



C A S E S T U D Y



The School District of Osceola County

OSCEOLA COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT GIVES ITS COMMUNITY AN ONGOING VOICE IN SCHOOL SAFETY

Osceola County School District sought a better way to give students, parents, and staff a voice in school safety as part of its strategic plan and commitment to improving customer service. The district used K12 *Insight's* Let's Talk! to create its Keep Osceola Safe portal, an online space where community members can ask safety questions and report bullying, threats, or acts of violence. The result? Increased community trust and safer schools. Here's how they did it.

THE CHALLENGE

Located in central Florida just below Orlando, the School District of Osceola County and its surrounding community are experiencing rapid growth. The district currently serves approximately 68,000 students from more than 100 countries in its 50 district schools and 21 charter schools.

To help ensure student success, the district implemented a three-year strategic plan that Superintendent Dr. Debra Pace and the school board envisioned to take Osceola from "good to great." The plan relies on a district-wide commitment to improving customer service and communication. (CONT'D)



68K

Number of students



50

Number of schools



8,200+

Number of staff members

Source: The School District of Osceola County, Fla.



THE CHALLENGE (CONT'D FROM PG 1)

“Teaching and learning are at the heart of every school district. That is our key mission,” Dr. Pace says. “But our board from the very beginning also wanted to emphasize that customer service is a school board priority. They believe that internal and external stakeholders are our customers, and it’s up to all of us to make sure we’re providing service that is respectful, prompt, and complete in order to ensure that they walk away understanding they are important.”

As part of the commitment to creating a strong customer experience, Dr. Pace and her team knew they needed to focus on the school environment.

“With school safety and security being top of mind and a top priority for our district — like with every district — we needed to have a reporting system,” explains Dana Schafer, the district’s public information officer. “People needed to feel comfortable reporting any threat or act of violence that they became aware of.”

But Schafer says that the district’s outdated website initially held them back. “We tried to build a system in-house, and it just wasn’t a perfect system on the back end in terms of who and how quickly people would be notified,” she says. “We knew there had to be a better way to do it.”

THE SOLUTION

The district turned to Let’s Talk!, which it was already using to streamline community feedback and customer service, to power its **Keep Osceola Safe** initiative.

“Because our community was already familiar with Let’s Talk! and we were training our staff to use the tool, it made it easy and natural to have it serve a safety function

Let's Talk! Feedback & Questions



Add a Let’s Talk! pop-out tab to make it easy for community members to reach out about whatever is on their mind.



as well,” Schafer says. “Let’s Talk! helps us track, monitor, and look into any type of threat or bullying situation.”

The online portal offers a dedicated space for students, parents, and staff to ask important safety questions, report instances of bullying, or report potential physical or social-emotional threats.

A special Critical Alerts feature makes it possible to flag messages that include potentially troubling keywords, such as “bomb,” “gun,” or “suicide,” and fast-track those messages for immediate review and investigation.

A back-end dashboard provides district leaders in real time with trends and key metrics such as the number of inquiries, average response time, and customer experience score. Metrics and trends help them understand and measure progress to ensure every school provides a safe, welcoming environment.

“Just as important as academic success to us is student and staff safety,” Schafer says. “We want the community to know that we take safety and security extremely serious. Using Let’s Talk! and Keep Osceola Safe really emphasizes that.”

LOOPING IN THE RIGHT PEOPLE AT THE RIGHT TIME

The tool also makes it easier for school and district leaders to collaborate within and across teams to ensure a timely, appropriate response.

“We’ll get bullying messages from parents reporting something that happened with their child,” shares Heather Kahoun, the district’s community relations specialist. “Our district bullying coordinator will work in conjunction with the area superintendents, school principals, counselors, and others to quickly address those concerns.”

“We have had far less disruptions to our school days through lockdowns and those types of things than ever before, because we’ve been able to use this tool to be proactive and get in front of potential threats or issues on our campus.”

DR. DEBRA PACE
SUPERINTENDENT
THE SCHOOL DISTRICT OF
OSCEOLA COUNTY, FLA.



Similarly, safety concerns are automatically routed to the district's safety and security team, which can then collaborate internally and externally with the appropriate law enforcement agency to investigate the threat and determine the best course of action.

One of the powers of Let's Talk! is being able to loop in whomever is needed to appropriately address a concern — including those who might not typically be associated with safety concerns — to ensure a timely, appropriate response.

"If something happens on a school bus or at a bus stop, we pull in our transportation department," Schafer says, adding that the transportation team is already familiar with Let's Talk! "It's critical that you get the right people involved at the right time."

A SOLUTION STUDENTS CAN TRUST

With Let's Talk!, students and others can reach out 24/7 from their favorite device. Just as importantly, they can decide whether to submit anonymously or share their contact information, which Schafer says helps community members feel comfortable using the tool. "Even if it's anonymous, we want community members to say something," she says. "This really has allowed us to stay in front of — and take proactive measures when — security issues happen."

Schafer recalls a recent incident in which the district, particularly the safety and security team, was especially grateful to have such a tool in place.

"This past school year, a student made a specific threat of violence to a middle school and a fellow student reported it," Schafer shares. "Upon investigation by law enforcement, it was determined that the student was in a downward spiral and was in desperate need of mental health help, which was immediately provided."

Let's Talk! at Osceola

114
Interest areas

3,815
Number of
Dialogues

8.8 out of 10
Average customer
experience score

0.9 days
Average
response time



With a comfortable and clear space to go to raise potentially sensitive topics, students and others are encouraged to speak up when they otherwise might not.

A SOLUTION STUDENTS CAN TRUST

Improving school climate and the customer experience is key to ensuring safe, welcoming schools. And it's something everyone has to participate in and be accountable for.

"You get lots of notifications for a lot of different things in your phone and email and whatnot," Kahoun explains. "Something can slip through, so you really need a way to ensure accountability and really have someone take ownership."

For Osceola County, that means ensuring schools and departments honor the district's promise of a 24-hour turnaround time for incoming inquiries. "The quicker we can get back to a parent or a community member or whoever, the happier they will be in the end," Kahoun explains. "And it shows them that we're working hard to meet their needs."

Because Let's Talk! tracks inquiries from submission through resolution, there is also a clear "paper trail" of actions taken by the district and community member.

"It provides a system where, if something does come in, we have it tracked in the system in case there's something later where the district will have to prove that we knew about something, did something about it, and made sure the right people were involved. That type of thing can all be done through Let's Talk!," Schafer explains. "We'll be able to pull that up if there's any type of litigation or legal action or anything like that, which provides a lot of reassurance to the district."



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DANA SCHAFER
PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICER
THE SCHOOL DISTRICT OF
OSCEOLA COUNTY, FLA.



THE RESULTS

TURNING RANTS AND RAVES INTO RESPONSIVENESS AND TRUST

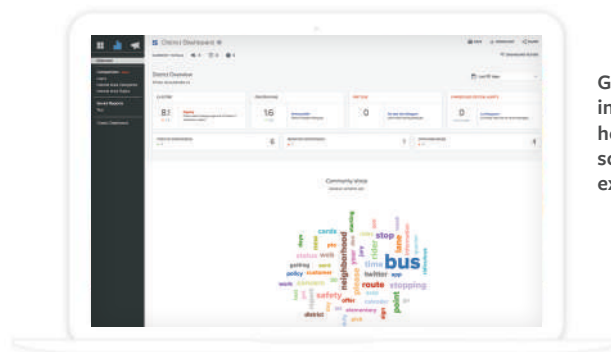
By using Let's Talk! to ensure school safety and improve the customer experience, the district has been able to create a positive school culture based on trust.

One way they are seeing this play out? Rumors about the district have dropped.

Kahoun notes that parents use an Osceola Rants and Raves Facebook group to share what they've heard about the district, which "fuels the fire" before the district has the chance to finish investigating a concern. "It is important for us to build trust with our community so parents trust us to get them the information as soon as we have something to share," Kahoun says.

As Schafer puts it: "We want our community to know that if there is something they need to know, then we are going to tell them and they are going to hear it directly from us — not on some Rants and Raves page from someone else. Having that trust really helps us manage communication through a crisis."

For Dr. Pace, this proactive approach to school safety is invaluable. "As we all know, school safety and security is on everyone's mind when you're in the field of education today," she says. "We have had far less disruptions to our school days through lockdowns and those types of things — as well callouts because of random social media posts — than ever before, because we've been able to use this tool to be proactive and get in front of potential threats or issues on our campus."



Get key insights in real time to help improve the school customer experience

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