

Using Google Voice for Student Reporting of Bullying and Cyberbullying Incidents



Sameer Hinduja, Ph.D. and Justin W. Patchin, Ph.D.
Cyberbullying Research Center

April 2015

Educators need to provide students with a way to easily and safely report bullying, cyberbullying, or any other issues that threaten the quality of the climate at school. Reporting systems that enable students to utilize their mobile devices to alert schools to potential problems cater to their preferred method of communication and offer a measure of confidentiality to the person providing the information. This can also help to empower youth to be agents of change and encourage them to step up for themselves or for others who are being targeted. They also allow for real-time reporting, can alert educators to minor situations before they become major, and can provide a tangible “paper trail” of documentation for every issue that is reported.

There are many commercial products and subscription services on the market that schools can purchase to streamline reporting. Alternatively, they can utilize Google Voice at no cost, and set it up in a way that allows students to privately call or send texts that can be fielded and addressed by the appropriate school authorities. Below, we provide step-by-step instructions on how to do this.

Setting up Google Voice for Confidential Reporting

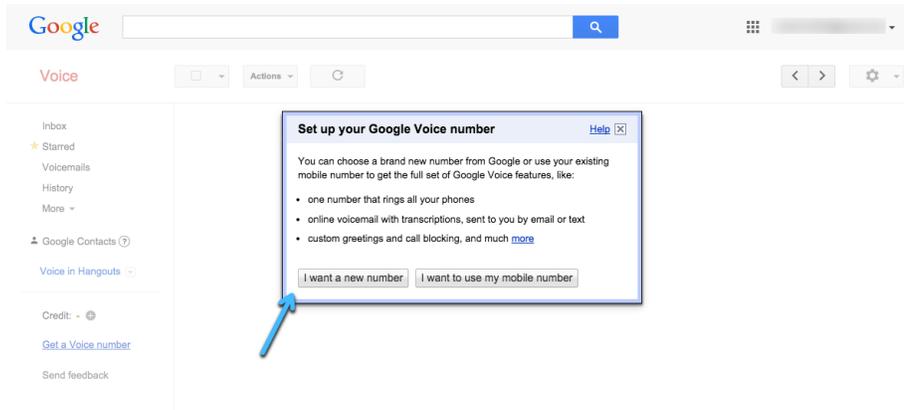
1. Go to <http://www.gmail.com>. Click on “Create an Account.” When creating a username, come up with something that is easy to remember and that pertains to the school. Be sure to write down all usernames and passwords. After you’ve created a Gmail account, while still signed in, go to <http://voice.google.com>. Accept the Terms of Service.

The screenshot shows the Google Voice setup page. At the top, there is a Google logo and a search bar. Below that, the word "Voice" is displayed in red. The page is divided into a left sidebar with navigation options like "Inbox", "Starred", "Voicemails", "History", "More", "Google Contacts", "Voice in Hangouts", "Credit", "Get a Voice number", and "Send feedback". The main content area features a "Getting started" modal window with the following text:

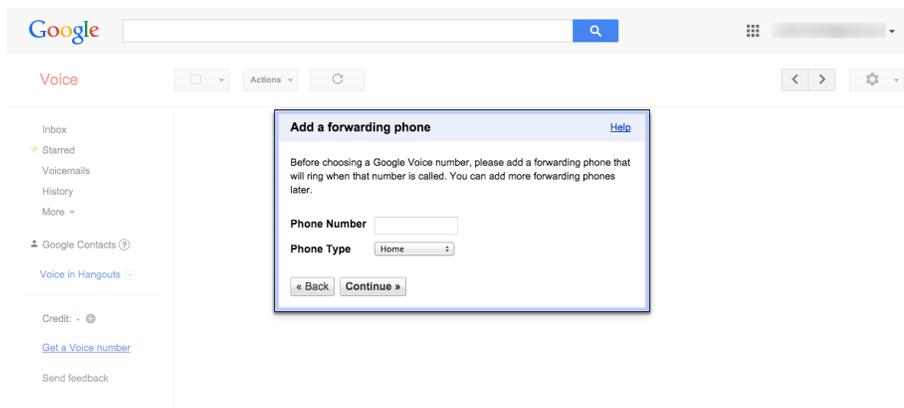
- Please note that Google Voice is only available in the U.S.
- You will be required to verify an existing U.S. phone number to get a Google Voice number.

Below the text is a checkbox labeled "I accept Google Voice's [Terms](#) and [Privacy Policy](#)." and a "Proceed >" button.

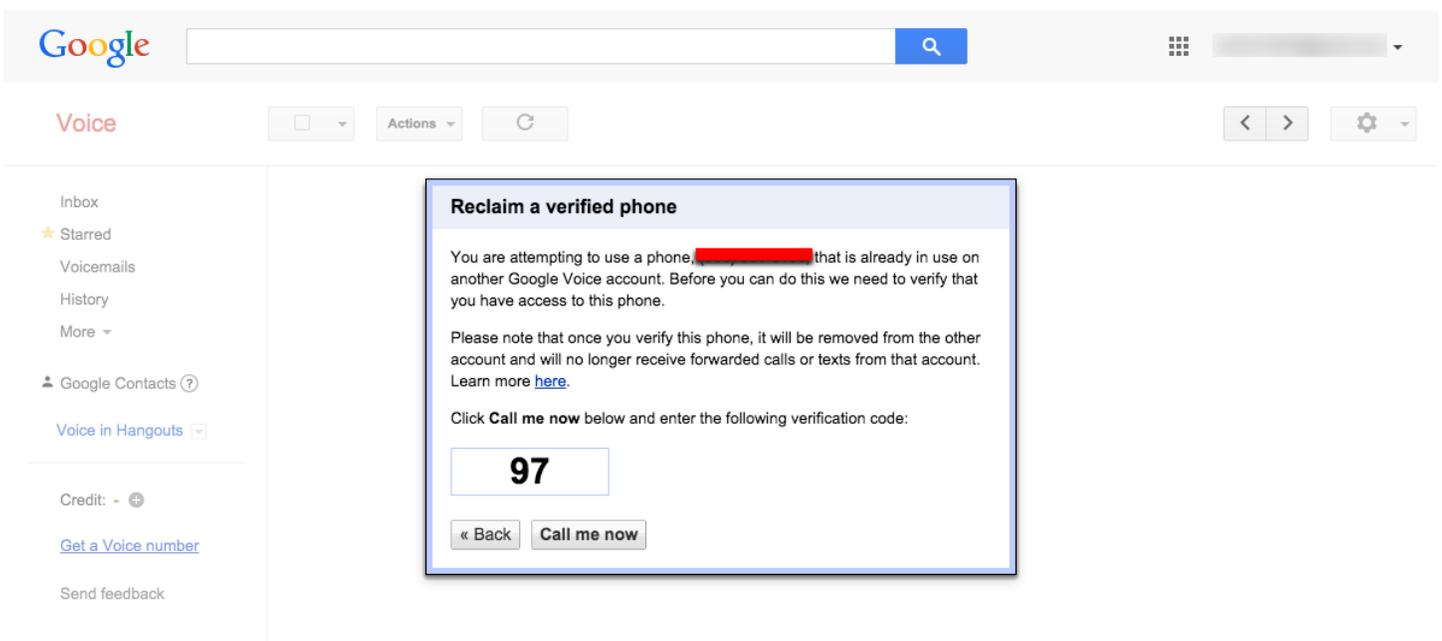
2. Select “I Want a New Number.”



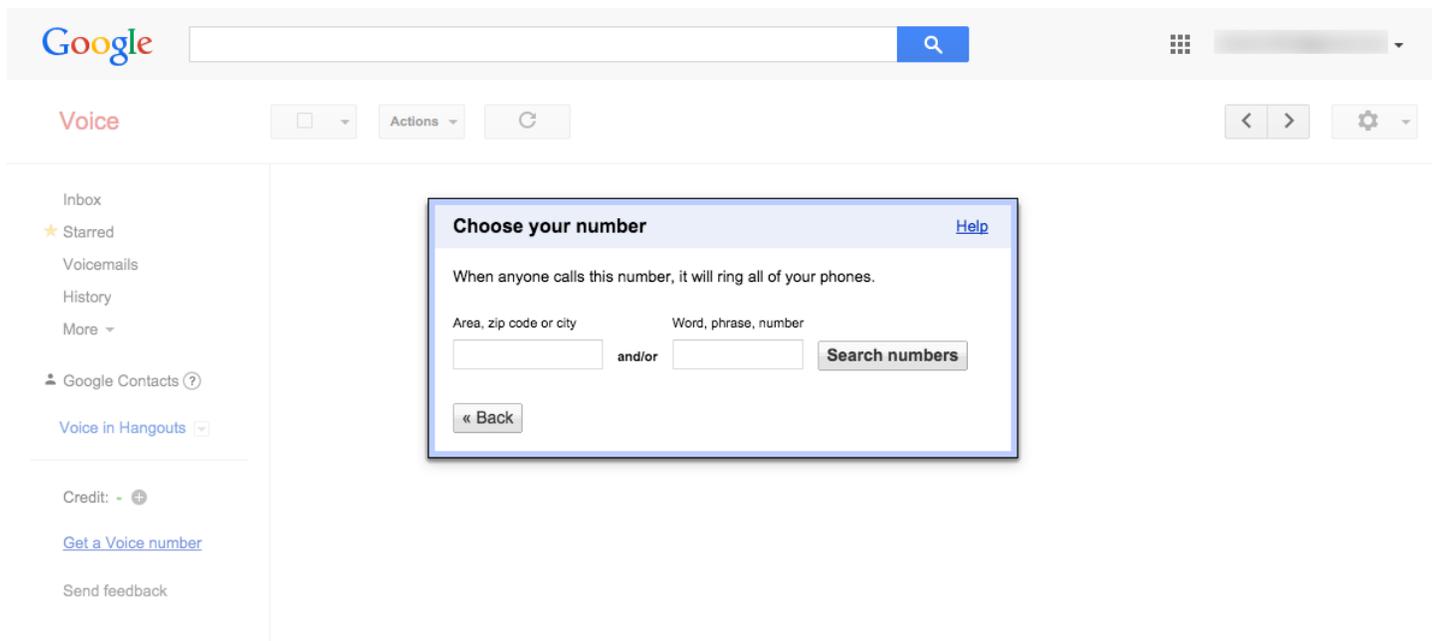
3. Add a forwarding number. This will be the telephone number that actually receives the text messages.



4. Verify your phone number. On the computer, you will be given a two digit code and the option of voice verification through Google Voice. Click on “Call me now.” You will then receive a call from Google Voice on the number that you specified as the forwarding number. Answer the call and



5. Choose your Google Voice number. In the box to the left, you can input your area code. In the box to the right, you can input a word that you might want the phone number to be, such as TEXT or your school's initials. Click on "Search numbers" to conduct a search to see which options are available.



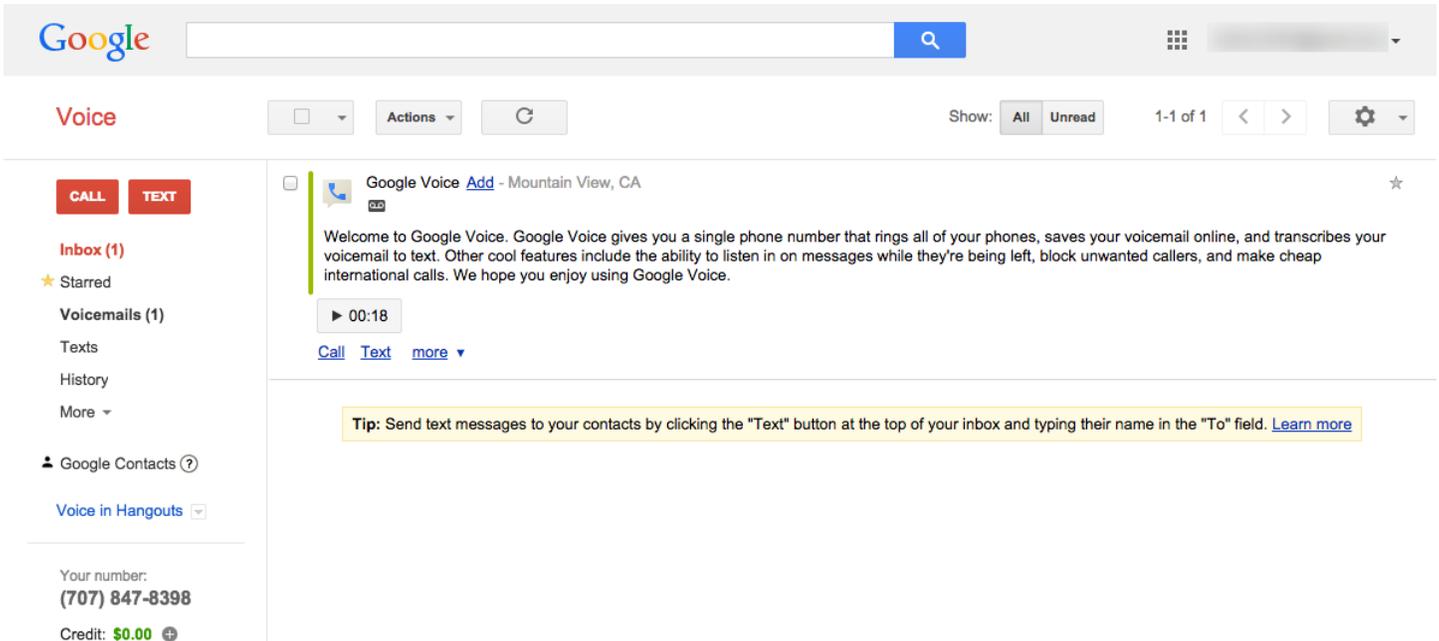
6. Searching for numbers. It is possible that you may not be able to find a ready match in your area code. At this point, decide what is most important to you: having a number in your own area code, or having a number that is easy to remember for texting purposes. While very rare, some cell phone service plans may charge fees for out of area texts, which may discourage some students from using the system. Conversely, having a tip line with a number that is easy to remember (though not in your area code) may encourage students to use the tipline more frequently.

7. Select your number. Once you decide on a number, select it. Click "Finish."



8. Retrieving Messages

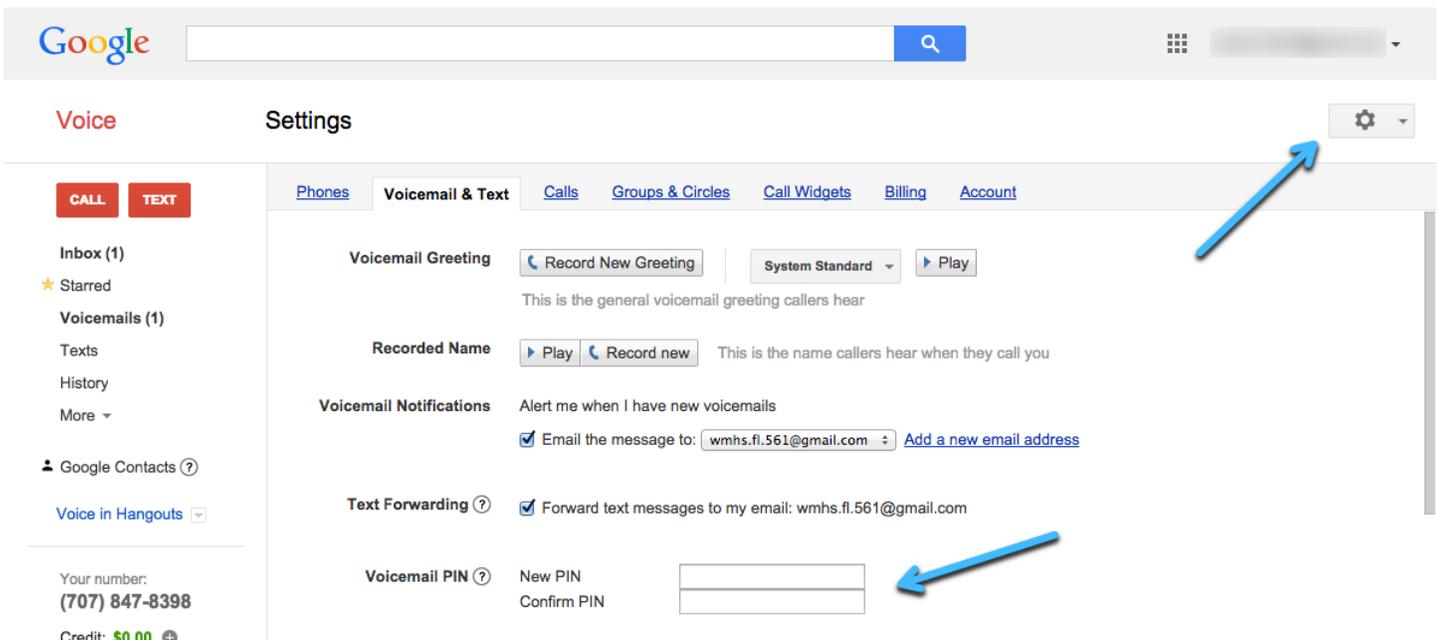
Google Voice will leave you a sample voicemail. This can be retrieved at the Google Voice homepage. Additionally, if you click on Gmail, you should receive a transcribed version of the message. Please note, you can always forward your Gmail to another account that you perhaps check more often.



The screenshot shows the Google Voice inbox interface. At the top, there is a Google search bar and a navigation menu with "Voice" selected. Below the search bar, there are buttons for "CALL" and "TEXT". The main content area displays a welcome message from Google Voice, including a play button for a 00:18 voicemail. A tip box suggests sending text messages to contacts. On the left sidebar, there are links for "Inbox (1)", "Starred", "Voicemails (1)", "Texts", "History", "More", "Google Contacts", and "Voice in Hangouts". At the bottom left, the user's number is listed as (707) 847-8398 and the credit is \$0.00.

9. Voicemail Settings

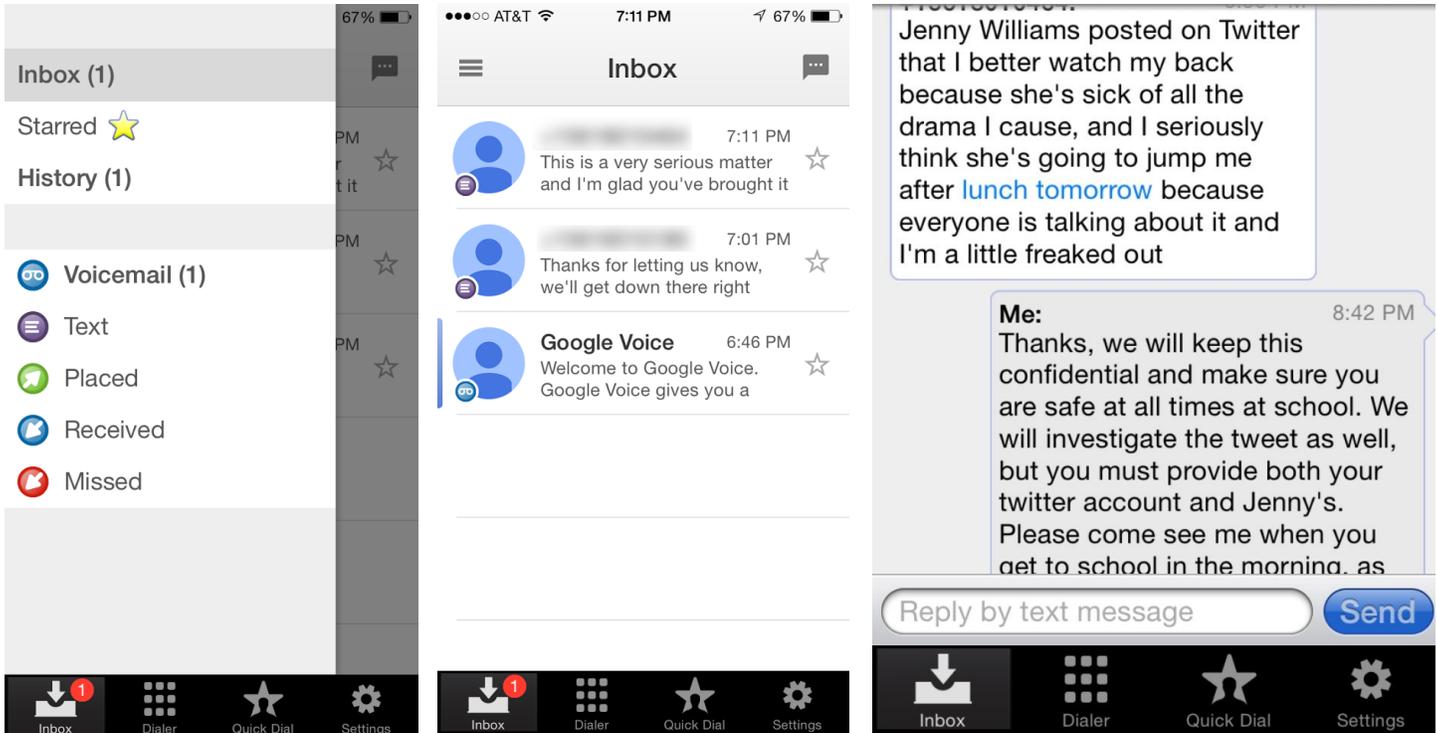
Click the gear icon in the upper right corner to access settings. Select "Settings." Select "Voicemail and Text." From here, you can configure specific settings such as PIN numbers to access the account, add additional forwarding numbers, and record a greeting.



The screenshot shows the Google Voice Settings page. The "Settings" tab is selected, and the "Voicemail & Text" sub-tab is active. The settings are organized into sections: "Voicemail Greeting" with a "Record New Greeting" button and a "System Standard" dropdown; "Recorded Name" with "Play" and "Record new" buttons; "Voicemail Notifications" with a checked box for "Email the message to" and the email address "wmhs.fl.561@gmail.com"; "Text Forwarding" with a checked box for "Forward text messages to my email"; and "Voicemail PIN" with input fields for "New PIN" and "Confirm PIN". A blue arrow points to the gear icon in the top right corner, and another blue arrow points to the "New PIN" input field.

10. Google Voice Apps

Apps are available for iPhone and Android devices. Download and use what you need!



Sameer Hinduja, Ph.D. is a professor at Florida Atlantic University.

Justin W. Patchin, Ph.D. is a professor at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire.

Together, they speak on the causes and consequences of cyberbullying across the United States and abroad and offer comprehensive workshops for parents, teachers, counselors, mental health professionals, law enforcement, youth and others concerned with addressing and preventing online aggression. They have written six books and numerous articles on teen technology use and misuse.

The **Cyberbullying Research Center** (www.cyberbullying.us) provides research findings, stories, cases, fact sheets, tips and strategies, quizzes, a frequently-updated blog, and a number of other helpful resources. It also has downloadable materials for educators, counselors, parents, law enforcement officers, and other youth-serving professionals to use and distribute as needed.

© 2015 Cyberbullying Research Center - Sameer Hinduja and Justin W. Patchin.
Permission for duplication provided for non-profit educational purposes.