



## A Googly problem

At Safe on Social we know that your average child can, will, and has run rings around the majority of parents and educators when it comes to social media, and circumventing restrictions. They just do.

If your school uses Google Docs (or GSuite), you may be missing a loophole that many of your students are using as a digital way to pass notes.

A timely article in the Atlantic, has pointed the finger at how students are talking to each other while you are teaching, or for parents – when they are theoretically studying.

[www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2019/03/hottest-chat-app-teens-google-docs/584857/?fbclid=IwAR3JZg9ILh\\_tjXIBqOzqjiiMzjF2r4MHyVXPnWz8MmNjGrmbBXDbu6a28](http://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2019/03/hottest-chat-app-teens-google-docs/584857/?fbclid=IwAR3JZg9ILh_tjXIBqOzqjiiMzjF2r4MHyVXPnWz8MmNjGrmbBXDbu6a28)

The collaborative benefits of Google Docs are extolled online as a teaching tool to engage and improve student learning. Google apps for education allows for projects to be worked on within a student group that can occur both in school and at home. Multiple users can interact and edit together, documents can be downloaded and worked on and uploaded again – it's a great thing. It's a real time exercise, and many teachers love it.

But there are some problems with the way that it's being used by some students. Safe on Social has confirmed that this isn't an isolated incident, discussing the topic further with high school students during our presentations.

## How are they using Google to chat in class-time?

1. With live- chat. Teachers take note; this doesn't pop up by default. You may not be aware of it. This information is NOT saved and will disappear when the document is closed.

### How?

- To access it, open a Google document, spreadsheet, or presentation.
- Invite other people to collaborate on the file.

- Look for the names of collaborators in the upper right corner of the screen.
- Click on the names to activate instant message box.
- Type in notes on the text field to chat live.

2. And notes sections that are shared between students on the collaborative documents.

3. The ability to use Google's own features that highlight certain words and phrases and then comment in the pop-up box that results.

### **How?**

- Open a Google document, spreadsheet, or presentation.
  - Highlight text, images, cells, or slides to comment on.
  - Look for the "Add a comment" bubble next to the highlighted part and click it.
  - Type in a message then click "Comment".
4. The ability to clone a shared document the teacher has prepared, and chat in the comments – (so diligent, making notes in class). Tapping the Reslove option will close the document and remove the comments.
5. If the document isn't collaborative with all those handy chat options, a simple shared document is created, with each person making a font their identity, this is then happily Google mailed to each other during class. Deleting the document will later leave no trace for school moderators to find.

### **Why is this a problem?**

Because Google is a 'whitelisted' application, comments and images shared via Google Docs will pass through both network, and device level filtering. We have recently discussed this specific issue with lawyers who believe that this creates an increased liability for the school, and the staff, because the school has provided students with an unregulated platform that can be misused.

Students may not be being productive in class-time. They may be lying to teachers and parents and appearing to work when they are not.

There are potential bullying applications here. Students are able to gang up on others quite easily and remove the evidence with a quick delete key. The shared documents function allows for so-called "Burn books" to be circulated amongst students targeting individuals not included in the shared documents or invited to the chat rooms.

## What to do?

### Be aware.

- There is no way to turn off the chat function on collaborative documents at this point.
- Teachers should be aware of the feature and are able to add themselves to the chat features if they have editorial privileges. This may serve to shut down some of the chit-chat.
- Monitor the comments sections if possible, during class time.
- Email alerts may be set for when in text comments are taking place – this could be a helpful indicator of what is going on in your Google School.
- If the students are using the school G-mail to facilitate their shared message documents, this can also be monitored, staff have administrator privileges over student accounts – watch the level of activity.
- Don't rely on filtering as a complete solution – technology is not a solution to address a behavioural problem. Filtering is only a part of a comprehensive strategy. Ask us about additional tools and/or services that are best suited to the requirements of your school.

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