Promoting Digital Literacy and Citizenship in School

BY SUNNY DEYE

Students today are expected to learn and apply skills that differ greatly from those for previous generations. These skills include communicating and collaborating using a variety of tools and platforms, mastering digital literacy, thinking critically and solving complex problems. The vast array of knowledge and resources available online, coupled with the ability to connect instantaneously with peers and educators, make for highly engaging and collaborative learning environments. Students can pursue their interests and find educational resources and experiences online any time, any place and at any pace.

While media and technology hold great promise for learning, young people need support and education to learn how to make sound judgments when navigating the digital world. According to the Common Sense report, "Technology Addiction: Concern, Controversy, and Finding Balance," half of teens and over one-quarter of parents say they're addicted to their mobile devices. The "Common Sense Census: Media Use by Tweens and Teens" found that nearly one-half of teens interfere with

Additional Resources

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their own learning by multitasking with social media while doing their homework. And, a recent report from a group of researchers at Stanford found that 82 percent of middle schoolers can't distinguish between an ad labeled "sponsored content" and a real news story on a website.

As states invest in 21st-century technology upgrades, state legislators are taking steps to ensure that students have the digital literacy and citizenship skills that enable them to take full advantage of online learning opportunities. These include helping students discern the source and validity of online content, and practice safe and ethical behavior online. Schools can play a critical role by educating, empowering and engaging children with the best practices around technology use.

WHAT IS DIGITAL LITERACY AND CITIZENSHIP?

Digital literacy refers to fluency in the use and security of interactive digital tools and searchable networks. This includes the ability to use digital tools safely and effectively for learning, collaborating and producing. The 2014 report of the Aspen Institute Task Force on Learning and the Internet, "Learner at the Center of a Networked World," recommends that states and districts adopt policies to ensure that digital literacy is taught as a basic skill in schools.

Digital citizenship is a broader term that often incorporates the concept of digital literacy. Digital citizenship is defined as the norms of appropriate, responsible behavior when using technology. "Digital Citizenship in Schools," published by the International Society for Technology in Education, identifies digital literacy as one of nine key elements of digital citizenship:

- **Digital Access:** Can all users participate in a digital society at acceptable levels if they choose?

- **Digital Commerce:** Do users have the knowledge and protection to buy and sell in a digital world?

- **Digital Communication:** Do users understand the various digital communication methods and when each is appropriate?

- **Digital Literacy:** Have users taken the time to learn about digital technologies and do they share that knowledge with others?

- **Digital Etiquette:** Do users consider others when using digital technologies?

- **Digital Law:** Are users aware of laws (rules, policies) that govern the use of digital technologies?

- **Digital Rights and Responsibilities:** Are users ready to protect the rights of others and to defend their own digital rights?

- **Digital Health and Wellness:** Do users consider the risks (both physical and psychological) when using digital technologies?

- **Digital Security:** Do users take the time to protect their information while taking precautions to protect others' data as well?

State Action

Utah requires schools to provide education and awareness on safe technology use and digital citizenship. They are tasked with empowering students to make smart media and online choices and helping parents know how to discuss safe technology use with their children. Washington added student instruction in digital citizenship to teacher-librarian duties, including how to be critical consumers of information and provide guidance about using online resources thoughtfully and strategically. Maine requires the commissioner of education to develop a program of technical assistance in digital literacy, including offering professional development and training for educators in using online learning resources effectively.

Washington went further in 2016, passing the most comprehensive digital citizenship legislation to date. Senate Bill 6273 addresses safe technology use and digital citizenship in public schools. The legislation provides a process for students, parents, teachers, librarians and others to engage in ongoing discussions about safe technology use, internet use, digital citizenship and media literacy.

Federal Action

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), the recent reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, was signed into law in December 2015. ESSA includes new provisions that encourage the use of technology in order to improve the academic achievement and digital literacy of all students. It includes support for professional development designed to enhance educators' and school leaders' capacity for using technology to support teaching and learning. The law authorizes school districts to plan how they will develop effective school library programs to provide students an opportunity to develop digital literacy skills and improve academic achievement.

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