

# Internet Safety: A Whole School Approach



With mouse in hand, today's students are "technology natives" who use technology in ways that put adults in awe. In particular, they are wonderful at surfing the Web, acquiring information, and processing this information at amazing speeds. The ability to use the Internet to instantly access such information is powerful. However, to quote the movie *Spiderman*, "With great power comes great responsibility."

It has come to the point that schools have to provide education on proper Internet usage and safety. It has become such a big part of students' lives that we have to find ways to educate them on proper use of this powerful technology tool. The challenge is to teach responsibility, and thereby promote healthy decision making.

At Canonsburg Middle School, we have taken a collaborative, multifaceted approach to educating our students on proper Internet usage and safety. Students are educated through a variety of means, including technology education course work, classroom discussions, assemblies, and having access to the district's Internet safety Web site. So, let's travel back to offer perspective on how we came to this point.

I first started my Internet safety mission as a middle school science teacher back in 2000. It was obvious even then that my students were online and using the Internet for more than an educational tool. I put together a simple PowerPoint presentation and shared it with my students in class and gave an Internet safety presentation for parents in the evening. The strategy was relatively effective but only reached a small number of children and parents. Later, I became an administrator and wanted

to take the message to the next level to reach all the students and as many parents as possible. Effectively reaching all middle school students in the district would require a collaborative effort. Our technology education and guidance departments were an excellent place to start in getting the message across.

All seventh grade students take two six-week courses called Technology Applications and Middle School Issues. In Technology Applications, Brian Herrig, the technology education teacher, teaches a week-long Internet safety unit. The unit covers the following topics: cyberbullying, protecting personal or private information, handling a threatening or harassing situation, rules for Internet etiquette ("netiquette"), and ways to determine the validity of information found on the Internet. Herrig surveys his students prior to the unit, using a student response system to help him receive honest feedback. (See "Internet Safety Survey," below.) The students are shocked at how many of their peers make poor decisions once

they have gone through the unit and reflected on their survey results.

Lori Hedderman, guidance counselor, provides an Internet awareness unit that covers a variety of topics in a nontraditional classroom setting that includes role playing, group discussions, and project-oriented exploratory activities. Students discuss how the Internet is used in a positive way and also how they might have negative experiences. Students have the opportunity to discuss how someone may feel uncomfortable in a situation even if that person is only on a Web site or in a chat room. She also gives the students tips on how to deal with online bullying and how to stay safe on the Net. "Students are excited to add their input and opinions about MySpace, instant messaging, parental controls, and safety precautions," Hedderman explains.

Matthew Harding, district network administrator, and I also meet with the students on a yearly basis through an Internet Safety assembly. We completed the iSafe, Inc. training to become

## Internet Safety Survey

The survey given as part of the Internet safety unit in the Technology Applications curriculum is administered using NetOp, a computer lab instruction software package, and the lab computers. The results are displayed as class totals, not individual results. Students are instructed to check each statement that is true for them, even if it is true only once. I encourage the students to be honest in their responses. The results from the survey are used to guide our class discussions of Internet safety, and results of selected questions are presented at the parent session.

1. I have signed on to instant message or e-mail as someone else.
2. I have sent an instant message or e-mail from an account that was not mine.
3. I have pretended to be someone else online.
4. I have teased, insulted, or threatened someone online.
5. I have forwarded a copy of a private conversation or e-mail to other people.
6. I have put things in my away message that could embarrass someone.
7. I have put things on MySpace that could embarrass someone.
8. I have put information or pictures of someone on the Internet without their permission.
9. I have voted in an online poll that was meant to insult or embarrass someone.
10. I have sent something rude or disturbing to someone, even as a joke.
11. I have said something online that I would not say in front of my mother.
12. I have signed someone else up for something online without their permission.
13. I have created a screen name very similar to someone else's to confuse other people.

By Greg Taranto

certified instructors. The experience gave us a number of resources to provide an exciting, multimedia assembly that reaches our adolescent learners.

Canonsburg Middle School also holds an informational meeting with parents on a yearly basis to give a comprehensive presentation on their role in helping develop responsible students. Ultimately, the parents will ensure proper usage at home, making parental involvement one of the most important components of Internet safety.

The final component in our multifaceted approach was the development of an Internet Safety Web site (<http://www.canon-mcmillan.org>). The site is a place for students, parents, educators, and community members to visit to acquire knowledge on Internet awareness through newsletters and a variety of postings.

When provided with education and guidance, students can benefit from the Internet's multiple uses while making responsible decisions. As educators, we understand the need to address the social issues related to technology. Canonsburg Middle School is confident that we are ad-

ressing NETS•S for our students. The positive feedback from parents and community members lets us know that we are taking the right approach in addressing an important issue in our adolescent learners' lives.

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- I have intentionally sent someone a virus over the computer.
- I have insulted someone in an online game.
- I have used information that I found online to tease, harass, or intimidate someone.
- I have put information in an instant message, e-mail, or on a Web site that I knew was not true.
- I have found out someone else's password and used it myself or given it to others.
- I have encouraged other people to harass or threaten a specific person online.
- I have said or done mean things online as a way to get back at a person who bothered me.
- I have a MySpace page.
- I have chatted online with someone that I did not know.
- I have been cyberbullied.
- I have been a cyberbully.
- I have given personal information out on the Internet.