As smart phones, laptops, tablets, and other digital products not yet invented become more prominent in schools and in the daily lives of children of all ages, it is important that education policymakers understand the impact. It is also necessary to prepare educators to deal with the implications, both expected and unintended, of integrating different technology tools into their classrooms. Students and teachers alike need to be able to interact in an online environment safely and respectfully. This has led many to examine what it means to be a good digital citizen.

Education policymakers need to understand the term “digital citizenship” and what role it plays in educating today’s students. Being a good digital citizen means participating in online culture in a way that is respectful of others. It also means being digitally literate, or having a full understanding of how to use the online world as a tool for enhancing offline interactions and learning. For example, when good digital citizens are doing research for a class assignment, these students know how to find online resources that are reliable sources of information. They might also choose to add images they find through a site that provides the photos and graphics to be shared without violating copyright laws. The students also know how to ask for help in forums on their research topics. When they are finished, students might also post their paper on blogs so others can learn from their analyses.

Why Digital Citizenship Is Important

Students today are so preoccupied in the online world, in part because they have never lived without the Internet, that it can be harder for them to understand the difference between online and offline interaction. Interacting without being face-to-face with the other person can be disinhibiting, making digital users feel they are invisible, which can make it easier to take risks and say and do things they wouldn’t do offline. Adults who have not grown up immersed in social media and other forms of technology-related communication may have a harder time understanding the impact that these have on students’ social lives today. However, their impartial perspectives can help adults teach students that the way they chose to present themselves online has implications in their offline lives, both now and in the future.

Constant access to the Internet, now even through nearly every type of cell phone, means that students do not mind being connected to their friends and classmates around the clock, and they are very adept at learning how to use new forms of technology quickly. However, knowing how to use a software program to create a presentation is different than knowing how to use it to make a persuasive argument—or knowing how to ensure that data and other information being used are accurate. Additionally, teaching teenagers how to focus on a single task at hand when they know they have unread text messages waiting on their phone can be a challenge.

Educators can find ways to harness the positive aspects of students’ technology use, while teaching them how to minimize the impact of the more negative aspects. Creating safe ways for them to learn how to interact online, turning mistakes into teachable moments, and helping students understand the impact of their online lives in the real world are just a few examples. Schools should also consider integrating digital citizenship instruction into all subject areas in

Digital citizenship is one of many technology issues that will play a role in shaping the education system. The 2012 NASBE study group titled “The Role of Technology in Schools and Communities” has spent this year exploring digital citizenship and a number of other issues related to technology use in education including its impact on student development and how educators are integrating technology into their work in significant ways. Findings from the study group will be released at the 2012 Annual Conference in October including how boards can address technology issues such as digital citizenship in comprehensive and meaningful ways.
age-appropriate ways and for all individuals including teachers, parents and students. Examples of integration could include:

- Developing a responsible use internet policy that provides examples of how students should be interacting online instead of what is prohibited;
- Incorporating responsible media/digital use into Common Core professional development trainings to optimize teachers’ ability to learn about the instructional shifts in the Common Core, including the integration of media and digital literacies;
- Incorporating examples of digital citizenship and responsible use in school/district character education programs;
- Holding parent workshops to find ways school efforts can reinforce efforts at home and develop digital citizen parents; and
- Providing development opportunities for teachers to build their own skills to be better digital citizens so that they can not only teach it but provide model behavior.3

It is no longer enough to just teach computer use when students are in the computer lab. Policymakers should recognize the impact of technology use in all aspects of the school environment and create policies that make it an asset rather than a liability.

**Issues for State Boards to Consider**

The E-rate is a federal program that provides funding for certain communications technology, including Internet access, to eligible schools and libraries. Schools that participate in the E-rate program must adhere to the requirements of the Children’s Internet Protection Act (CIPA), which is intended to address concerns over Internet content that is accessed through school or library computers. State boards of education can help schools understand what is needed in order to be compliant with CIPA, including the establishment and monitoring of an Internet safety policy and filters that block specific types of content.

State boards of education can also consider the following actions to address digital citizenship:

- Taking leadership to set the tone for how this area will be addressed in their state by creating a visionary statement on digital citizenship.
- Requiring student education and educator professional development on digital citizenship, possibly by offering resources or recommending specific curriculum and programs.
- Adding having the knowledge and skills to foster digital citizenship in students as a requirement for receiving state teaching licenses.
- Recognizing school districts, schools and educators that are addressing digital citizenship in innovative and effective ways.
- Integrating digital citizenship into the implementation of the Common Core State Standards.

**State Action**

On May 4, 2012, Delaware State Board of Education members began discussing the concept of digital citizenship during their annual state board retreat. They invited representatives from the Delaware Center for Educational Technology to talk about existing programs and activities in the state that address aspects of digital citizenship, as well as funding streams and other state partners. NASBE staff members also spoke about the concept of digital citizenship and how state boards can take action. This conversation helped inform state board members about the issue, and gave them an opportunity to begin thinking about the most effective ways for the board to create and support existing policies and programs.

**Resources and More Information**

Common Sense Media is a national organization that works with schools to implement a digital citizenship curriculum that encourages parent and community involvement: www.commonsense-media.org.

To learn more about the Children’s Internet Protection Act and its implications for E-Rate funding, visit the Federal Communications Commission site at www.fcc.gov/guides/childrens-internet-protection-act.

The Pew Research Center’s Internet & American Life Project’s website provides current reports on many different topics related to technology use: www.pewinternet.org/.

**Endnotes**

3. Emily Esch and Mike Lorion, “Thriving in a School Filled with Media and Technology,” (Common Sense Media), Presentation to The Role of Technology in Schools and Communities Study Group, March 24, 2012.

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