are most vulnerable occur when educators and administrators aren't actively watching what students are posting online. "This underscores the need for a 24-7 service like Gaggle," Sandak says.



[Students] would have to acknowledge that the pain they're dealing with is something an adult should be aware of, and many students don't want to do that.

**TOTAL NUMBER OF INCIDENTS**  
Per 10,000 Students, July 2018–June 2019



## SUICIDE & SELF HARM

Gaggle looks for signs that students might be depressed, have suicidal thoughts, or are engaging in self harm behavior, such as cutting or burning themselves. When content reveals possible self harm without evidence of an imminent threat, it is characterized as Questionable Content. However, when this activity seems imminent, it becomes escalated to a Possible Student Situation.

Here are some examples of things that students have written in email messages, Google Hangout chats, and documents that suggest a threat of suicide or self harm might be imminent:

- 📄 *If I ever kill myself in these upcoming months, I'm writing this letter to express my conclusion to this pretty cool life I'd had. The question everyone will have is why. My answer is why not. With all the shit everyone goes through, I feel like life has nothing left to offer.*
- ✉️ *...i want to kill myself. i dont want to live. i know that i seem happy with my friends, but that's because i have to be tough. i have to act like everythings fine...*
- 📄 *I really want to kill myself right now, but I can't tell anyone or else I'll be put in the hospital... I feel attacked from every corner, and tired. I don't want to be alive. I really want to die.*

NUMBER OF ACTIONABLE ITEMS IN THE 2018-19 SCHOOL YEAR

	FALL SEMESTER	SPRING SEMESTER	SCHOOL YEAR TOTALS
QCON	23,558	28,933	52,491
PSS	2,465	3,965	6,430

## DESERT SANDS USD TECHNOLOGY HELPS SAVE LIVES

As technology continues to transform teaching and learning, school districts are doing their part to prepare students for success in the modern world.

But when technology steps in and helps preserve human life, its value proposition becomes, well, invaluable. That's exactly what happened recently at Desert Sands Unified School District in La Quinta, Calif., where Gaggle's student safety management platform identified not one, but two different troubled students.

"We've had two instances where both district administrators and the students' families agree that two student lives have been saved," says Dr. Kelly May-Vollmar, Chief Innovation and Information Officer for California's Desert Sands Unified School District. "There just aren't words enough to describe how powerful and how vital that is."

[Read the full story at gaggle.net/success-stories](https://gaggle.net/success-stories)

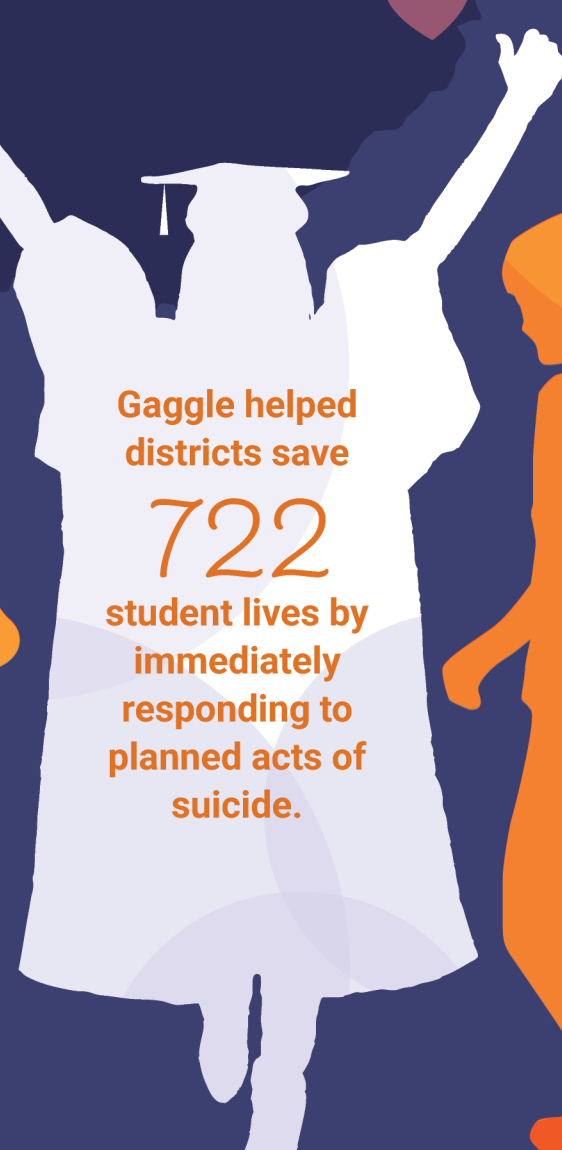


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District administrators and the students' families agree that two student lives have been saved.

# 24/7/365 SAFETY

Creating a Safe Digital Learning Environment for Your Students, Everyday—and Night.





## BLOOMINGTON 87 PROTECTING STUDENTS 24-7

With a new 1:1 computing initiative under way, School District 87 in Bloomington, Ill., needed better visibility over students' email and online activities to prevent bullying, fighting, self-harm, and other dangers.

Since implementing Gaggle, the district has intervened in at least six cases where students might have been suicidal. But Gaggle has also prevented smaller dangers as well, like two sixth-graders who were using their school email chat feature to make plans to fight after school.

"When you catch that early, you can provide some conflict resolution, alert parents, and—lo and behold—you've averted that," says Superintendent Barry Reilly. "Whatever might have resulted from that doesn't happen, and kids can avoid getting in trouble."

Read the full story at [gaggle.net/success-stories](http://gaggle.net/success-stories)

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Whatever might have resulted from that doesn't happen, and kids can avoid getting in trouble.

## VIOLENCE TOWARD OTHERS

Regarding violence toward others, Gaggle looks for signs that students might be planning an attack or threatening someone with physical harm. Signs of possible violence include discussions of weapons, bomb threats, or other explicit threats.

Again, when content reveals possible harm to others without evidence of an imminent threat, it is categorized as Questionable Content. When this activity reveals an imminent threat, it becomes escalated to a Possible Student Situation.

Examples of statements students have written to suggest that violence might be imminent include:

-  *You don't understand [Student Name Redacted]. I can kill people. Im a danger to myself and others. I have always wanted to know what it was like to kill smone because I like the feeling of power to end someones life.*
-  *[Student Name Redacted] got his ass beaten by 6 kids and people sent it to me bcuz they were all in the halls and I thought it was gonna be funny like hahah [Student Name Redacted] got beat up but I saw it and it literally broke my heart. Everyone stood there laughing and taking videos and no one helped.*
-  *Video of what appears to be students involved in a physical altercation, escalating to a female wielding a knife and attempting to stab another female*

### NUMBER OF ACTIONABLE ITEMS IN THE 2018-19 SCHOOL YEAR

	FALL SEMESTER	SPRING SEMESTER	SCHOOL YEAR TOTALS
<b>QCON</b>	13,957	20,026	<b>33,983</b>
<b>PSS</b>	577	1,070	<b>1,647</b>



## VICTOR VALLEY UHSD PROVIDING A SAFE DIGITAL ENVIRONMENT

With the help of Gaggle, California's Victor Valley Union High School District was able to intervene when an underage foster child began communicating online with an adult male who was planning to "pick her up and run away," says TechED Director Dr. Audrey Hovannesian.

"During one email exchange, the adult happened to include a profanity," she says, "and Gaggle's safety management service picked up on it and alerted us to the potential problem." That, in turn, opened up the entire email conversation and allowed district administrators and the child's foster parents to intervene in what could have turned into a major incident.

In other cases, the district has used Gaggle to identify students who were using email for online dating or escort services, the latter of whom were posting profiles that contained nudity. "Safety is the No. 1 priority in this district, yet our staff cannot individually review all student emails and documents for inappropriate behaviors," Dr. Hovannesian states.

Read the full story at  
[gaggle.net/success-stories](http://gaggle.net/success-stories)

“  
Gaggle's safety management service alerted us to the potential problem.”

## NUDITY & SEXUAL CONTENT

Nudity and sexual content cover a wide range of student activity, such as sharing nude photos of oneself, asking for nude photos from another student, sharing other pornographic images, discussing sex acts, threatening sexual assault, or even revealing instances of rape or incest.

If online content contains professional pornography or reveals inappropriate sexual activity involving a student, it is considered Questionable Content. If it contains pornography that appears to include a minor or an imminent plan of inappropriate sexual activity, then it becomes a Possible Student Situation.

- ☑ *I was like yeah I know but we could at least try. And he said idk or whatever. And I said age of consent is 16 soooooo it wouldn't be illegal wed just have to wait to have sex until im 16*
- 📷 *An Elementary Student in possession of an image of nude adult women performing oral sex on each other*
- 📷 *Image of a female student photographing herself fully nude in front of a mirror*
- 📷 *A student was attempting to email an image of a penis. The image appears to be self-taken and may contain the student himself*

NUMBER OF ACTIONABLE ITEMS IN THE 2018-19 SCHOOL YEAR





	FALL SEMESTER	SPRING SEMESTER	SCHOOL YEAR TOTAL
QCON	6,741	8,083	14,824
PSS	1,906	3,250	5,156



## OTHER HARMFUL BEHAVIORS

Harassment involves teasing or bullying in which there is no threat of physical harm from one student to another. Besides harassment, students also frequently allude to drug or alcohol use in emails, Google Hangout chats, or online documents. If this content reveals possession, intent to sell, or intent to procure an illegal substance, then it is considered a Possible Student Situation.

The “Other Inappropriate Content” category might include a whole host of situations, such as students making plans to run away from home, discussing or planning a crime, sharing instructions for how to circumvent a school’s web filter, or responding to an email phishing scam.

-  *Meth brings home the bacon not gonna lie. It pays well and you dont have to go to college. Eth is also the best option. UYou mnake a lot of money and you could get shot so thats a plus. There is absolutely not a single downside of dealing meth that i have found.*
-  *idk why I got high but on Monday was my first time and I have not stopped*
-  *Student has a video downloaded from the internet of people decapitating another human.*
-  *Multiple videos of students smoking marijuana*

NUMBER OF ACTIONABLE ITEMS IN THE 2018-19 SCHOOL YEAR

	FALL SEMESTER	SPRING SEMESTER	SCHOOL YEAR TOTALS
QCON	7,164	11,442	18,606
PSS	180	379	559

## HUNTLEY 158 SAFETY IS A TOP PRIORITY

When Huntley Community School District 158 in Algonquin, Ill., first started using Gaggle’s student safety management platform, officials didn’t quite know what to expect. “We were shocked at the sheer volume of conversations that were taking place among students on email,” says Chief Technology Officer Chris Budzynski.

Those emails were mostly innocent, ranging from, “Hey, where’s the party this weekend?” to “Where can I buy the best hair products?” Then one day Gaggle detected some inappropriate content on a student’s Google Drive account. “We called home, and his parents were incredibly thankful,” Dr. Budzynski says. “They were unaware of the issue and thanked us for having this system.”

With protecting students their top priority, district leaders can now quickly intervene in serious situations while also handling minor incidences seamlessly. “If we can put a speed bump in the way of a student who is doing something inappropriate online,” Dr. Budzynski says, “that puts our students in a much better, safer position.”

Read the full story at [gaggle.net/success-stories](http://gaggle.net/success-stories)



“  
We can put a speed bump in the way of a student who is doing something inappropriate online.”



# KNOWLEDGE IS POWER

Data from Gaggle’s solution demonstrates that students are not only engaging in potentially harmful behavior at an alarming rate, but they are revealing this behavior using school-issued email accounts and other digital services.

With nearly 120,000 instances of Questionable Content among Gaggle’s 4.8 million users during the 2018-19 school year—and with nearly 14,000 cases where immediate action was needed—it’s clear that K-12 leaders have their work cut out for them in keeping students safe.

But if K-12 leaders have visibility into students’ online activity, backed by 24-7 monitoring with the help of human safety specialists, they can step in and take appropriate action to protect students from harming themselves and others—in some cases, preventing a situation from becoming tragic before it’s too late.

“Kids are using digital tools provided by their school to communicate about many things that should be



A service like Gaggle is really important because we can’t do it on our own.

concerning to K-12 leaders,” Beck says. “And it’s happening around the clock, not just when they’re on their device at school. Fortunately, we can see this activity and intervene as needed.”

“Whether it’s bullying, student mental health issues, school violence issues, or another problem, this is one of the tools that you really can’t be without,” says Bloomington 87 Superintendent Barry Reilly. “It’s helping us on a daily basis prevent and/or solve important problems.”



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## CELEBRATING TWENTY YEARS OF SAFETY

*Gaggle has been providing safety solutions to the K-12 industry since 1999. Although education technology continues to evolve, our mission remains the same; ensuring the safety and well-being of students.*



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