# SHOULD SCHOOLS USE TRACKING SOFTWARE TO MONITOR STUDENTS' MENTAL HEALTH?

Mental health continues to be a growing issue in the United States. Some schools have gone further than offering counselors and support groups by adopting AI-powered monitoring software that can flag concerning online activity. These digital tools, like Gaggle, Securly 24, Bark, and many others, act as a "second set of eyes" to help identify at-risk youth. Such programs check every email, text, and interaction made using a school device or account for potential troubling words. If a match is found, the situation is escalated to a team of human reviewers, who verify the concern and alert school officials or even the police. Though the software is not cheap--Gaggle's coverage for all grades costs Cincinnati Public Schools $323,780 a year--the companies argue that the benefits to students' lives justify the cost.

## 1 in 6
U.S. youth experience a mental health disorder each year.

**What do you think?**

Should school devices and accounts be monitored at home?

Should schools invest in monitoring tools over other resources?

Does the potential to save lives outweigh students' right to privacy?

By: Kyle Young

## YES, SCHOOLS SHOULD USE THIS SOFTWARE

School districts have an obligation to look out for their students. By implementing monitoring software, they can better help struggling students. This technology can catch a variety of stressors, like concerns of mental health issues, suicidal ideation, and trouble at home. Bark claims that it identified over 88,000 children who were expressing severe self-harm, cutting, and/or suicidal thoughts in 2023 alone. Monitoring online activity may also help prevent students from harming others. It can help identify cyberbullying and can even be an early warning sign of potential school shootings. A survey of nearly 1,000 educators across the United States found that "95% [of teachers] believe that Gaggle makes schools safer." Lastly, keeping an eye on student activity online can serve as an opportunity to improve digital citizenship. It can create opportunities for students to learn about internet safety, privacy, and the consequences of irresponsible online conduct.

## NO, SCHOOLS SHOULD NOT USE THIS SOFTWARE

Monitoring software just isn't effective enough. It is susceptible to false alarms from jokes, typos, and school assignments, such as flagging a student doing a research project about depression. These false alarms place students in embarrassing situations and needlessly worries parents. Additionally, students can often find ways to bypass the software. Four in ten students report finding workarounds to the monitoring tools. This tracking software is also a breach of student privacy. Keeping a watchful eye on every word typed is akin to flipping through someone's personal diary. This 24/7 surveillance can make it hard for kids to develop the ability to evaluate and manage risks on their own in order to function effectively. These invasive tools also pose new risks for certain minority groups, such as LGBTQ+ students who risk of being outed to their teachers and parents.