securly

Transitioning from classrooms to distance learning with Securly

Table of contents

One of the big takeaways in this time of COVID-19 is that there seem to be far more questions than there are answers. For schools that suddenly found themselves having to pivot to a distance learning model, the number of unanswerable questions still being asked is too many to count.

The question we'd like to do our best to address is "Should we be planning for long-term distance learning?" The answer is, unfortunately, we just don't know.

A study published by Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy (CIDRAP) predicts additional peaks and valleys of infection rates through the next 18-24 months as a result of many factors, including relaxations on shelter in place orders as well as no real timeline for the development of a vaccine.

In short, we may be in store for a rollercoaster of our daily lives being upended again, including school closures and a return to distance learning. Will this happen for sure? We really have no idea as we are but a nimble group of engineers and educators.

So while Securly maybe can't offer concrete answers, we can definitely offer concrete solutions that will take the pain and frustration out of pivoting to distance learning environments if and when the need arises once again.

> "At this point, our approach is to just hurry up and wait. But somehow still be proactive with planning because we have no idea what next school year is going to look like. Our approach has to be very broad but also be flexible and will likely be a hybrid model on an A/B schedule.
> This (the virus) isn't going away any time soon."
>
> **Jeanine Leys,**
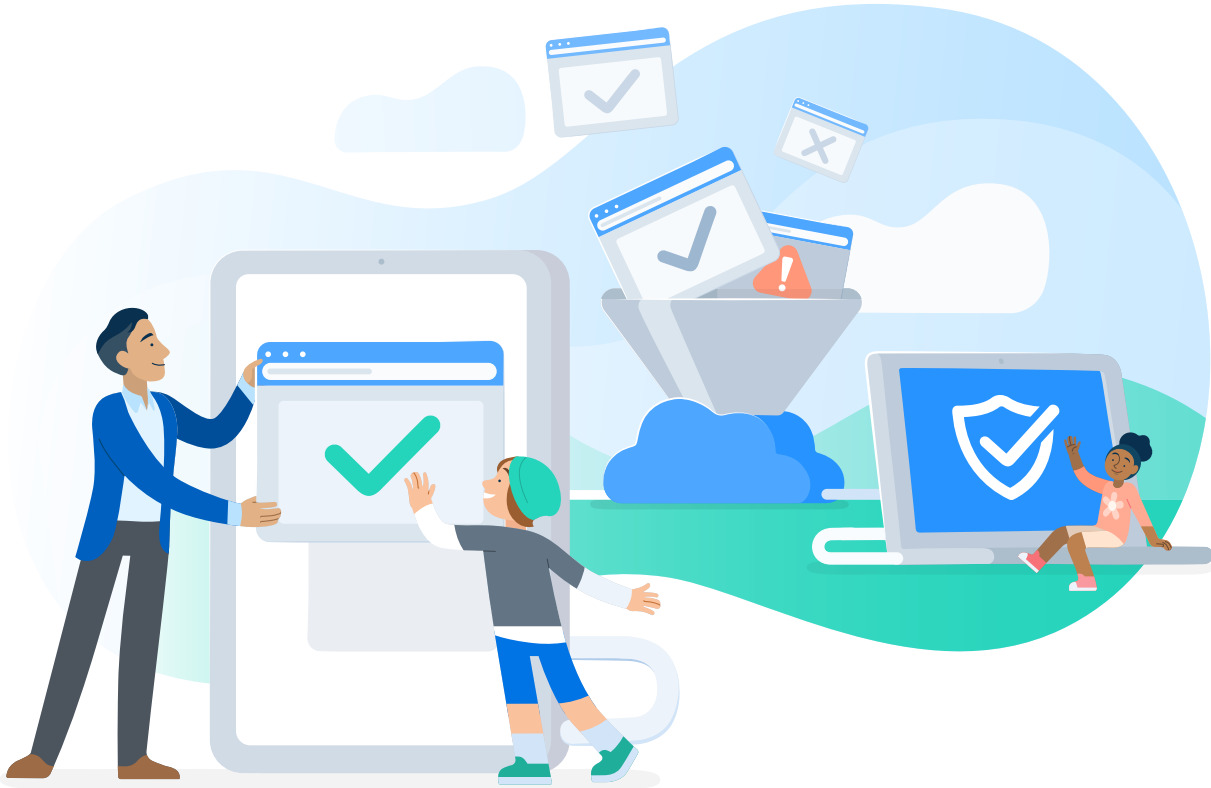> Director of Digital Learning and Innovation,
> Stratford Schools

Securly is able to provide schools with a near-seamless transition from on-campus to off-campus learning. We know because so many districts that already use our cloud-based solutions converted to distance learning with little interruption to the learning process or to the safety of their students. One district even described it as "painless".

Granted, we never set out to design school solutions that would help in the event of a pandemic, but it turns out that we did just that. In fact, our solutions empower schools in this time of large-scale distance learning. Filter offers unprecedented online safety; Securly Classroom gives teachers the ability to do their job effectively; Auditor looks for signs of trouble over email and docs; MDM lets admins manage 1:1 devices regardless of location; 24 keeps an eye on the emotional well-being of your students; and Home helps parents become partners in at-home schooling.

Filter

Securly's Cloud-based web filter works across all remote devices.

How Filter keeps kids safe and schools compliant

There was a time when 1:1 initiatives were technical infrastructures that schools could choose to employ based on resources and community support.

With Coronavirus, however, sending devices home with students has become an operational necessity in order for schools to maintain a certain level of instruction. Through government and private resources, the necessary 1:1 devices were supplied to millions of students, but schools were still left wondering how to make distance learning viable.

When devices go home, schools less concerned about CIPA-compliance may still need to take into account any community standards or expectations and personal beliefs of parents, which still makes the filtering of take-home devices a must. Unfortunately for many districts, the reality quickly became clear that web filtering appliances simply cannot handle these new remote learning environments.

Here's why:

Appliances represent a single point of failure.

With proxy traffic funneling back through the network from take-home devices, a single failure (e.g. an appliance overheats, runs out of hard drive space) will lead to a massive disruption for admins, teachers, and students.

The answer: A cloud-based multi-tenant system such as Securly's eliminates any risks posed by a single point of failure.

Appliances need timely software updates.

The answer: A cloud-based system like Securly's Filter allows admins to completely offload the headache of managing software updates to your provider.

SSL decryption on appliances is computationally intensive.

Appliances need to be turned off periodically which, in turn, limits visibility.

The answer: Securly's decryption is set up out of the box and crowdsourced from thousands of schools around the globe.

Many appliances require Active Directory for authentication.

This requires another on-prem server which the school is required to maintain, which suddenly becomes more difficult when the admins are forced to work from home.

The answer: Securly leverages cloud IDPs (Google and Azure) for 99.95% uptime and optimized speed. For iPads specifically, Securly supports user injection via MDM which eliminates the need to authenticate the devices when they're sent home while still providing admins in-depth visibility into how the iPads are being used.

Many offsite filtering solutions are difficult to install.

The answer: Securly was designed 100% in the cloud, meaning that it can be installed from the comfort of your couch and with zero risks of taking your network down.

On average, it takes less than 30 minutes for a district to get set up with Securly, including defining unique filtering policies, empowering staff with reporting access, and setting up alerts. It also provides the luxury of Zero Touch authentication for 1:1 environments. Securly leverages Cloud Identity Providers such as Google and Azure, thereby removing any dependency for an on-prem Active Directory, Radius, or LDAP.

*Find additional details on the benefits of cloud-based filtering [here](#).

Securly Classroom

Real-time classroom management for teachers.

How Securly Classroom keeps students focused on learning

Securly Classroom was originally designed to give teachers control over the devices within their actual classroom environment. It allowed teachers to keep students focused, communicate with individuals, and push out content.

With distance learning, Securly Classroom has proved that teaching can continue uninterrupted even in the absence of an actual classroom. Regardless of the style of instruction teachers are adopting, Classroom has proven itself a nimble and invaluable resource in the age of distance learning.

Securly Classroom for synchronous learning

For teachers opting for live synchronous classes (via Zoom or Meet), they've found that Securly Classroom augments the experience exponentially.

Simply put, Securly Classroom plays much the same role as it does in a physical classroom. In distance learning ecosystems, Securly Classroom puts teachers in charge through remote visibility of desktops, the ability to push resources, plus remote assistance capabilities like 1-1 chat communication when individual students need help.

Securly Classroom for asynchronous learning

For those teachers whose classes simply can't be live, an asynchronous model has been adopted that allows students to self-pace through pre-set lesson plans. In these models, the teacher sets time aside for office hours during which students can drop-in via Securly Classroom for support.

Teachers can also monitor remotely to see if students are getting stuck on a lesson and then communicate with them to see if they need help.

> Regardless of the teaching model adopted for distance learning, Securly Classroom still provides teachers with an array of capabilities, including the ability to view screens and push out content. For more detailed information, click [here](#).

Updates are driven by user feedback

The moment that users of Securly Classroom turned their focus towards distance learning, our product management team made it their ongoing mission to actively gather input on their current needs. The result has been our ability to execute and release updates in record time that enable teachers to better educate students in a world where they aren't sharing a physical classroom.

Examples of requested updates that were released include chat notification sounds, notifications when students enter a classroom session, faster refresh rates when viewing student screens remotely and an option to force the chat window open on student devices. With user feedback, updates to Securly Classroom will continue to happen often and as quickly as possible.

MDM

Provides simplified mobile device management to Apple devices.

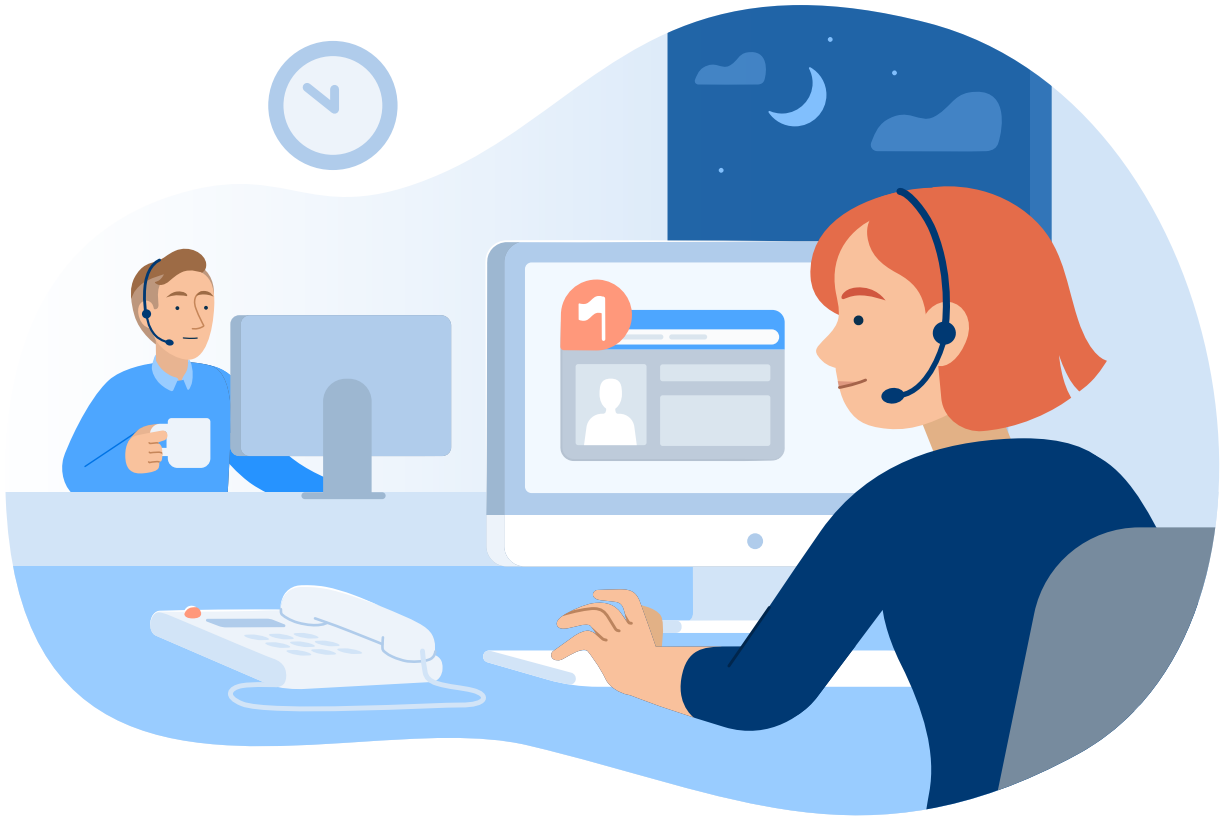## How it ensures remote devices stay protected

For schools with Apple devices, the need for management exists whether the devices are in the school or at home. With a cloud-based MDM like Securly, moving between school and home is completely seamless.

Administrators can still manage apps and restrictions on the devices. Teachers can still utilize our integrated teacher tools to control individual student devices. Teachers have the same access to request new apps for vetting and approval (an exclusive Securly-only feature in the world of MDMs) at home or school.

24

A team of specialists works alongside our AI to analyze flagged activity 24/7.

Its most important job is to keep students alive

When distance learning began, Jeanine Leys, Director of Digital Learning and Innovation at Stratford Schools noted, "…an uptick in searches for suicide prevention hotlines, etc. A lot of it was tied with assignments that were being pushed out - gives you a window into what kids are talking about in their natural habitat when adults are not around. Students being overwhelmed with not being connected to friends, feeling lonely."

In late March of 2020, as many schools rushed to distance learning, The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) hosted two webinars to answer questions about how to ethically and logistically approach the new virtual reality of counseling.

According to an AZCentral article, over 13K people signed up and crashed the servers. In some states, the ratio of students-to-school-counselor is at its lowest since 1986 (according to The Hechinger Report), evidence that SEL is viewed as important and necessary to the health of students. However, as counseling roles are funded locally and/or by state, not all schools share the same student to counselor ratio.

When AZ, for example, slashed its funding for public schools, the ratio of students to counselors rose from about 736-to-1 in 2000 to 905-to-1 in 2019, according to data from the National Center for Education Statistics. In many cases, teachers are stepping in to assist students emotionally, as well as academically.

"Digital learning has transformed us into 24/7 teachers," said one of several teachers interviewed by The Verge. Others said they've given students and their parents/guardians their personal contact information, telling them to reach out anytime hours of the day. "The students just miss each other, they miss school, and they miss us. They are craving interaction," she says. "Many are profoundly depressed, they don't know how to manage time and work throughout the day, many are emailing me at 12 to 4AM."

Even as counselors and teachers do their best to connect with students, an important question for schools to be asking during these check-ins is this: If a student is truly desperate, will they be forthcoming about those feelings or whether they've formulated a plan?

It's not safe to assume that because kids are home that parents have eyes on them at all times. Depending on the household, parents may have no other choice but to leave children home alone or with the minimal supervision of a sibling. Even when parents are home, though, kids are not always forthcoming and may hide their desperation behind a mask of contentment.

These reasons and more are why getting insight into a child's emotional health is critical. That's where 24 comes in. It can act with the empathy and professional insights of a guidance counselor but at all hours. Learn more about how 24 works [here](#).

> *"Kids are going through something they had never gone through. Without 24, we would not know what they're going through."*
>
> ## Berryessa School District

As noted in the table below, alerts the 24 Team determine to be extreme (those that require an immediate response) have not gone down in frequency in a post-COVID environment. The difference, however, is in the times that the largest number of alerts are occurring.

Extreme alerts screened by the 24 Team

When alerts occur	Pre-Covid	Post-Covid
In school hours	70%	25%
Out of school hours	30%	49%
Weekends	0%	26%

A shift towards shared responsibility

When distance learning began, the 24 Team heard from many schools that their escalation preference for high-risk alerts had changed. Instead of the pre-Covid process where the 24 Team reached out to the school's designated contact, schools now preferred their local police to perform the necessary wellness checks. The reasons for this are twofold: First, police can respond faster to an alert regarding a desperate student. Second, police are able to respond to high-risk alerts at all hours, whereas individual teachers and administrators simply cannot be available round-the-clock.

Auditor

AI-based notifications and scanning of nudity, cyberbullying, suicide, and violence for email, Docs, and Drive.

How it keeps students safe and schools in the know

With remote learning and shelter in place, social isolation can become a very real problem for many people, adults and children alike. With a school-provided device as the primary window into the outside world, a sense of boredom or ennui can spiral into a full-blown depression, which can lead to a lower sense of self-worth and an increase in suicide ideation.

It is because of this very real danger in remote learning environments that Auditor has become incredibly useful in allowing schools to better understand and address the emotional well-being of their students.

Powered by the industry's most mature AI (it even stays current on slang and trends, which also makes it the industry's only hipster AI), Auditor scans Gmail, Docs, and Drive for signs of suicide and depression. If any of these are found, Auditor will alert the school and provide it with the relevant information so that they can make an informed decision on how to address the situation.

Cyberbullying and violence

Auditor scans Docs because kids have taken to creating and sharing live documents. These can act as a harmless way for kids to have private conversations, but live docs are also being used for spreading rumors or active harassment. Docs are also used for penning farewell notes, as well as dangerous items like manifestos or violent plans to be carried out.

Nudity

Auditor monitors for nudity within email attachments and within files stored in Google Drive. Securly's AI has become very adept at keeping inappropriate photos away from innocent eyes.
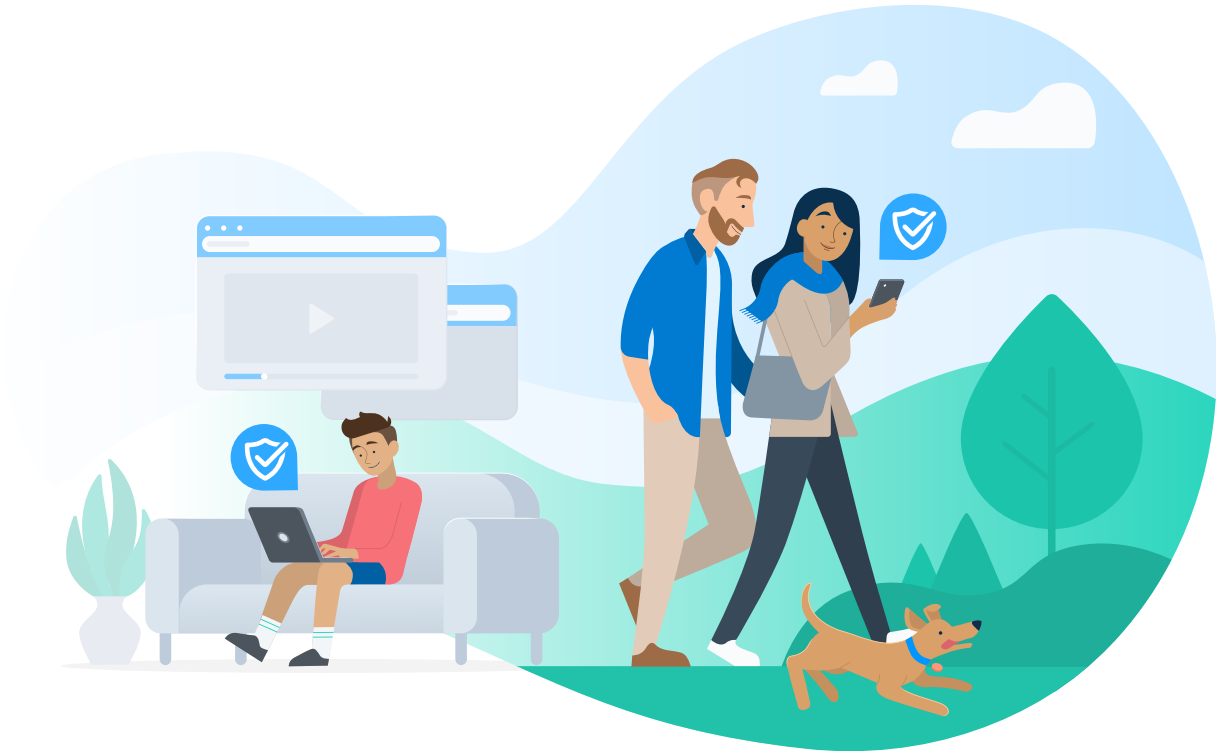
Remind kids they're not alone

As social isolation and loneliness become more rampant in the world of remote learning, Auditor is an important tool for schools to be aware of the emotional health of their students. Kids that are experiencing depression can very easily convince themselves that they are alone or that nobody truly cares about them. Auditor alerts schools to those students for whom an adult reaching out to ask, "Hey, how are you feeling?" can make a world of difference.

Home

Gives parents visibility and controls for those school-issued devices at home.

Why working alongside parents is necessary and beneficial

When schools pivoted to distance learning, millions of parents suddenly found themselves having to act as teachers and administrators in their own homes.

They also had a lot of questions about online safety and privacy. Fortunately for Securly parents, Home provided them with full visibility and hands-on controls for those school devices that suddenly came home.

Quintana Patterson, Sr. Information Security Analyst at Jefferson County Schools, recognized that her parents needed a tool like this in place at the very onset of the school closures:

> *"Our parent community is extremely in tune with what their students are doing online. During normal times, we have a constant stream of Helpdesk tickets from parents asking for activity reports. With all of our students at home 24/7 we anticipated an increase in this regard and turned on the parent portal for each of our 86,000 students."*

As a free Android and iOS app, Home provides parents with a stronger sense of control over the dangers online or the concern that their child is shunning their schoolwork altogether.

> First and foremost, admins determine the level of control parents get, and parents only control at-home activity. An admin's filtering rules cannot be overridden by parents. So what exactly can parents use Home for? For starters, it lets parents view online activity and comes with a pause button for the internet. Learn more about Home [here](#).

In the early days of school closures, Securly sent a real-time alert to a parent's Home app regarding a young girl's search of the phrase, 'how to hurt yourself'. The parents immediately started a conversation with the girl who, as it turned out, was very frustrated with distance learning and was missing her friends. Because of the notification, a conversation was able to take place before the issues the girl was experiencing became too overwhelming.

Funding and the CARES Act

In response to the Coronavirus, the federal government provides states $13B to support school districts, with each state determining how those funds will be allotted.

To assist you in better understanding your state's allocation, reach out to us at **solutions@securly.com**.

Conclusion

Securly provides, *"...a comprehensive solution ensuring that our students are safe, devices are monitored and that we can truly partner with parents on one platform, plus get a high-level view of their (students') usage."*

Jeanine Leys,
Director of Digital Learning and Innovation,
Stratford Schools

When it comes to COVID-19, none of us can predict what direction this will all go. Maybe a vaccine developed in the fifth inning will give us back the sense of normalcy we've lost. Or maybe the 12-18+ month estimate is accurate in which case all any of us can do is plan ahead the best we can.

For districts everywhere, planning for the 2020-2021 school year involves a lot of guesswork and hoping for the best. Many of the admins we've spoken with were asked a simple question: Are you planning for next year's learning to be in the classroom or remotely from home? The overwhelming majority simply answered, "Yes."

We at Securly cannot see into the future nor can we do anything to stave off the spread of a virus. We can, however, offer schools the solutions they need to operate effectively from any environment while providing them with the ability to transition from one to the other seamlessly, with little to no hiccup to the education of its students.

![securly](securly logo)

securly

✉ sales@securly.com　　　📞 1-855-SECURLY　　　🌐 www.securly.com