

Digital Citizenship

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## **Digital Citizenship**

According to New Jersey's 2019 Student Learning Standards for Technology, students must be able to "harness the power of technology" in this ever-evolving digital world. Since students are members of a diverse global society, they must be empowered to be equipped with "digital and civic citizenship skills" to gain the attributes of a responsible digital citizen. However, who should truly be accountable for teaching youth the vital lessons of digital citizenship?

## **Legislations and Regulations**

In 2000, Congress ratified the Children's Internet Protection Act, also known as CIPA. Legislators were concerned with children's ability to access obscene content (Consumer & Government Affairs Bureau). CIPA expects schools and libraries to develop Internet safety standards in order to qualify for the E-rate program. It is assumed that these institutions will establish and enforce regulations that monitor the online behavior of every student, as well as their social interaction while online. In response to these expectations, schools and libraries prepare for online threats via filters and blocking software. However, even with the most sophisticated attempts to deter inappropriate content, "statistics tell us that digital solutions are never 100% effective" (Robinson, Brown & Green, 2010).

As an additional precautionary measure, schools are expected to create an Acceptable Use Policy, also referred to as an AUP. This document is signed by students and their parents or guardians acknowledging their responsibility to adhere to the expectations set forth by the student's school district. Furthermore, New Jersey's Department of Education (2014) provides a curriculum framework for educational facilities to implement digital citizenship standards. These educational strands establish domains that promote appropriate conduct while online. Murphy

(2012) insists that the verbiage of Acceptable Use Policy should be changed to Responsible Use Principles. He goes on to state that there should be RUPs for both students and employees; a set of principles that are in accordance with state and federal laws. Murphy attempts to justify his claim by constructing a set of values that reflect on the foundation of learning in lieu of an AUP that is “autocratic and binding”. Murphy does not agree that most AUPs are generated by authoritative figures who dictate guidelines for teachers, students and other staff members to abide by. Murphy argues that this hierarchy approach is counterproductive to achieve true digital citizens (2012). Regardless if these guidelines are called AUPs or RUPs, the bottom-line is that schools are held to a high standard in teaching lessons of digital citizenship to every student and incorporate contract-like agreements to do so.

### **Fear of Implementation**

Technology is undeniably visible in our world. Therefore, it has earned its rightful place in classrooms. Becker (2000) points out that there are multiple studies that show the importance of constructivist approaches in the classroom when technology is infused within instructional practices. However, some educators are hesitant to implement technology into their classrooms. Unfortunately, some educators opted to not infuse technology into their instructional design because they felt “big brother is watching” and did not want to get “caught” (Robinson, Brown, and Green, 2010). Some educators fear getting blamed and/or held accountable for a particular infraction that may or may not take place in their classroom; therefore, some teachers avoid the Internet and technology altogether because of fear. All in all, the ones missing out on the unique experience of the benefits of technology integration are the students. Moreover, how can students learn the essential lessons of digital citizenship if they do not access the digital world in class?

There are many fingers of blame that pass on the responsibility of teaching the lessons of digital citizenship. Johnson (2013) emphasizes that a school's technology department should not be the sole protector of everyone's online security. Johnson goes on to state that every school leader and member should be responsible for emphasizing the importance of understanding cybersecurity in their corresponding district. Making sure students are aware of how to protect their data, as well as are knowledgeable of laws and policies is an intricate part in obtaining districtwide buy-in from all stakeholders. Batterman (2014) believes tech tools that are meant to enhance communication can be tools that are easily used or abused; therefore, students need to be knowledgeable of the potential hazards of said technology. Again, the responsibility of digital citizenship revolves largely on teachers.

Truly making time to teach the importance of Internet literacy to students is to teach them to be responsible consumers of the Internet (Brown, Green, & Robinson, 2010). Jones and Mitchell (2016) criticize that the importance of digital citizenship cannot be generalized; instead, the content of appropriately using technology should be broken down and reexamined as technology evolves. Digital citizenship extends far beyond a child's academic success with technological tools. Gungoren advocates that digital citizenship encompasses key factors such as student life outside of school, as well as student life and behavior while in school (2014). Skills acquired from digital citizenship is carried out after the bell rings and transcends into life's daily decisions. The impact of children's daily choices are visible in their day to day online activity – both in and out of the classroom.

### **Parent/Guardian Involvement**

Keeping the lines of communication open between parents and children about every and any topic that can be accessed online is the foundation of digital citizenship. These conversations

will underline the importance of making good decisions in life and will transcend online (Deptula, Henry & Schoeny, 2010). Communication with parents and guardians is an important practice in general. Parents and guardians can assist a child with deciphering right from wrong, good from bad. Soldatova and Rasskazova (2016) attribute a youth's lack of understanding of the cyber community which may expose them to erroneous content. If a child possesses or accesses the Internet, then conversations need to be held with parents/guardians regarding digital citizenship.

Wespieser (2015) illustrates that 89% of youth use the Internet outside of school. She goes on to note that this factor makes it increasingly difficult for parents to monitor their child's day to day online activity. In addition, a student study conducted by Jones and Mitchell (2016) surveyed nearly one thousand students in grades 6th through 10<sup>th</sup> in the U.S. Their study argues that students did not appropriately apply lessons conducted during digital citizenship training because the safety instruction was "unfocused". Hence underlying the importance of continuing the lessons of proper online usage at home. Digital citizenship is not a one time lesson, but rather an ongoing conversation that evolves with technological advancements.

### **Conclusion**

Isn't a person asked for his/her identification before they purchase alcohol? Doesn't a minor have to pass a test in order to obtain a driver's license? These processes are in place to gradually prepare children for an upcoming milestone in their life. However, the Internet is a free-for-all with an all-access pass with a simple click or swipe. Therefore, in order to achieve true digital citizenship, stakeholders need to get on the same page with a shared disposition. We are all responsible for being digital citizens and teaching children to do the same because

technology isn't going anywhere. On the contrary, technology is evolving; therefore, we all need to prepare children to be responsible citizens of the digital world they live in.

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