

Digital Citizenship -What Does It Mean for Students, Parents, and Teachers: Article 4 of 8 in Series

At five years old, I had the world figured out! I was a kindergartener. And, I was one of the *lucky* kindergarteners who got to sit in one of two “special” desks right by the teacher’s desk! More importantly, I had a girlfriend. She sat in the other desk. She was no ordinary girlfriend. Her parents owned a McDonald’s, right next to my dad’s business, which meant free Happy Meals and ice cream nearly every day. But, above all else, the greatest thing in the world was the fact that I knew how to ride my bike down the hill in front of my house faster than all my friends: that made me one cool five year old. All in all, life was pretty peachy.

Of all my memoires, however, one day sticks out more than any other day. One afternoon, after seeing some older boys riding their bikes down the hill with “no hands,” I decided I would give this a shot. So, I pedaled to the top of the hill, took a deep breath.... and....the next thing I knew, I woke up with my mom holding me and wiping away blood from a nice case of road rash down one side of my face and body. At five years old, I had just received one of my first reality checks from the world around me. Before returning to my bicycle following my epic crash, my mom and dad gave me a healthy dose of biking safety instructions, which included keeping both hands on the handlebars. And, they made certain I always wore this ridiculously un-cool helmet. Although I never confirmed it, I think the helmet led to the break-up of me and Miss McDonald. But, together, the training, the helmet, and my newfound caution, helped me avoid countless pitfalls in my five-year-old world, and beyond.

For the 21st Century kid, Digital Citizenship is the equivalent of biking safety. Today, digital devices are as common, or are possibly more common, than bicycles. And, if gone unchecked, digital devices can lead to injuries as great as or greater than any bicycle wreck. In today’s age, parents and educators must partner together to ensure students know how to conduct themselves and how to protect themselves while using technology. Over the past decade, technology for young students has been optional. In the Common Core Era, it is a requirement. Students today are digital natives and as such they will be required to learn and will be assessed on their ability to utilize, explore, connect, create, and communicate electronically. For this reason, a new term has been coined called “Digital Citizenship.” In essence, Digital Citizenship represents the extent to which students are prepared to think critically, behave safely, and *live responsibly* in a digital world.

In the Spring of 2013, West Platte School District will implement a Digital Literacy and Citizenship Curriculum. This curriculum is produced by Common Sense Media and is based on the research of Howard Gardner and the Harvard Graduate School of Education. This K-12 Curriculum offers: a comprehensive and balanced approach to addressing safety and security issues; digital literacy skills; student-centered lessons; media rich lessons that emphasize skill building, critical thinking, ethical discussion; media creation and decision making; parent materials; alignment to Common Core and NETS; and, rich professional development resources.

This Digital Citizenship curriculum will be integrated in grades K-12 this Spring and will be ongoing throughout the years ahead. For students, this will provide the knowledge, skills, and competencies needed to protect themselves. For teachers, this will mean we have taught our students yet another set of life-long skills required for safety and success. For parents, this will mean having not only peace of mind, but also the information needed to promote a safe digital environment at home. Together, it will mean strapping a helmet on our students, embedding the safety rules in their mind, and instilling caution and critique in their actions. Students will know to look both ways and to read the road signs during their daily ride up and down the steep hills of the information highway. It will mean our students know to always keep their hands on the handlebars in order to avoid digital disasters.

An interactive “anchor” presentation which covers Digital Citizenship and all topics addressed in this article series may be accessed on the all new West Platte website: wpsd.net. This anchor slideshow will connect you

with a variety of multimedia and in-depth details on this movement. On behalf of our students and teachers, thank you for your time to investigate this initiative. I encourage you to seek out these articles and additional information over the next few weeks. We look forward to partnering for progress with you in the Common Core Era!

Seeking a World Class Education,
Jerrod Wheeler, Ed. D., Superintendent of Schools