Cyber Savvy Schools: Embracing the Future

Trying to prepare students for their future and teach them about Internet safety without Web 2.0 in schools is like trying to teach a child to swim without a swimming pool!

A combination of factors should ~ and will ~ lead schools to reassess how they are managing student Internet use, addressing Internet safety education, and responding to the concerns of youth risk when using technologies.

It is becoming clear that concerns about Internet risk and the ineffective way in which schools are trying to manage Internet use are a major barrier to moving schools forward to embrace 21st century learning environments. The new Children's Internet Use Protection Act (CIPA) will require that schools teach Internet safety. Increasingly, schools are recognizing that the online behavior of some students is having a damaging impact at schools and on the ability of students to feel safe and be successful.

A recognition of the relatedness of these factors provides the opportunity for schools to address these issues in a more comprehensive manner. This document will outline how these issues interact and how Cyber Savvy Schools can embrace the future.

Cyber Savvy Schools Vision

21st Century Learning Environments

✦ Schools are safely and effectively using Web 2.0 technologies to prepare students for their future education and careers, civic responsibilities, and personal life in the 21st century.

 ▸ Schools will shift from the primary reliance currently placed on filtering technologies to more effective supervision and technical monitoring. All instructional staff will be able to override the filter to access and allow students to access instructional material online. Districts will establish safe, well-managed Web 2.0 environments to support a professional development community, as well as student learning. This Web 2.0 environment will showcase student work and support interactive instructional communities that can bring students together to create, communicate, and collaborate. Students will be able to access their individual classwork and the interactive community from any Internet location ~ which will support anytime, anywhere learning.

Universal Digital Media Safety, Citizenship, and Literacy Competencies.

✦ All young people understand digital media safety, citizenship, and literacy issues and demonstrate competence in keeping themselves safe, engaging in responsible behavior that respects the rights of others, and taking responsibility for the well-being of others.

 ▸ Younger children will use the Internet in safe places. As young people grow they will be empowered with the knowledge, skills, and values to independently make safe and responsible decisions online. These lessons will infused into web 2.0 learning activities. All teachers are prepared to address these issues, under the leadership of school librarians, educational technology and health teachers, and counselors.

Targeted Youth Risk Online Prevention and Intervention

✦ Effective risk prevention and intervention programs have been established through a multidisciplinary collaboration of educations, law enforcement, and mental health to respond to the concerns of the minority of young people who are at greater risk of engaging in unsafe or irresponsible online behavior or being victimized by others.

 ▸ Comprehensive whole school and community approaches enhance all students' ability to further healthy personal interrelationships and avoid risky online situations. Targeted multidisciplinary approaches effectively investigate situations where students are at risk, are being harmed, or are harming others using digital technologies. Interventions are grounded in Restorative Justice.

Moving Past Techno-Panic

In proceeding forward, schools must understand that the past decade has been characterized by technopanic ~ a heightened concern about the use of the Internet by young people that is not grounded in the actual research evidence. Here is what the research says:

✦ Many of the young people who are engaging in risky or harmful behavior online are those who are also at greater risk in the Real World. These are "at risk" youth, whose risk behavior is now manifesting in the context of use of these new technologies. These more significant risks most often involve known peers and, thus, could lead to a disruptive impact at school or create a hostile environment that prevents a student from being successful at school.

✦ Repeated research studies have demonstrated that the majority of young people are generally making good choices online and effectively handling the negative incidents that do occur. However, they are young, they do not fully understand the ramifications of some actions, they will engage in risk-taking, they will make mistakes, and others may seek to harm them. The technology environment can have a negative influence on behavior due to the misperception of invisibility and the lack of tangible feedback of the consequences of behavior. Through effective social norms/peer leadership-based education we can reduce their mistakes, increase their abilities to respond to negative incidents, and encourage them to assist others or report serious concerns to a responsible adult.

21st Century Learning Environments

Essential Foundation & Challenges

✦ Schools must establish 21st century learning environments, infused with Web 2.0 technologies.

  ‣ To prepare students for their future education, career, civic responsibilities, and personal life.

  ‣ To provide the necessary environment to teach digital media safety, citizenship, and literacy competencies.

Planning Challenges

✦ No Child Left Behind has impeded innovation.

  ‣ High stakes testing of 20th century skills and the requirement that programs be "scientifically-based" has thwarted progress and the shift to 21st century learning.

✦ Educational technology is often not well integrated into the Curriculum and Instruction or viewed as a tool to facilitate learning in appropriate areas of the curriculum.

  ‣ Effective programs for ongoing professional and curriculum development and sharing of technology-enriched lesson plans have not been established.

✦ Educational technologies have been overhyped. Too often there has been a mistaken perception that a high level of computer access will transform schools ~ accompanied by ineffective planning for implementation. Inadequate attention has been paid to Total Costs of Ownership.

  ‣ This results in too much "Internet recess" (non-educational use) which provides opportunities for misuse.

✦ Many teachers lack sufficient skills in 21st century media literacy and content selection.

  ‣ Currently, textbook publishers select content, districts select textbooks, teachers teach from the text, and librarians select additional resources. This paradigm will change ~ thus requiring enhanced media literacy skills.

Filtering Reliance and Administration

✦ Reliance on filtering is interfering with effective instruction.

  ‣ When teachers and students are frequently blocked from accessing relevant instructional material, reliance on Internet resources significantly decreases. Many districts have not provided teachers with the ability to bypass the filter to access relevant instructional material or to address safety concerns.

  ‣ Filtering only works in a Web 1.0 environment, where the objective is to block students from accessing "objectionable material." But older students can easily bypass filters using technologies created for dissidents.

  ‣ Filtering is not an effective management tool for the interactive activities that occur in Web 2.0 environments.

  ‣ Primary reliance on filtering, which was influenced by CIPA, has led to false security and the expectation that technical services is responsible for preventing misuse. Universal staff responsibility is necessary.

Technopanic ~ Inaccurate Fear-Based Messages

✦ Fear about Internet risk and Web 2.0 technologies has created the misperception that using these technologies in school could place students at risk.

21st Century Learning Environments

✦ The Partnership for 21st Century Skills has described the 21st century learning environment: <http://www.21stcenturyskills.org>

  ‣ Creates learning practices, human support and physical environments that will support the teaching and learning of 21st century skill outcomes.

  ‣ Supports professional learning communities that enable educators to collaborate, share best practices and integrate 21st century skills into classroom practice.

  ‣ Enables students to learn in relevant, real world 21st century contexts ....

  ‣ Allows equitable access to quality learning tools, technologies and resources.

  ‣ Provides 21st century architectural and interior designs for group, team and individual learning.

  ‣ Supports expanded community and international involvement in learning, both face-to-face and online.

Recommended Action Plan

✦ Focus on use of digital media resources and technologies to facilitate learning where appropriate in the curriculum.

  ‣ Fully integrate the district's educational technology program into Curriculum and Instruction.

  ‣ Establish a Web 2.0 professional community to support ongoing dialogue, sharing of lesson plans, and mentoring.

  ‣ Expand role of library media specialists to that of digital media literacy specialists ~ professionals who support teachers and students in gaining digital media literacy.

  ‣ Adopt a "continuous improvement" model to support innovative approaches with effective evaluation.

✦ Revise approach for technology use management.

  ‣ Reinforce that the Internet must be used for learning activities, not entertainment. Periodically analyze technology use to ensure instructional focus.

  ‣ Shift from primary reliance on "blocking" to more effective "watching" ~ through use of remote access or content analysis technical monitoring and staff supervision.

  ‣ Implement a district Web 2.0 interactive environment for professional development and student use. Provide students with an online "classwork portfolio," accessible through the Internet from any device or location ~ with the ability to email work to a teacher or post work to a blog or wiki for group collaboration. Provide web-based lesson development and white list capabilities for teachers.

  ‣ Develop a strategy to ensure that teachers and students are not inappropriately blocked from accessing sites necessary for educational or professional development purposes. Establish clear standards that address purpose, content, and bandwidth concerns. Make sure processes are in place to ensure accountability.

  ‣ Establish student "tech teams" to provide computer trouble-shooting and support in the use of technologies.

Universal Digital Media Safety, Citizenship, & Literacy

Instructional Issues

✦ All young people must gain competencies in the safe and responsible use of digital media technologies and resources. This includes:

  ‣ Understand risks and effective protective strategies and engage in safe behavior.

  ‣ Understand the standards for responsible behavior, demonstrate respect for others, and take responsibility for the well-being of others.

  ‣ Engage in effective consumption, creation, and collaboration in the development of digital content.

✦ Schools are mobilizing to address digital media safety and literacy. Factors fueling this include:

  ‣ The new Internet safety education requirements associated with CIPA.

  ‣ The recognition that student's misuse of digital media while on or off-campus is having an impact on their well-being and learning and is also impacting the quality of the school community.

✦ Addressing these issues will require a multidisciplinary team approach. The issues involve risk behavior, technology, and media literacy.

✦ Unfortunately, some Internet safety curriculum and professional development materials currently available present concerns.

  ‣ These materials support the authoritarian delivery of inaccurate, fear-based messages and simplistic rules against normative online behavior. Fear-based risk prevention approaches have never been demonstrated to be effective in preventing risk behavior. This approach may cause young people not to report negative situations because they fear adults will overreact, blame them, and restrict their online actions.

Recommended Action Plan

✦ Develop a plan to provide instruction utilizing the expertise of library/digital media specialists, educational technology specialists, counselors, health teachers, school resource officers ~ and older students.

✦ Closely review curriculum and professional development resources to ensure they are grounded in the research literature and incorporate effective risk prevention.

✦ Because the majority of young people are generally making good choices online, social norms risk prevention educational strategies can be used. The social norms approach has been shown to be highly effective.

  ‣ Correct the misperception that other teens are engaging in risky online behavior. Identify, model, and promote the healthy, protective behaviors that are the actual norm in this population.

✦ Encourage peer leadership and helping behavior.

  ‣ Stress the importance of helping others. Make sure students fully understand the potential harmful consequences. Provide practice in helping skills. Ensure it is very easy for them to confidentially report concerns at school.

Digital Media Safety, Citizenship, & Literacy

Core Competencies

✦ Critical thinking using digital media.

✦ Information credibility.

✦ Keeping life in balance.

✦ Protecting personal information and reputation.

✦ Interacting safely with others online.

Sites and Technologies

✦ Computer security and scams.

✦ Terms of use agreements.

✦ Accidental access to objectionable material.

✦ Market profiling and advertising.

✦ Protection features for social networking.

Youth Risk Online

✦ Cyberbullying and cyberthreats.

✦ Risky sexual relationships and activities.

✦ Unsafe or dangerous online groups.

Digital Media Literacy

✦ Free speech.

✦ Accurate attribution.

✦ Copyright and fair use.

✦ Publisher responsibilities.

✦ Establishing credibility and effective advocacy.

✦ Civic collaboration.

✦ Develop a plan to use multiple instructional opportunities:

  ‣ Provide direct instruction in appropriate classes ~ library, technology, health.

  ‣ Infuse issues throughout Web 2.0 instruction.

  ‣ Use "teachable moments" ~ discussing actual incidents and news reports.

  ‣ Provide informal tips ~ signage and computer screens.

✦ Especially in the older grades, use peer discussion approaches ~ with the teacher asking questions that will lead to a deeper level of understanding. Provide opportunities for older students provide guidance to younger students.

✦ Educate parents through multiple channels.

  ‣ Workshops, "just in time" resources in the school library, and educational information in school newsletters and on the district web site.

✦ Provide opportunities for professional development for the local mental health and health community, law enforcement, and media ~ along with school staff.

Targeted Youth Risk Online Prevention & Intervention

Risk Issues

✦ The young people who are at greater risk online are generally those who are at greater risk offline.

▸ These youth generally have psychosocial problems, friends who engage in risk behavior, and disrupted relationships with parents or caregivers.

▸ These youth are less likely to make good choices, less resilient in getting out of difficult situations, less likely to listen to adult guidance, and less likely to report online concerns to an adult because they more likely to have made bad choices that led them into the situation.

✦ Online risk behavior is grounded in mental health concerns or victimization can result in mental health concerns. Because many incidents involve known peers, such behavior will often cause a disruptive or harmful impact at school. The behavior could result in criminal victimization or violation.

▸ Effective targeted risk prevention and intervention will require a collaborative, multidisciplinary approach.

✦ There are no evidence-based best practices to address these concerns. The research regarding these new risks is still emerging. The technologies and digital media activities will continue to change rapidly.

▸ It will not be possible to emulate traditional risk prevention initiatives that establish relatively static programs that use evidence-based best practices. It will be necessary to shift to a dynamic "continuous improvement" model.

✦ Adults are generally not present in digital environments ~ but other young people are.

▸ Influencing positive peer helper responses and peer reporting of concerns will be very important.

✦ School officials have the legal authority to respond to off-campus student speech that has caused, or there is a reasonable expectation will cause, a substantial impact at school or interference with the rights of students to be secure.

▸ Protecting student safety and well-being will take priority over protection of student free speech.

▸ Focus on restorative justice and prevention of further risk behavior and harm in all responses to concerns that have impacted the safety of students or school community.

✦ Digital media can provide significant opportunities to effectively address the concerns of "at risk" youth.

▸ The electronic record of actions and relationships can provide excellent insight into risk behavior and factors and provide the opportunity for early intervention.

▸ The online environment itself can be used to provide information, self-help resources, individual or network-based support, and crisis intervention.

- The ability to seek help "invisibly" online may support greater help-seeking behavior.

Risk Areas

✦ Electronic aggression.

▸ Cyberbullying and posting material that raises concerns of the potential of violence to self or others.

✦ Risky sexual and relationship issues.

▸ Sexual solicitation or exploitation, unsafe cyberdating, use of digital media by abusive partners, and creating sexualized images.

✦ Unsafe or dangerous groups.

▸ Unsafe groups support anorexia, self-cutting, drug/ steroid use, suicide. Dangerous groups include hate groups, gangs, hackers, and trafficking in porn.

✦ Underlying concerns.

▸ Unsafe postings or interactions and addictive access.

Recommended Action Plan

✦ Establish a multidisciplinary team at the district and school level to address the concerns of youth risk online.

▸ This team should include the safe school personnel ~ administrators, counselors & school psychologists, health educators, and school resource officers. Expand to include librarians, education technology, and technology services. Preferably, include community mental health.

✦ Conduct a needs assessment to determine what kinds of youth risk online problems are emerging in the schools and what is necessary to address these concerns.

✦ Provide professional development to district and school-based teams on youth risk online issues.

✦ Evaluate and modify school plans and policies that might be implicated in youth risk online issues.

▸ This includes: threat assessment and suicide prevention plans, bullying and harassment policies, cell phone and digital imaging devices policies, and extracurricular activities policies.

▸ Ensure students have an effective way to report online concerns or crisis situations ~ such as an report feature on all school web sites.

✦ Provide education to students about online risk concerns. This education will build on the universal curriculum.

▸ As these issues are closely integrated with healthy youth behavior, integration of instruction should be infused into the instruction that addresses these issues. These classes are generally offered by health teachers or counselors. As these professionals often do not understand digital technologies, team teaching with a librarian or educational technology coordinator may be advisable.

✦ Establish protocols for administrators to follow to investigate and intervene in situations involving online behavior that have impacted the school or student safety at school.

▸ Establish an evaluation protocol to assess effectiveness at a district level.