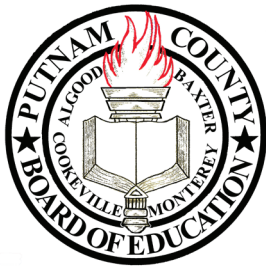


NetRef Gives Teachers the Freedom to Teach



Learn how Putnam County School System (TN) is using NetRef to manage and monitor student engagement, and so much more.

Putnam County School System had a one-to-one tech initiative for six years before finding the perfect tool to manage and monitor how students are using their devices.

“We’re all one-to-one with Chromebooks, and it’s really difficult, walking around the classroom, to make sure students are on task and on the appropriate websites. They just get tempted with the technology to deviate to other sites,” explains Jennifer Lawrence-Dishman, a science teacher in the district. “We asked for a long time to have something to track what students are doing since we are using so much technology.”



We have to try this!

~ Mary Kirk, Math Teacher

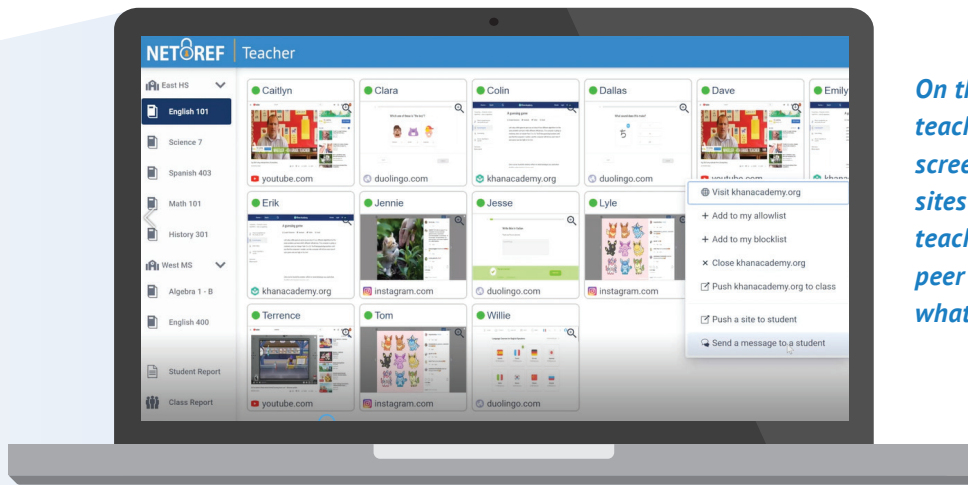


Then, two years ago, math teacher Mary Kirk saw NetRef at a conference and said, “We have to try this!” After piloting NetRef during the 2019-20 school year, Kirk knew NetRef was a must-have for not only her eighth grade team, but also every other teacher in the district as they strive to keep students focused on and engaged in learning when using devices.



The Third Eye

Kirk's was one of the first schools in the district to use NetRef. And as she helps fellow teachers adopt the system, she urges them to use it to answer this guiding question: "What are students actually looking at?" Kirk suggests to teachers that if they use nothing else, use the NetRef Teacher Dashboard to see what sites students are on in real-time and NetRef's Site History for an overview of the sites students have visited over time.



On the Teacher Dashboard, teachers can see either a screenshot or the URLs of the sites students are on. Either way, teachers know without having to peer over a student's shoulder what they're doing online.

Middle school language arts teacher and NetRef building liaison Laura Young agrees with Kirk that NetRef is a game-changer, serving as a "a third eye in the sky" and giving teachers "the freedom to teach." It also teaches students "next-level accountability" and good practices for working with online resources.

Lawrence-Dishman echoes this. "NetRef holds students accountable, and it helps teachers monitor not just off-task behaviors but on-task behaviors as well, like how long students have been working on an assignment," she says. "Students know you're interested in what they're doing so they are more accountable for their actions. This helps with classroom behavior. When one student is off task often the rest will follow. NetRef helps keep them on task."

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I use a lot of media in my class. I use Google Classroom for everything. NetRef is a way for me to keep students accountable.

~ Jennifer Lawrence-Dishman, Science Teacher

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It changes the game on what we have to worry about ... The freedom of being able to teach and not having to worry about what they're accessing.

~ Mary Kirk, Math Teacher

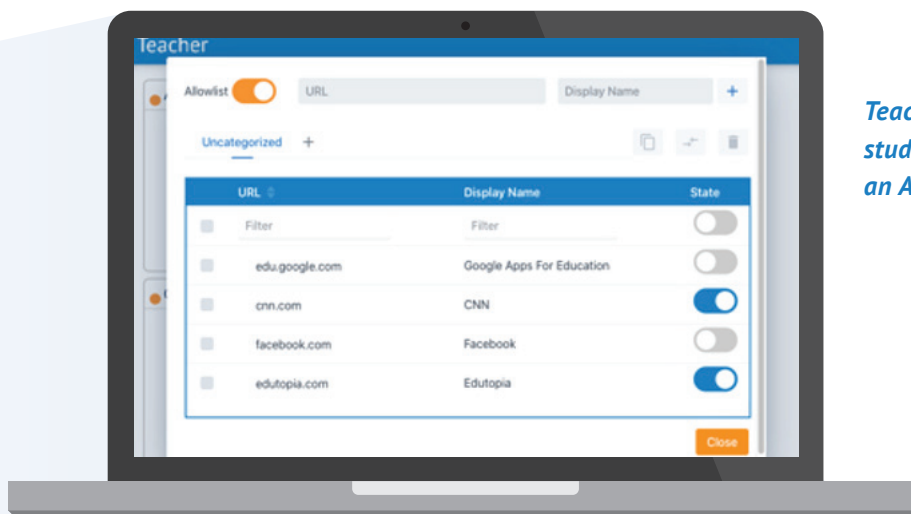
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Setting, Not Overstepping, Online Boundaries

But when Upperman Middle School assistant principal Angela Webb reflects on how NetRef is used in her school, she clarifies that it's not a "gotcha," but instead a transparent system that equips teachers with data to talk to students about their online activity. Students understand why NetRef is being used; It's not a secret to them. They know if they're off-task, teachers will have a conversation with them and ask open-ended questions like "Hey, I had NetRef pulled up and I saw this. Can you tell me what you were doing?"

Young laughs that NetRef is so widely used, both staff and students have turned it into a verb. Students exclaim in good humor, "She NetRef-ed you!" Young recalls a time she was away from school for professional development but was still monitoring her class in NetRef. Because of the ease of use, she was able to head off several off-task issues. "They were sufficiently NetRef-ed!" she jokes.

If, after viewing device screens on the NetRef Teacher Dashboard, teachers find students need to be redirected, NetRef's Allow and Blocklists are there to help. Young points out that usually a Blocklist (a tool that keeps the internet open except for a teacher-selected group of sites) is enough to keep students on-task. Kirk comments that it's easy to add or remove sites from a Blocklist as she monitors student activity. But if students are taking a test or just need a few more boundaries, teachers can put an Allowlist in place that gives students access to only a select group of the sites.



Teachers can limit and guide students' site access by enabling an Allowlist.

Supporting Healthy Device Use, and Healthy Students

From ease of use to keeping students on task, Webb is confident that NetRef is the right fit for Putnam. In fact, it's proven to be more than a device monitoring and management program. NetRef is contributing to students' well-being, too.

Webb recalls several instances in which students were chatting about something online that caused the teacher to pause and later connect with the student about a serious issue. In some cases, the issue was discussed with the student and the school counselor. If the teacher hadn't known about the issue through NetRef, they wouldn't have been able to address it, and further issues could have arisen. According to Webb, "We've been able to intervene in ways to help the kids."

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With 30 to 35 in a class it's tough to make sure everybody's in the same place, but when you can do that all on your screen at one time, it makes it much easier.

~ Laura Young, Language Arts Teacher

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