12 Ways to Kick off Digital Citizenship in your School Community

How can we equip students with more than just computer skills, so that they think critically, behave safely, and participate responsibly? Common Sense Media has developed a free, media-rich curriculum to teach the skills that children need in this "always on" world. The curriculum was developed with scholars at the GoodPlay Project at the Harvard University Graduate School of Education. Their comprehensive website (**www.commonsensemedia.org**) includes both classroom materials and professional development for teachers.

Here are 12 ideas to help kick things off:

1. **Develop a pledge.** Have your students create a Digital Citizen pledge to establish expectations and norms for online behavior. Check out a lesson plan and suggestions for developing a pledge at www.commonsensemedia.org/sites/default/files/uploads/pdfs/3-5-unit2-digitalcitizenshippledge_0.pdf.

2. **Hold a kick off assembly.** Focus your whole school community on the importance of digital citizenship by gathering for an assembly. Some ideas include collectively reciting your Digital Citizenship Pledge; having students share real-life examples; and creating and sharing banners or posters to highlight key topics of the discussion.

3. **Teach a Lesson.** CSM's Digital Literacy and Citizenship curriculum offers more than 65 lessons that align with Common Core and other standards and can be integrated into core curricular classes. The lessons cover such topics as cyberbullying, online safety and security, and more. Check out www.commonsensemedia.org/educators/curriculum for more info.

4. **Share a video.** Video of real students talking about real issues is a powerful teaching tool. Educators can choose from a rich video library to supplement the curriculum. Go to www.commonsensemedia.org/video/educators/student-videos to see more.

5. **Pick a topic and take a deep dive.** In addition to ethics and citizenship issues, CSM offers lessons on a range of cross-curricular topics to help students hone their digital citizenship skills. Use the Scope & Sequence (www.commonsensemedia.org/educators/scope-and-sequence) to find the lessons that are just right for your classroom and school. Our spiraling approach covers eight categories, including Internet Safety, Privacy & Security, Self-image and Identity, and Relationships & Communication, among others.

6. **Put things in perspective with real-world examples.** There's nothing better than a "teachable moment" from the news of the day or from online chatter to spark a meaningful conversation.

7. Stay current. CSM's Educator Blog is the place to find out how other educators are using the K-12 curriculum to stay on top of developments that affect teachers in this digital era. CSM keeps up on the latest research, and features the positive digital tools that teachers can use in teachable moments. Go to www.commonsensemedia.org/educators/blog for more info. This year CSM will be featuring many more case studies from the classroom as well, so join in the conversation. We'd love to hear from you.

8. Learn from the experts. Although today's students were "born digital," many of today's educators were not. CSM has developed a set of professional development resources that help educators get up to speed and stay abreast of all the latest developments in effectively teaching the digital citizenship curriculum. These resources highlight best practices through video interviews with teachers on the strategies they use to teach the lessons and how they align the lessons to Common Core State Standards. Go to www.commonsensemedia.org/educators/professional-development to learn more.

9. Bring families into the conversation. Online worlds have no borders. Kids are increasingly exposed to a wide range of digital media in and out of the classroom. Even the most tech-savvy parents welcome the opportunity to help their children become better digital citizens. In response, CSM has created resources for parents (www.commonsensemedia.org/educators/parent-media-education) to utilize at home.

10. Address the "drama." Anyone who made it through middle school can relate to the drama, pain, and angst of that stretch of growing up. Rumors, gossip, pictures, and at the most extreme, bullying and sexting, happen faster and with wider – and more devastating—reach thanks to digital tools. Many of these acts take on different meaning for boys and girls, and the Girls, Boys, and Media: A Gender and Digital Life Toolkit (www.commonsensemedia.org/educators/gender) spotlights applicable lessons and helps students reflect on such hurtful and irresponsible behaviors.

11. Learn what makes a "good" app for learning. Not all apps, or games, are created equal, especially when it comes to learning. App reviews can serve as a primer on "media literacy" in many ways. Have students review and rank apps and then compare their results to Common Sense rankings (www.commonsensemedia.org/learning-ratings) on learning potential or "citizenship" points.

12. Treat students like the experts. By its very nature, the internet has democratized learning and expertise. Ask your students to come up with their own list of what they think makes a good digital citizen, or tips for safe, smart and respectable online behavior.