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How Virginia Beach solved all educational and safety needs with one provider



At a glance

66,820	4,000	15,027	86
Students	Teachers	Staff	Schools

Challenge

Virginia Beach City Public Schools (VBCPS) wanted to find one partner for its student safety, filtering, and classroom management solutions, so the district launched a national RFP.

Solution

The district, which had already been happily using Securly to cover some of its filtering and security needs, selected Securly for its all-in-one student wellness solutions.

Large Virginia district finds a perfect partner in Securly for safety, security, classroom management, and more

Most Americans think of Virginia Beach as a resort town, with miles of oceanfront hotels and restaurants. What they might not be aware of is that the 70,000 students who attend Virginia Beach City Public Schools (VBCPS) outperform school divisions across the nation on key academic indicators.

The district's mission is to help students become responsible offline and online, thanks to its "Be Social. Be Smart. Be Safe." campaign, which teaches digital citizenship and best practices, particularly surrounding social media.

"Our hope is that we provide a safe digital environment, where students recognize the importance of being good digital citizens and have the tools available to help protect themselves in an ever-growing digital world," says Shane Snedecor, Information Security Manager for VBCPS. In fact, the district has been focused on educating and protecting students from the beginning of its 1:1 program.

Protecting devices when they leave the school grounds

In 2016, VBCPS started a district-wide 1:1 Chromebook initiative. Providing devices that follow students wherever they learn comes with unique challenges, especially with keeping children safe on the internet. At the time, all internet traffic in the district was filtered through an on-premises network appliance called ContentKeeper.

While the solution was technically capable of filtering those devices at home, accomplishing this was no easy feat as it required the VBCPS team to route all of that home traffic back to the school before going back out to the internet.

"We started looking for a new solution that would work seamlessly when students took their devices home, and we found Securly Filter," says Snedecor. *"In less than 15 minutes, the Chromebooks were up and running and everyone was pleased."*

Because Securly Filter is focused on student safety, it flags self-harm and cyberbullying keywords or sentiments—things that other filters aren't looking for. Securly's filter intelligently decrypts https content and specifically looks at search engines, YouTube, and social networking for signs of violence, self-harm, cyberbullying, and more.

Over the next year, Snedecor noticed that Securly continued to expand their product line while continuing to innovate and add key features to its existing product suite. He was particularly intrigued by Home, which allows districts to customize parental controls for school-owned devices in the home, including real-time reporting.

"Home sounded amazing to us," Snedecor says. *"It integrated with our student information system, accessed parent contact details, and enrolled them automatically."*

A success from day one, today Home is used by more than 30,916 parents in the district to see what their children are doing online and manage internet access with Securly's 'pause the internet' feature.

> *"As a one-person security shop, I'm it for filtering. Taking that off my plate is huge."* **Shane Snedecor, Information Security Manager, VBCPS**

For Snedecor, having almost zero work to do around set up and beyond is a dream come true. *"We love having a solution that lets parents control internet access at home. The capabilities you can give parents are fantastic."*

Another plus for Snedecor is that Securly offers support directly to parents. *"As a one-person security shop, I'm it for filtering. Taking that off my plate is huge,"* he says.

Adding additional layers of safety

With the 1:1 program fully in place and the parental community engaged, VBCPS continued to look for ways to keep students safe. That's when they purchased Securly Aware, which monitors Gmail, Google Docs, and Google Drive for cyberbullying, suicide, violence, and sends alerts to the appropriate district contacts.

"The release of Aware could not have come at a better time for us," says Snedecor. *"We were already using Securly for internet filtering. Aware rounded out our student safety lineup, proving to be an extremely valuable tool in our efforts to identify struggling students and cyberbullying early."*

In a nutshell, Aware fills in that missing piece of visibility, which is where students spend the bulk of their time creating content: Microsoft and Google Mail, Docs, Drive. Students use Google Docs to share notes and have innocent chat conversations through collaboration features, but it is also one of the number one vectors of modern bullying.

Aware and Filter combined helped paint a comprehensive picture and bring it all into a single-pane-of-glass, and having Securly screen student emails was a huge relief, but Snedecor was still concerned that he might miss an alert if he was asleep or otherwise unavailable. Luckily for him, Securly launched a new service: Securly On-Call.

On-Call is a team of highly trained specialists that analyze flagged activity alerts and tips, then conduct a thorough risk assessment. The team looks over alerts from the AI, factor in context, and get rid of false positives. If they determine an imminent threat, they call the district. *"The On-Call team knows what it's doing, and I'm confident that nothing gets missed,"* says Snedecor.

"Every time we need something, Securly is there!" **Shane Snedecor, Information Security Manager, VBCPS**

Going with one partner for all filtering, security, and management

VBCPS was already very pleased with its Securly tools, but in the winter of 2019 the district decided to add classroom management to support blended instruction and so put out an RFP for all of the following services:

- on-site internet filtering
- off-site internet filtering
- parent engagement
- student safety
- classroom management

Securly won the bid, and Snedecor says it's because of the company's excellent customer support, product quality, and the opportunity to work with one partner. "Knowing the level of support and service Securly provides was a key factor, as was the comprehensive services Securly offers. But most of all, I like working with Securly," he says.

Snedecor is pleased to have Securly handle both on- and off-site filtering. "Now we can get the same level on-site as we have for off-site. We're rolling out the classroom management piece, Securly Classroom, and excited to start using that this fall."

Overall, Snedecor knows he has a technology partner he can count on. He says Securly is easy to work with and that whenever he has a problem—which he's quick to point out is rare—it's dealt with immediately. "I just send an email and I get a response in no time, letting me know that the problem is being worked on. I work with the same support people over and over and we have a great rapport."

As someone who has been in IT for many years, Snedecor says he was very comfortable with his appliance. However, he says Securly has proven that it can take filtering to the cloud district-wide, maximize efficiency, reduce cost, and provide student safety everywhere.

"The whole implementation has been painless. No matter what the fall brings us in terms of remote learning, we know our solutions will work."

Taking classroom learning to the next level

Students and families aren't the only ones benefiting from the new products. Teachers have also enjoyed stronger classroom management, thanks to Securly Classroom. *"We started without any kind of management tool and teachers had difficulty keeping students off YouTube, Amazon Prime, and other sites. We needed to find a way for teachers to have more control to keep students on task and productive,"* says Benedict.

According to Benedict, MMSD first experimented with a couple of other products, which proved to be either too expensive or ineffective. The district was happy to try Classroom, especially because it was part of the Securly package and they were already impressed with the quality of Filter.

Benedict says he's received very positive feedback about Classroom.

"Teachers can see their students' screens and close tabs on an individual student's device to prevent distractions. It's an invaluable tool for teachers in the modern age."

Everyone at MMSD appreciates Classroom's ease of use. Once teachers had a little bit of training and saw what it could do, they were on board. Most of the 3,000 classroom teachers are using it, especially in the middle schools, where students struggle the most with time management and self-awareness.

Teachers tell Benedict that they love the scheduling component, which allows them to pre-set student monitors to run at certain times. *"They can see the report after the class and use what they find to have a conversation about appropriate use,"* he says. *"Lots of teachers use it as a data-collecting tool."*

As the district continues to figure out how to best leverage technology to enforce effective teaching and learning, they know that ongoing training and support are key. *"Technology can and should be used to ensure that our mission is fulfilled,"* says McCray. *"What role will it play? What does that look like?"*

For now, the plan is to continue educating teachers, parents, and staff on how to fulfill the MMSD mission, help every school to thrive, and prepare all students for college, career, and community.

About Securly

Securly was founded in 2013 with a single intention to keep kids safe online. Securly develops solutions that keep kids safe & engaged online, at school, and at home. From tools that help adults create a kid-friendlier Internet, to an AI that recognizes signs of bullying and even intuits risks of self-harm, Securly breaks new ground and innovates to meet modern problems head-on. For every child that we empower to stand strong, for each kid that chooses hope over hopelessness, Securly is motivated to continue forging ahead.

To learn more, visit **www.securly.com.**

classroom	Cloud-based classroom management for Chromebooks.
filter	Cloud-based web filter for keeping students safe on all devices.
aware	AI-based notifications for nudity, bullying, self-harm, and violence.
on-call	Specialists that review flagged activity round the clock.