

10 ways schools are teaching internet safety

Using third-party resources and having students act as investigators are some of the many ways educators are teaching about online safety and responsibility

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By Meris Stansbury, Online Editor

As internet use has become a daily part of most students' lives, students must know how to protect themselves and their identity at all times—especially when teachers and parents aren't there to help them.

Teaching students about internet safety has been important for as long as the internet has existed, but it's in the spotlight this year in particular as schools get ready to apply for 2012 eRate discounts on their telecommunications services and internet access. That's because applicants [must amend their existing internet safety policies](#) by July 1, 2012, to include information about how they are educating students about proper online behavior, cyber bullying, and social networking sites.

To get an idea how educators are approaching this issue, we recently asked readers: "Do you teach internet safety at your school or district? If so, how?"

With thanks to our knowledgeable readers, we've compiled some of the most innovative and detail-rich answers here.

1. Through gaming

"Some of the classes I teach are in an online environment. The first week of the class [addresses] internet safety and time management. I feel that, since I send the students to many sites, and they are working from home, this is a very important part of the class. I use material from [CyberSmart!](#) for my content classes. I also teach a 3D game for the middle school called Quest Atlantis out of Indiana University, and internet safety is the first requirement ... before the students are granted full rights in the game. I also include three additional internet safety classes that are available as part of the game. Information about it can be found at <http://atlantis.crlt.indiana.edu/>. They do, however, require that teachers go through [professional development] before allowing them to register a class in the program." —Zena Johnston

"I teach internet safety through the technology curriculum. I use a trio of internet safety games from [WebWiseKids](#): Missing, It's Your Call, Mirror Image. These games cover cyber bullying, sexting, and predators. It keeps the students engaged as well as offering them hands-on work." —Debra Smith, *Gracemont High School, Okla.*

"I teach lessons on internet safety using the [FBI-SOS scavenger hunt](#) and on internet privacy using the [Jo Cool Jo Fool](#) website. Jo Cool Jo Fool has some dated areas, but the same concepts covered apply today. During the FBI-SOS scavenger hunt, we have commercial breaks periodically and I show the old Citibank identity theft commercials from YouTube. **I also have my students figure out how to locate my college-age son via the information that can be found online.** Creepy! I am a middle school librarian who co-teaches these lessons with our keyboarding teachers. It gives the kids vital knowledge and little breaks from the keyboarding class." —Miriam Rone

2. Through analogies and student-generated projects

“I am an Elementary Instructional Technology Specialist for South Jefferson Central School in New York State. I prepare, facilitate, and present an internet safety lesson yearly for all of our kindergarten through 6th grade students. I like to use analogies in my lessons, giving students a hook to ... remember. **This year, I used the analogy of Little Red Riding Hood—[that] things aren’t always as they seem, there are people who try to pretend they are something they are not, etc.** I also create SMART Notebook lessons to engage our digital natives so that they are active participants in their own learning experience. ... In grades K-2, emphasis is on computer parts, computer care rules, always telling an adult when there is a problem (I use the book [Arthur’s Computer Disaster](#) as an example), [not giving out] personal information, ... being nice on the internet, and what to do if someone isn’t being nice. In grades 3-6, emphasis is on rules, cyber bullying, personal and private information, think before you post, ... predators, password protection, etc. A safety pledge is signed and filed for grade 3-5 students, and an AUP is completed for [sixth graders].

“Every year, we complete a project after the internet safety lesson to ‘bring home’ the lesson material. I believe this project allows students to take ownership of internet safety and allows what they have learned to be shared by others. [One such project was an] internet safety calendar: Each student’s assignment was to create a drawing of an internet safety rule, ... then they divided into groups of two to create a calendar page ... using Microsoft Publisher. The calendars are printed and distributed to students at school. The file is put on our school website for parents to print at home. [In another project,] using Visual Communicator and a green screen, students have created their own script, their own backgrounds, and completed short [public service announcements] on internet safety, cyber bullying, think before you post, etc. These movie files are posted online on our school webpage for the community. After the lesson with the fifth grade students, I bring those students to the elementary classrooms and they help facilitate the lesson for another classroom. Here is the link to all of my resources and student files:

<http://www.spartanpride.org/webpages/tgroff/>.” —*Tina Groff, South Jefferson Central School*

3. Through investigative role-playing

“I teach about internet safety by having fifth grade students act as detectives. Students are assigned three web sites to look at. [They analyze information such as the site's] author, sponsoring organization, copyright date, contents, [and] purpose ... and compare the information on the website to information in nonfiction reference sources [and] online databases. **The catch is that one of the three websites is a hoax! The student’s job is to figure out which website is the hoax.** After students have looked at all three websites and figured out which one is the hoax, they share what they found with their classmates about the hoax site that made them question its authenticity. While many of our students (and adults) are tech savvy, thinking critically about what they see on the internet is still something they need to be taught to do and how.” —*Joan Curtis, teacher librarian, Information Literacy Education, Schwenksville Elementary School, Pa.*

4. With the help of guest speakers

“I am a middle [school Technology](#) Education teacher at Tuttle Middle School in South Burlington, Vt. I am teaching a pilot class called Media in Action. The goal of the class is to demonstrate how social media can be used for learning and also just as importantly online safety and etiquette. This is an eighth grade class. Students and parents sign a release/permission form in order to participate fully. I am a teacher trainer for the [National Education Association], teaching school district staff all around Vermont about bullying and harassment. I also partner with a national organization called [Child Lures Prevention/Teen Lures Prevention](#). [Representatives from this organization] come in as our visiting guests and speak to the kids. **My students video tape them, blog about them, summarize [their talk] on Facebook [and] Twitter, and take still pics to upload to our class blog. I also invite a state special online investigation detective.** We carry the same routine for him. We then post our video on YouTube and link it to our blog. One special event involved an eighth grade girl from a neighboring school district who visited our studio. We did a live spot with her as she shared how she had been bullied and harassed since fourth grade and came close to taking her own life. She gave us permission to [record] her. We produced the segment and named it: “Sarah’s Story.” Here are a few links to our specials: (Sarah’s Story)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FKOxyUcTYdk>; (Online safety with Teen Lures Prevention) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QX9iUnyV55Y>; (A New Way for Learning Socially Speaking) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tj0wDSoQF3I>; (Casting The Social Net for Learning) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qydf5IHBtNM>; (Our class blog) <http://fhtmsmediainaction.blogspot.com/>.” —*Jay Hoffman*

“Internet safety is a very important part of the computer/technology curriculum at St. Augustine School. Students learn safety tips, as well as ways to prevent/stop cyber bullying, and how to use netiquette when communicating online. A wonderful website, www.netsmartz.org, is a great resource for students of all ages. Through the use of interactive games and videos, the website offers a wide range of information to keep students safe in cyberspace. I also have my students design ‘anti-cyber bullying’ posters to display around our school, as well as PowerPoint presentations on internet safety tips. We have also had speakers from the Maryland Center for Missing and Exploited Children and the FBI as guest speakers on internet safety.” —*Sherry Mobley, preK-8 computer teacher, St. Augustine School, Elkridge, Md.*

5. By having students be the teachers

“I use a combination of the [Common Sense Media](#) curriculum, Netiquette by Edutopia, and videos by [BrainPOP](#) (Digital Citizenship, Internet Safety and Cyber Bullying). After the knowledge acquisition segment, **students make a keynote presentation with the purpose of teaching their audience the meaning of Digital Citizenship and internet Safety.** It is a subject that is extremely appealing to our students, and therefore the unit of study has been very successful in both fourth and fifth grades. For younger grades, I use elements from these sources and additionally, [Webonauts](#) by PBS Kids for second and third grades. Common Sense Media has a very good age-appropriate video that I’ve used for kindergarten and first grades.” —*Judy Havens, elementary computer specialist, Seoul International School*

6. Through third-party resources

“I teach internet safety to first through fifth graders using the [CyberSmart!](#) curriculum. I have used it for several years and feel that it exposes students to many aspects of online safety and courtesy. The students enjoy the activities and are enthusiastic about the lessons. I will be using it again this year and especially like that it is a *free* resource for teachers, easily available and adaptable to the needs of my school.” —*Heidi L. McDaniel, technology teacher, University School of Jackson Lower School*

“We use the [I-safe curriculum](#), which was recently revised. Additionally, we had a presentation for the parents at the Home and School meeting entitled: “Keeping God’s children safe on the internet.” It’s essential to teach manners and procedures.” —*P. Keenaghan, principal, Academy of Our Lady*

“As a part of the Information and Technology Essential Standards, I teach Safety and Ethical Issues: understanding issues related to the safe, ethical, and responsible use of information technology resources, understanding ethical behavior (copyright, plagiarism, and netiquette), as well as understanding internet safety precautions. These are a series of lessons I teach in the media center as an information specialist in August/September each year. The best resources I have found are *free* and are [available] through the Federal Trade Commission [at] [bulkorder.ftc.gov](#). The ‘Net Cetera Community Outreach Toolkit’ has videos for viewing and discussion (Heads Up: Stop, Think, Click.; The Protection Connection; Share with Care; and Stand Up to Cyber Bullying). Also, I received free books for my entire population to send home to parents (in both English and Spanish): *Net Cetera: Chatting with Kids About Being Online/Net Cétera: Cómo charlar con sus hijos sobre su comportamiento en línea*, as well as the brochure in English, ‘Heads Up: Stop. Think. Click.’ The students really responded well to the discussion and the video clips!” —*Cathy DuPre, Media Coordinator, Merry Oaks International Academy (Courier No. 453), Charlotte, N.C.*

“We utilize a combination of direct communication at our orientation sessions plus a required safety course we purchase through [Learning.com’s Easy Tech](#).” —*Michael H. Harris, principal/CEO, Gresham-Barlow Web Academy, Ore.*

7. Through self-created curriculum

“Being of the same generation as my students (for whatever that’s worth) meant that I saw the digital world through a similar lens, rather than taking the traditional method of ‘don’t ask, don’t tell’ that many of my older colleagues preferred, or at least defaulted to. **I have spent the past couple of years attempting to aggregate and curate some of the best resources I could find** to develop my own method of presenting internet safety/digital citizenship to a group of students that are already, at the age of 13-14, heavily invested in the digital realm. The resulting product(s) have changed so quickly that I have literally revamped and reconstructed everything with each new semester-long class. We dig deeply into the ideas of privacy, permanence (is anything ever really deleted online?), and being considerate of others. Truthfully, my lessons on digital citizenship and online safety more strongly resemble character lessons than nerdy/geeky tech lessons. Interestingly, this ‘hot topic’ is in high demand as educators everywhere begin to realize how truly important this issue is, and it’s one that we can’t afford to get wrong. As the statistics of cyber bullying, sexting, scandals, predators, and privacy invasions continue to rise, we realize just how vital it is for us to address these issues and

coach our students through the Wild West of the internet. I have presented to other educators and business professionals regarding this topic. If you would like, feel free to view, use, and [share my presentation](#) as it helps this cause. I am passionate about evangelizing this topic and feel very strongly about its message and necessity.” —*Greg Garner, eighth grade technology teacher, Texas*

“I work for a BOCES (Board of Cooperative Extension Services) that supports 23 districts in upstate New York. I have read extensively about internet safety, bullying, cyber bullying, digital citizenship, and other related topics. After collecting resources and data almost daily, I have developed several different programs that I offer to districts through our BOCES to component districts and beyond. When a district requests these services, I ask what issue(s) there are in the district, and I tailor the program to their needs. Each district has its own issues, and I update the program almost daily as new facts, statistics, and thoughts about internet safety and everything in that realm change. My resources are from other educators, developed programs currently in use ([NetSmartz](#), [CyberBee](#), [athinline.org](#) to name a few), with some recent articles and information about social media as it becomes available. I also offer this information to adults as well as students, as they also need to be aware of their safety.” —*Kelly Schermerhorn, Questar III-Model Schools, Office of School Improvement, Castleton, N.Y.*

8. Through a department citizenship program

“The New South Wales Department of Education and Communities has developed a series of online resources for students, teachers, and parents to support the digital citizenship program. The program aims to teach what it means to be a good digital citizen, how to use the internet responsibly, and how to keep yourself and others safe and healthy in an online world. The student activities are based on the domains of digital conduct, digital footprint, digital relationships, digital health and well-being, digital law, and digital financial literacy. The themes of cyber safety and how to deal with cyber bullying run through all activities. Links are included to other Australian sites, such as [CyberSmart](#) from the Australian Communications and Media Authority, as well as international sites such as [Think you know](#) and [Dizigen](#). The teacher resources include a professional learning course and support for implementing digital citizenship programs in schools. There are also links to videos and student games. The parent resources focus on [staying safe online](#). The [current site](#), designed for secondary students in Years 9 and 10, will be expanded in late November to cater for students from kindergarten to Year 10.” —*Leonie Wittman, project leader, Learning Design, New South Wales Curriculum & Learning Innovation Centre*

9. As part of a research lesson

“I am the school media specialist, and I teach internet safety through my Media course. It has been bounced around as to grade level (7th, 8th, both) but this year is being offered only to 8th graders. It is a trimester course, and I cover the basics of doing research, including internet safety. I use some of my own content, especially current articles in our newspapers, but I also heavily use the curriculum from Common Sense Media. I see a real need to do a formal curriculum at a younger level, but my time with the elementary students is very limited, as is our technology teacher’s.” —*Sharon Gunkel, Nevis Public School*

10. Through a school-wide program

“We teach internet safety at Helena Flats School through our [Olweus program](#), and I spend a great deal of time with the students throughout the school year talking about how to keep safe. I have a doctorate from the University of Montana and conducted my study on internet predation.” —*Ann Minckler, Ed.D., superintendent, Helena Flats School*