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Encinitas Union School District Announces Partnership with iboss To Protect Student Online Mental Health

Monitoring for Harmful Online Activity Protects Children Among Significant Increase in Mental Health Concerns

Introduction

Children's experiences at school can greatly impact their mental health. Negative experiences can go unnoticed, particularly as online learning becomes more common. The Encinitas Union School District in California is a clear example of a district taking steps to prioritize students' online mental health. The district's leadership collaboration across departments and their effective use of technology is credited with making a big difference for their students and the families they serve.

The Challenge

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The Encinitas Information Technology and Educational Services Departments are working closely on proactive self-harm monitoring capabilities implemented in partnership with cybersecurity firm iboss. The district is utilizing iboss's granular self-harm monitoring and reporting capability, which identifies potentially harmful behaviors, giving the district the ability to take proactive measures aimed at saving lives and improving the mental health of students.

The district's iboss security service edge (SSE) high risk alerting capability provides the district with more than the typical blocking of explicit content, it provides alerts to a team of district staff on self-harm related queries and behaviors, while at the same time directing students to preventative self-harm related resources

According to Vivek H. Murthy, U.S. Surgeon General, "It would be a tragedy if we beat back one public health crisis only to allow another to grow in its place... Online mental health challenges in children, adolescents, and young adults are real. For the first time, educators can seamlessly connect students with situationally relevant resources that help them return to a pathway of wellness".

For Encinitas, the ability to identify student high-risk online activity and to take action has been a game changer "When we can identify signs that a student is struggling online with their mental health, our team, alongside parents and other supportive resources can move in swiftly to get the student the help and support they need. The earlier we take action to connect these students with appropriate mental health services, the better the outcome that we can expect", explains Nathan Short, Director of Information Technology.

Short explains, five years ago, in collaboration with iboss, the district set out to calibrate its iboss platform to focus on high-risk alerts, with a focus on self-harm. As a result, Short was able to provide convincing proof to district leadership that the technology could meet their requirements. School officials signed on to the concept.

The payoff of their efforts was best exemplified when the pandemic hit, and students found themselves isolated from their peers, as a result, self-harm alerts increased. What had been a rare occurrence became more frequent and those efforts saved lives. When parents received phone calls from the district's psychology team, they were often shocked when they learned about indicators of self-harm associated with their child. Short describes one alert incident. At 11p.m. a self-harm alert came in and attempts to reach guardians by phone were ignored and blocked, one member of the district's response team realized they lived a couple of blocks from the child's address. Within minutes, the team member was knocking on the family's door, which resulted in saving a life.

In another case the versatility of the monitoring tool coupled with the district's rapid response proved invaluable. Twenty minutes before school dismissal, alerts came in of a child searching for the "fastest way to kill themself", while monitoring in real-time, the searches progressed from "nearby tall buildings" and "nearby cliffs" to directions to a specific cliff within walking distance of the school. The high-risk intel coupled with the districts rapid response prevented a student from taking their life.

Most recently, a new partnership and integration between iboss Security Service Edge, and Gaggle have streamlined operations even further. Gaggle is a 24/7 monitoring service, specializing in student mental health, that takes on the liability risk that the district's response team used

to take upon themselves. This has been life changing, as Gaggle now takes care of reviewing false positives, and rapidly reaching out to the district's response team.

About iboss

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