

Emergence of the Digital Natives

It's time to have a candid conversation about social media and technology.

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Last year, we started parent academies on the component topics of *Digital Citizenship* and we're once again offering them. These academies are aimed at assisting our parents help their children, as well as providing support for each other. As a parent of a 16-year-old and a 13-year-old, I'm constantly reminded that our children are digital natives, and we are the digital immigrants! For example, I still don't understand Snapchat!

I recognize both the benefits and liabilities of social media. It provides important information quickly, shares the great work going on in our classrooms and community,

IT WOULD BE nearly impossible to identify a segment of our society that has not been impacted by social media and technology. According to a recent poll conducted by Common Sense Media, 48% of parents and 72% of teens feel the need to immediately respond to texts, social networking messages, and other notifications. In addition, 69% of parents and 78% of teens check their devices hourly! With these facts in mind, we need to have a candid conversation about what it means to be a responsible digital citizen. I'm proud to say we have started just such a conversation here in the Ramsey public schools.

Three years ago, we adopted and implemented the Common Sense Education's K-12 Digital Citizenship Curriculum. We are directly addressing topics such as privacy and security, relationships and communication, cyberbullying and digital drama, digital footprints and reputation, self image and identify, information literacy, and creative credit and copyright. Mike Ribble, in *According to Digital Citizenship*, summarizes it concisely: "With so many communication options available, students need to learn how to make appropriate decisions, how to learn in a digital society, and how to be effective consumers in a digital economy."

and serves as a tool to promote positive social change. With the easy access and instantaneous reach of social media, students and families are in a continuous loop of information—instead of having to wait for the occasional newsletter. This same benefit, however, can potentially become a tremendous liability to the work of the district and/or community by causing unnecessary distractions and spreading misleading information. We need to remember that we're setting an example when posting things online. The age-old axiom, "Children become what they see," is more true today than ever. Every single time someone uses social media to comment on something, we're sending our children a message about the kind of person you expect him or her to be. Many of us have read and, unfortunately, have been the target of absolutely vicious personal attacks on social media. Please do not forget that the children are watching.

We have been very proactive in our approach to digital citizenship; yet, I also recognize that there is much more to do in an ever-changing environment. As always, I invite and encourage you to send me any feedback. Feel free to reach me via e-mail at: mmurphy@ramsey.k12.nj.us ✉