

# Preparing Students for the Complex Challenges of Digital Citizenship

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Digital citizenship is the responsible use of technology to learn, create, and participate. More than a skill, it is a fundamental responsibility for today's students beyond the classroom. Children use technology to connect, socialize, learn — and for entertainment. Most students encounter the digital world before they enter our school doors. According to a study by Common Sense Media, children ages 8 and under use digital media on average 2.5 hours per day, while 9–12-year-olds are active for almost 5 hours daily. Not surprisingly, teen usage is more than 7 hours every day on non-school related activities.<sup>1</sup>

Students in all grade levels must be empowered to use technology. However, with the power of technology comes ethical dilemmas, social situations, and other challenges; and as digital technology continues to evolve, the lines between real life and digital life start to blur. Students will encounter personal, moral, ethical, and civic decisions through their networked world. The decisions that they face will not always have a clear-cut, right-and-wrong answer. They must learn to navigate these more complex challenges as well as the simpler ones.

It is our responsibility as educators to prepare students so they can participate fully in digital and real-world communities — understanding how to make smart choices online and in life. As recommended by the Archdiocese of Philadelphia Department of Education, we use the Common Sense Media lessons and resources, which are updated annually. Designed in collaboration with Project Zero at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, these lessons use digital challenges and dilemmas that students face at each grade level today.

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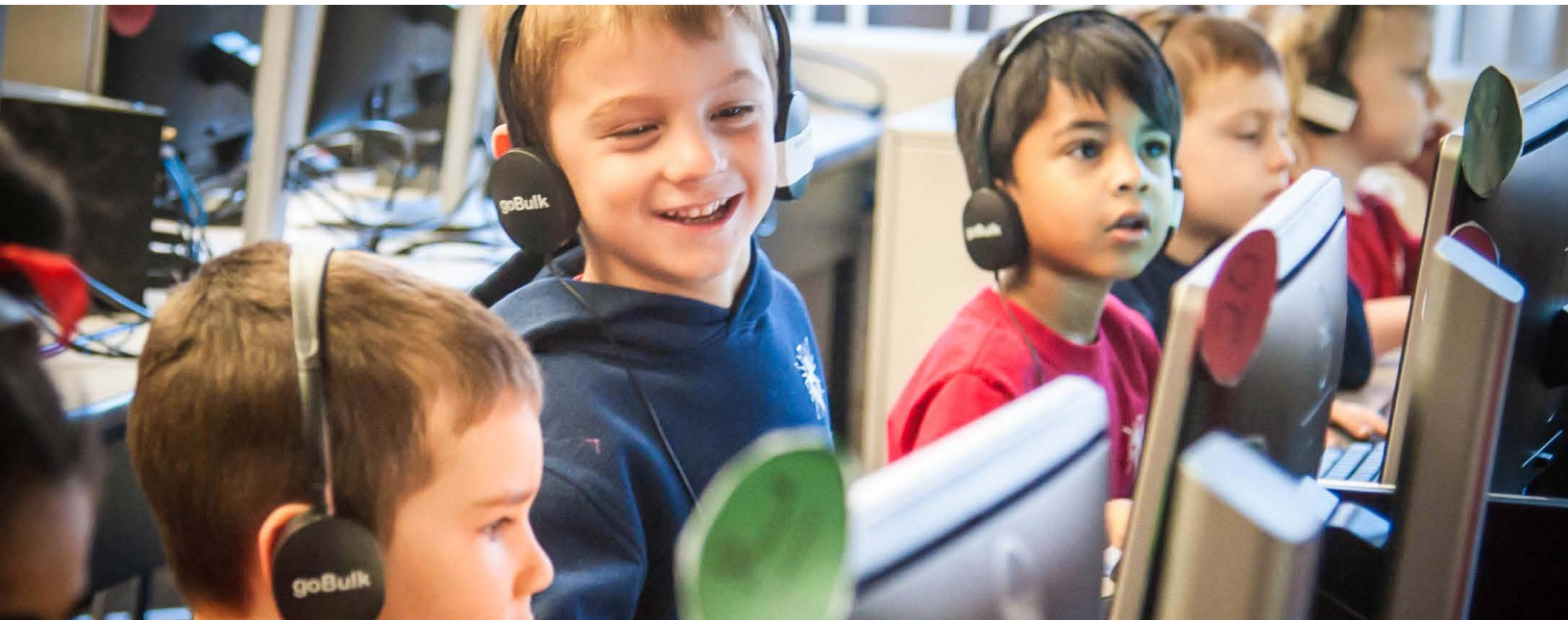
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By introducing age-appropriate digital citizenship topics such as media usage, digital footprints, security, communication, media literacy, and cyberbullying, we expose students to situations they may encounter when using digital technology. The lessons open a dialogue with students so they can learn how to think through and handle situations they have already discussed and resolved together in the classroom.

We don't just work on teaching students to be safe and avoid the negative aspects of the digital world. We also expose them to positive opportunities to express themselves, participate in conversations relevant to their interests, and help them learn how to be involved in their local and world communities. For example, they may learn about their ability to reach broad audiences effectively while also understanding the permanence of online posts. These lessons will help equip students with knowledge and skills to navigate the digital world and to know when to remove themselves and interact in the physical world.

Digital citizenship. It is a responsibility we can never take for granted.



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1.V. Rideout & M. B. Robb, "The Common Sense census: Media use by tweens and teens, 2019," San Francisco, CA: Common Sense Media, 2019, <https://www.commonsensemedia.org/research/the-common-sense-census-media-use-by-tweens-and-teens-2019>; V. Rideout and M.B. Robb, "The Common Sense Census: Media Use by Kids Age Zero to Eight, 2020: Common Sense Media," Common Sense Media: Ratings, reviews, and advice, November 17, 2020, <https://www.commonsensemedia.org/research/the-common-sense-census-media-use-by-kids-age-zero-to-eight-2020>