

# Supporting Effective Digital Learning – Wherever It’s Taking Place



Learn how Portage Community School District (WI) with its mix of hybrid, fully onsite and fully offsite students is using NetRef to support student engagement, parent communications and digital citizenship.



*(Teachers) picked it up and used it on day one of school.*

~ Stefanie Zehner,  
Technology Coach

We talked with three staff members about how they’re taking advantage of NetRef’s many features. Amy Eppinger is Portage’s Director of Instructional Technology, Tyler Carl teaches sixth grade math and social studies, and Stefanie Zehner is a technology coach and seventh grade social studies teacher. Zehner was part of the adoption team that piloted NetRef over the summer heading into the 2020-21 school year. While each educator has their own uses for NetRef, a few common themes came up.

## Ease of Use

Portage selected NetRef with an initial emphasis on supporting staff with virtual learners, although in their first year of use it’s shown added benefits inside the classroom as well. Both Carl and Zehner speak of how easy NetRef is to use. It’s “so much more user-friendly [than other programs],” Carl says. Having helped with training educators in her school, Zehner witnessed teachers picking up and implementing NetRef right away. “After a 10-minute training, I understood the mass majority of the tool.” Zehner comments. Eppinger is also impressed with the NetRef team’s responsiveness in answering questions, emphasizing that they’re putting kids first and making sure teachers and kids can do what they need to.



## On Task and On Target

Whether in the classroom or remotely, NetRef has helped Portage teachers answer, “Are students working on what they need to be working on?” especially with Portage’s combination of in-person and remote learning. Over half of Zehner’s students learn remotely, and some classrooms are 100% virtual. Zehner says “I used it every day during quarantine to be sure students were online.” Carl finds NetRef helpful for tracking attendance and especially useful when testing. Teachers can lock students into an assessment by using the Allowlist or restrict access to certain sites with the Blocklist.

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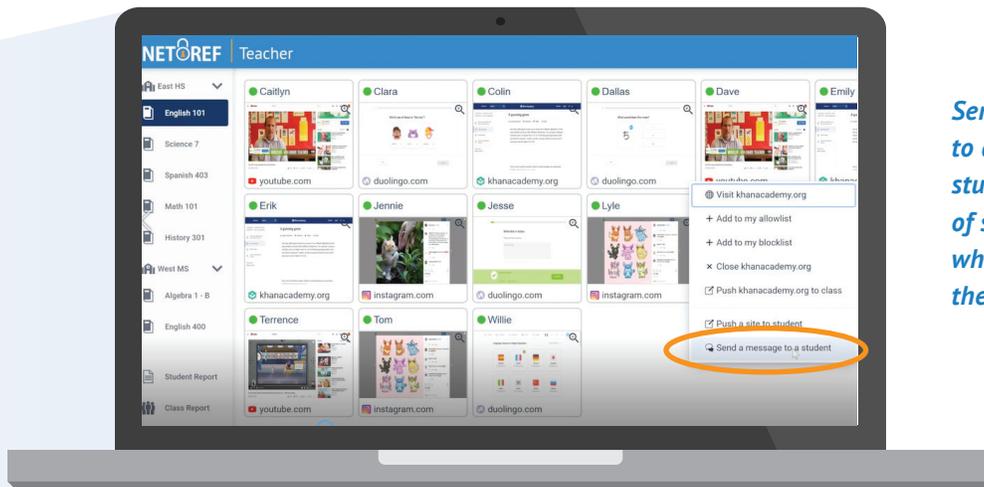
*It’s a way of monitoring the fairness of any sort of assessment that’s given.*

~ Tyler Carl, 6th Grade Math & Social Studies Teacher

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## Message Received

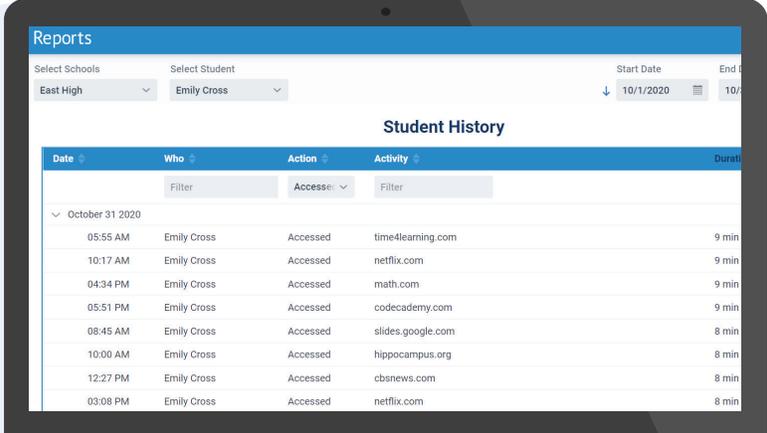
Both Carl and Zehner call out NetRef’s ability to direct message a particular student or the entire class to keep them on task or provide support. Zehner often pushes out individual messages to students, checking: “Are we doing what we need to?” It’s also a useful way to reach out to students who are missing a homework assignment or need to make up a quiz, especially on the district’s weekly dedicated day of remote learning, Carl says.



*Send a message to an individual student, a group of students or the whole class through the NetRef platform.*

## Support Parent Conversations

Zehner and Carl also use NetRef to support their conversations with parents about student engagement. Carl explains how NetRef does the work of adding up how much time students spend on school content. “It opens parents’ eyes,” he says. Zehner adds that data from NetRef’s engagement reports are “clear evidence of time.” And Eppinger points out how NetRef shows both which sites a student visited and how long they spent there. So even if a student visited the desired educational website, they may not have been there long enough to complete the assignment.



Date	Who	Action	Activity	Duration
October 31 2020				
05:55 AM	Emily Cross	Accessed	time4learning.com	9 min
10:17 AM	Emily Cross	Accessed	netflix.com	9 min
04:34 PM	Emily Cross	Accessed	math.com	9 min
05:51 PM	Emily Cross	Accessed	codecademy.com	9 min
08:45 AM	Emily Cross	Accessed	slides.google.com	8 min
10:00 AM	Emily Cross	Accessed	hippocampus.org	8 min
12:27 PM	Emily Cross	Accessed	cbsnews.com	8 min
03:08 PM	Emily Cross	Accessed	netflix.com	8 min

*Find out not only what sites students visited but how long they spent on them.*

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*[NetRef gives parents] clear evidence of time and which tool students are on.*

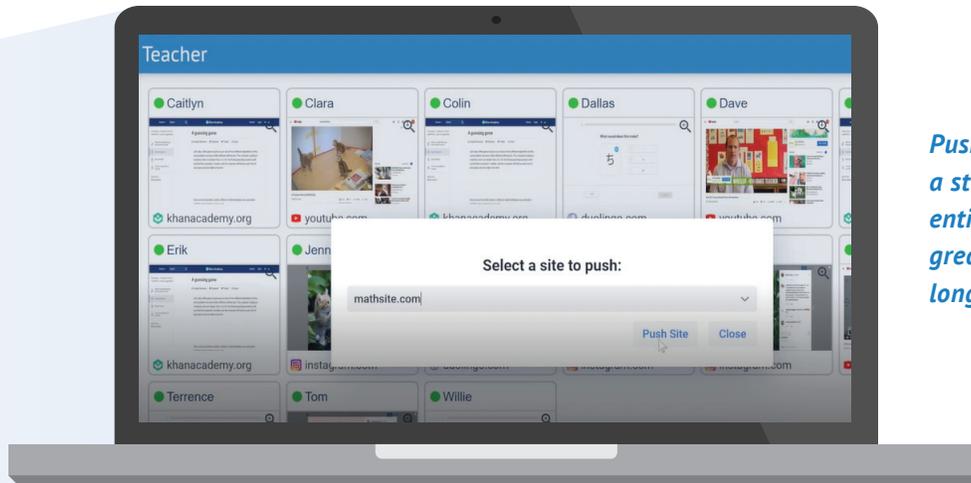
~ Stefanie Zehner, Technology Coach

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The data NetRef provides isn’t only used to facilitate parent conversations with students who are off task, but also to support students who are putting in time and effort to learning but who have not yet demonstrated mastery of the material or completed assignments. “We can praise the students who are giving it their best, and then we know how we can support that student better,” Eppinger says.

## Fostering Digital Citizenship

For Portage Community School District, NetRef has also helped foster class community and digital citizenship in a time of remote learning. For example, Eppinger has seen NetRef help teachers identify students who have found a helpful website and then share that discovery by pushing the website out to the whole class. On a larger scale, both Carl and Eppinger like how NetRef supports students' digital citizenship and “navigate what it means to be a virtual learner.”



*Push a website to a student or the entire class—great for sharing long urls.*

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*I do not know where we would be in this digital and hybrid learning environment without [NetRef].*

~ Amy Eppinger, Director of Instructional Technology

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Eppinger explains today's students aren't “digital natives” but “consumer natives.” Now that the internet – whether it's a YouTube video or sports game – washes over them, educators can help students modify their online behavior to make smart choices about how they're spending their time online.

“We're using [NetRef] in ways we didn't think we would initially,” Eppinger explains. The Portage team is sure there are even more undiscovered uses to come.