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Digital Citizenship Audit

The rapid ascent of increased technological resources and their daily improvements have permeated many households and the livelihoods of most of our students in Napa County. In an effort to stay current and provide students the best educational opportunities, Napa Valley Unified School District has integrated a focus on 21st century skills in every classroom. The district is in the midst of clarifying what its policies are around this use. In fact, in a few short years, we’ve moved from a firm no cell phone use policy at school, to allowing their use within the classroom for educational purposes.

With this increased abundance of technology in younger students’ hands, comes the added responsibility for our district to delineate rules and expectations around this use. As a middle school teacher, a clear district policy around this use would definitely be welcomed. Students at this age are testing boundaries and navigating their world. The technology in their back pockets offers a wealth of educational opportunities, but we must set a clear course for them and educate them to proper uses.

To date, our district has a technology use agreement and consent form. It includes both a vague statement regarding breaching of acceptable use, “Students can lose his/her privilege at any time for inappropriate use” and an explicit one, “The Internet is to be used in school for research and educational purposes only. Any obscene, threatening, commercial, or illegal use will end a student’s access to the Internet.” And yet, there hasn’t been a clear policy sent to teachers and administration as to what that means or to what degree a transgression will eliminate Internet accessibility. In addition, it doesn’t clarify the length of time a student will lose his or her privileges. Furthermore, we have a meager behavior support plan that addresses issues of cyberbullying, but many teachers at our site find it unsuccessful.

In fact, of the 5 surveyed teachers at the middle school where I also teach, the survey results showed a perceived high use of cyberbullying. In addition, a majority of the other scores fell within one point of each other. Overall, two teachers rated that technology use at our school is very high, but that inappropriate technology use is also very high. And the other three teachers’ scores fell in the range where technology use is perceived to be moderate to high, with an above average misuse of technology. These responses coincide with the district’s vision to increase 21st century skills and its lack of clarity around both the direct teaching of digital citizenship and the policies that surround it.

In fact, all five teachers’ high score of ‘five’ in regards to student use of technology as a means of intimidating students may point to our lack of digital citizenship curriculum. The third highest score, that of plagiarizing information from the internet, also seems to reiterate that point. Another high score, scoring “somewhat” or “extremely important,” was noted concerning that of students posting private information on the internet. In all, the highest-scored responses all relate to students’ lack of awareness regarding digital citizenship. Granted, students in middle school often do blur the boundary lines. However, this point emphasizes our need for explicit lessons and clear consequences when students do misstep.

An issue that arose at our school last year that both illustrates our need for educating students in digital citizenship and our lack of clear consequences. Students took inappropriate pictures of a teacher and his or her items, and posted them on a social networking site. The response was a stern discussion with the students and in some cases, suspension. The police were involved in removing the pictures off the site. The students were not allowed in the teacher’s room for the rest of the year. However, I’m fairly certain that they all were able to use technology within a few months. The school’s response was to clarify to teachers that we shouldn’t let students retrieve or drop off items in our cars. These students were shocked at such a swift response. Had they received a clear education in appropriate use of technology, would they have made the same poor choice?

Furthermore, as the survey shows and frequent discussions at school have shown, cyberbullying is rampant through the middle school. As we integrate PBL into our school, and a reliance on technology and use of 21st century skills, it is imperative that we also add clear, deliberate curriculum in digital citizenship. This point is clear in both the survey responses and in recent, frequent misuse of technology at our middle school. Although the district has swiftly integrated the phrase, “21st century skills” in Napa Valley Unified, it has not balanced this with clear expectations of how we must teach the digital citizenship. Although brief, the survey very clearly exemplifies this, too.

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| Questions | Teacher #1  Scores | Teacher 2 | Teacher 3 | Teacher 4 | Teacher 5 | Total |
| 1 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 20 |
| 2 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 25 |
| 3 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 4 | 12 |
| 4 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 24 |
| 5 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 12 |
| 6 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 23 |
| 7 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 19 |
| 8 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 22 |
| 9 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 10 |
| 10 | 5 | 4 | 2 | 3 | 5 | 19 |
| Totals: | 40 | 37 | 34 | 34 | 41 |  |