Case Study
Forest Hills Public Schools

PROFILE:

COUNTRY: USA
INDUSTRY: Education
SIZE: 9,500 students

OBJECTIVE:

Michigan's Forest Hills Public Schools needed a cross-platform Internet monitoring and filtering solution that seamlessly decrypts SSL web traffic and provides the same high-quality experience regardless of what type of device students are using.

SOLUTION:

In ContentKeeper, Forest Hills has found a solution that can decrypt and inspect SSL-encrypted web traffic at very high speeds and provides the same visibility and control across all browsers and device types.

RESULTS:

Forest Hills IT staff now have greater visibility into students' web use, whether students are using iPads, Chromebooks, or other devices. In addition, the district was quickly able to deploy 1,200 devices for remote learning when the pandemic hit, keeping students safe online whether they're learning from home or at school.

With ContentKeeper, Forest Hills Has a Cross-Platform Internet Filtering Solution That Works On and Off Campus

Although Michigan's Forest Hills Public Schools isn't a traditional 1:1 school system, it has a large fleet of shared devices for students to use during instruction. These include iPads for students in the younger grades and Chromebooks for older students who complete more writing-intensive work.

"We want to make sure we have the right device for the right task," says Director of Technology Susan Bordewyk-Case.

Identifying specific network users and enforcing its Internet Use Policy across multiple shared device types proved challenging for this district of 9,500 students just east of Grand Rapids. "We weren't seeing our previous web filtering solution progress to meet our needs," Bordewyk-Case notes. So when it was time to renew the contract, she and her team looked for other options.

Forest Hills needed a fully cross-platform solution that provided the same user experience and the same degree of control regardless of what device or web browser students were using to get online. IT staff also wanted a system that would give them complete visibility into each student's Internet activity, tracking and reporting not only the IP address of each device but also the network credential of its user. What's more, "we wanted a solution that would seamlessly navigate SSL decryption," says Systems Engineer Chris Alger.

They found all this—and more—with ContentKeeper.

Giving parents confidence

Forest Hills IT staff tried ContentKeeper in a "proof of concept" pilot in January 2020 and found that it exceeded their expectations, while meeting every requirement on their list. The district planned to go live with the system during spring break, but then the pandemic hit—forcing instruction to move online nearly overnight.

"We had to deploy 1,200 devices for students to take home immediately," says Alger, explaining that many students lacked a device of their own at home. Before the pandemic, district-owned devices never went off campus.

Fortunately, the district discovered that ContentKeeper was easy to set up and deploy. This allowed IT staff to get devices into students' hands quickly, so their learning wasn't disrupted. In addition, ContentKeeper has provided the same degree of visibility and control whether students are learning from home or at school.

"We haven't really had any issue with those devices being outside our buildings," Alger says.

Having a web monitoring and filtering solution that works equally well on or off campus has given parents more confidence in the district's remote learning plan.

"Knowing that we could provide the same level of filtering and control when students were learning from home was key," Bordewyk-Case indicates. "Initially, I think parents were concerned about whether their children would continue to be safe online. It was nice to be able to reassure them."

'Set it and forget it'

ContentKeeper's value was confirmed when the coronavirus pandemic forced students to learn from home. Aside from offering greater visibility and control across all device types, ContentKeeper has demonstrated its value to Forest Hills in many other ways as well.

For instance, its previous filtering solution retained data on students' web use for only 30 days. With ContentKeeper, district officials have access to Internet use data going back several months, which has proven useful for investigations.

Also, ContentKeeper's technical support has been exemplary, with rapid response times and near-immediate resolution. "That's not something we have experienced before with other providers," Alger says.

With ContentKeeper, Forest Hills has found a complete, cross-platform Internet monitoring and filtering solution that works equally well on *and* off campus, without a lot of time or hassle needed from district IT staff.

"It just works," Alger concludes. "That's always a good thing. We simply set it and forget it."