



Dear Parents and Caregivers,

Your son or daughter is taking part in classroom lessons from the Common Sense Media Digital Literacy and Citizenship curriculum. The overall goal of this curriculum is to educate and empower young people to harness the power of the Internet and digital technology for learning, and for them to become safe, responsible, and respectful digital citizens.

What is digital citizenship?

YouTube. Runescape. iTunes. Twitter. Facebook. Club Penguin. Digital media and technology is evolving at a dizzying pace, bringing with it extraordinary opportunities as well as real risks for our children. On the positive side, young people are using the immense power of the Internet and mobile technology to create, connect, explore and learn in ways never before imagined. On the negative side, harmful behaviors aided by digital technology, from cyberbullying to digital cheating, are surfacing in schools and in homes across the country. Young people face ethical challenges daily, without a road map to guide them. And many of us – parents and teachers alike – are struggling with how to help kids thrive in this brave new world. That is why we have embarked on this digital citizenship program.

Our partner in offering this curriculum is Common Sense Media, a nonprofit organization dedicated to improving the lives of kids and families by providing the trustworthy information, education, and independent voice they need to thrive in a world of media and technology.

What we teach

Common Sense Media's Digital Citizenship curriculum is divided into five units based on the digital ethics research of Dr. Howard Gardner and The GoodPlay Project at the Harvard School of Education. Students learn to think critically about how they treat others in this fast-paced digital world, and they learn to use the Internet in legal, ethical, and responsible ways.

The underlying message is one of empowerment: With powerful digital tools of creation and communication comes great responsibility.

- **Digital Life:** Students learn about the 24/7, social nature of digital media, reflect on the role of the Internet in their lives, and are introduced to the concept of digital citizenship.
- **Privacy:** Students learn that the Internet is a public space, and then develop skills to protect their own privacy and respect the privacy of others.
- **Connected Culture:** Students explore the ethics of online relationships – both the negative behaviors to avoid, like cyberbullying and hate speech, and the positive behaviors that support collaboration and community.
- **Self-Expression and Identity:** Students explore the nature of online identity. They see how the choices they make about how to present themselves online can affect their relationships, sense of self, and reputations.
- **Respecting Creative Work:** Students learn the importance of respecting creative work in a connected culture – to download content legally, respect copyright, comment constructively on others' work, as well as how to share what one authors and creates and receive attribution for it.

The curriculum emphasizes skill building, critical thinking, and decision making. We take a balanced approach and celebrate the positive aspects of digital life while teaching students to avoid its potential perils. The Digital Citizenship curriculum is rooted in a model of ethical thinking that starts with the self and moves outward, to encompass the entire community. Through video, hands-on activities, role playing, and classroom discussion, your children will be asked to reflect on how their digital and online behaviors affect themselves, their friends and family, and the communities of which they are a part. They will have the opportunity to use computers and the Internet to practice digital literacy skills and to create digital media products (videos, blogs, digital art) to demonstrate and share their knowledge with you and others.

What families can do

Common Sense Media takes a holistic, school-community approach to digital literacy and citizenship and provides parent educational resources to help you support your child's learning. As we engage in these lessons in class, we will be sending home parent tip sheets, videos, and an occasional homework activity for you to do with your child. We encourage you to read and view the parent materials, have fun with the homework activities, and take this as an opportunity to spend time with your kids and learn together. If you have access to the Internet at home or at work, you can visit the Common Sense Media website at www.common sense media.org and take a look at the wealth of parent resources it provides on kids and media.

We are thrilled to be launching this Digital Citizenship curriculum for middle school and look forward to sharing more with you in the weeks ahead. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions. Raising and educating young people in today's 24/7 digital media environment is one of the most exciting and daunting challenges that parents and schools face today. Working together, we can raise a generation of kids who become smart, responsible, and respectful digital citizens.

Sincerely,

