Lightspeed Systems Relay Keeps
Nye School District Safe & Secure

Nye County School District serves over 5,000 students across 17 schools in Nevada. Like many K-12 IT employees, Director of Technology Robert Williams is part of a relatively small staff — at Nye, just four employees — with a wide variety of responsibilities.

"We handle all kinds of things including professional development, a big transition to G Suite, and all of the work orders that come in for technology," Robert said. "We're spread pretty thin."

But, as every tech director with limited resources knows, device security and student safety must be top priorities.

Robert has worked in the Nye County School District for about 10 years. He transitioned to his new position a year ago, after nine years serving as principal, and his experience in administration has helped him immensely to understand instructional technology needs in schools. Robert has been spearheading the school's initiative to apply grant funds and make the switch from computer labs and laptop carts to G Suite and Chromebooks.

As principal, Robert successfully rolled out 1:1 Chromebooks, and chose a similar strategy for other schools in the district.

From Rocket to Relay

The Nye County School District network has utilized Lightspeed Systems Rocket appliances since 2015. Because of the Chromebook deployment at Nye, Robert needed a smart way to manage those new devices in the cloud.

Robert offered the idea to purchase a cart of Chromebooks for each teacher at one grade level. Then, as more money became available, more carts could be purchased for all teachers at another grade level.

"This creates ownership of the Chromebooks for the teachers who have an assigned cart, and improves integration and frequency of use because the teachers always have access to the devices," he said.

As Chromebooks were integrated into instruction, IT encountered a challenge. Many students attempted to bypass the content filter with VPNs and proxies, and played games during class. Also, teachers struggled to monitor student devices during instruction.

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Robert Williams, Tech Director

"**We're routinely getting requests on, 'Hey, can you check the search history of this student?'** And 'Hey, there are some issues here. Is there a way to monitor Chromebooks the same way that we do with the computer labs?'" Robert explained.

When Robert researched Relay and other solutions to secure a more advanced monitoring tool for the Chromebooks, Relay emerged as the winner for its robust features and cost.

"We looked at Relay … and GoGuardian as solutions that would allow us better monitoring tools," Robert said. "Once we'd done our pilots and looked at the pros and cons, Relay came out on top with a couple features."

Robert said he appreciates Relay's one-time, life-of-device licensing fee. "**Relay is much more cost-effective,**" he continued. "We wouldn't necessarily be able to afford adding another annual subscription into our regular budget for these tools."

Using Flagged Content To Better Detect Self-Harm and Suicide Risk

Shortly after pushing the Relay extension to devices, Robert made a shocking discovery with the help of Relay's Flagged Terms.

Relay Flagged Terms are a core element of pinpointing suspicious behavior that may be something for IT and administration to take action on. IT can set custom Flagged Terms and phrases with corresponding danger levels, and receive immediate, daily, and weekly email alerts.

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Robert Williams, Tech Director

"Within the first week, **we identified two students in one of the schools that were researching a suicide hotline**," Robert said.

Robert was able to notify the school principal of this activity so he could intervene to help the students, potentially saving their lives.

"It was a very positive thing that we were able to catch them and get them the help they need," Robert said.

Recently, Robert enabled Flagged Terms by user input rather than content scanning, which has led to a more accurate picture of student activity. By setting Flagged Term alerts based on what a student is actually typing (e.g., a student working on a Google Doc typing "suicide" vs. a page scan containing the word "suicide"), IT gains more transparency about behavior observed on the device.

"When you're talking about user input, **it's a lot easier to identify when there are issues**. Plus, if we get a flag on [the word] 'suicide' and nothing indicates that in the user's history but we know that the word suicide was used in a Google Doc, we can then get into the student's account and take a look at those documents to see if there's an issue," he explained.

The VPN Battle and How Relay Has Led to a Safer Network

Like many K-12 IT professionals, Robert was accustomed to students using VPNs to try to bypass the network filter.

Although Robert uses Google's Admin Console to prevent students from installing VPN software, he relies on Relay to help identify the students who are researching how to get around the filter via VPN on other devices.

"With Relay, we can connect behavior to specific students, allowing us to bring in school administrators and teachers to address the behavior," Robert explained. "We still have a mixed environment with Chromebooks and Windows machines. Kids can still attempt to install VPNs on the Windows machines. Because we can connect behavior to specific students, we've been able to address some of the problems happening on Windows machines."

Thanks to Relay, the IT team noticed many students researching information on how to access blocked content.

Due to this behavior, Robert and the team sent word to administrators. After administrators addressed those behavior issues, Robert's team saw a vast decrease in filter bypass attempts.

"**We don't want kids to be punished, but we do want them to understand acceptable use of technology in schools and in the working world**," he explained. "They also need to know they could lose their privileges on district technology if they continue [this behavior]."

Case Study

Conclusion

Robert's team of four has a lot on their plate to ensure the school's IT programs are running smoothly every day. But, he's still able to work closely with administration and teachers to provide critical data on student device use with the help of quick, actionable student use analytics from Relay.

With more visibility into student device use than ever, Robert can have productive conversations with teaching staff to better inform them of what's going on in their classrooms.

In the past, Robert set teachers up with instructions on how to use Classroom Orchestrator, which some teachers implemented. With the updates in Classroom, Robert is excited to see what new tools he can provide to teachers.

In Lightspeed Systems Classroom, teachers gain powerful classroom management tools including the ability to monitor activity, insights into who's on track and who needs help, broadcasting teacher and student screens, controlling access to the internet and much more.

Moving forward, Nye plans to continue the 1:1 rollout and extend multi-OS Relay across the district. Sending devices home with students is on the radar for next year. With Relay's smart features, Nye School District is set up for complete 1:1 success.

About Relay

Finally, there's a smarter way to filter.

Relay combines the power of a filtering appliance and the ease of a cloud solution into one platform that will save you time, protect your students, solve your SSL challenges, and maximize your school's use of mobile devices. It filters every device, everywhere, with revolutionary Lightspeed Systems Smart Agent technology. Appropriate K-12 YouTube access is solved with Smart Play, high-risk student behavior is identified, and IT has more flexibility and control than ever before.

Learn more at lightspeedsystems.com/relay
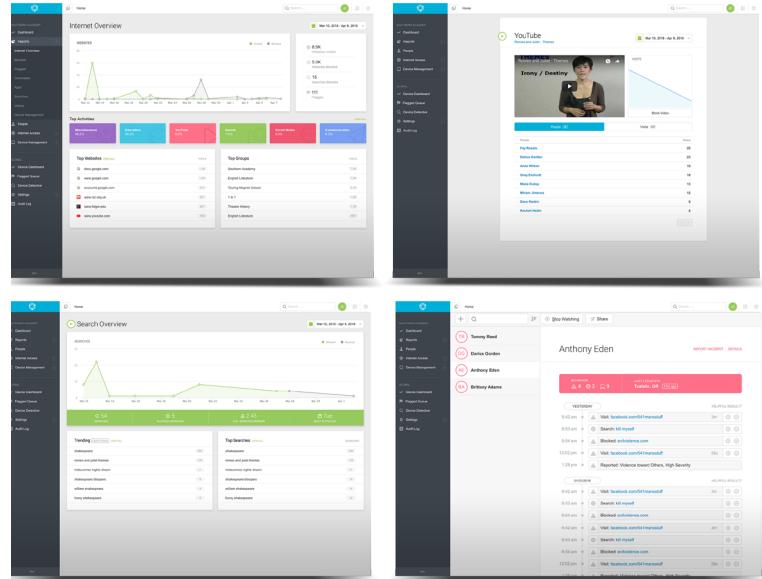
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