



Common Sense Digital Citizenship Recognized District: Omaha Public Schools

GRADES K-12 | OMAHA, NEBRASKA

On the eastern side of Nebraska, Omaha is a bustling Midwest city with a metropolitan area nearing a population milestone of 1 million residents. In a city with 11 school districts, Omaha Public Schools (OPS) serves the largest share of the area’s students. In 2014, OPS made a bold move to focus on increasing equity and access to learning technology for its students, a majority of whom are classified as economically disadvantaged. When voters passed a \$421 million bond issue — the largest in Nebraska’s history — OPS set out to ensure the district and its classrooms were ready for innovation. Among a range of large-scale construction and renovation projects, a portion of the funds targeted modernizing the technology infrastructure across the district, and with new devices comes the imperative for responsible device use, which OPS was ready to face head-on.

Why Digital Citizenship?

The administration and staff of Omaha Public Schools believe that digital citizenship is about more than online safety. To be a positive, contributing member of today’s society, kids must learn to participate in online communities, recognize and stand up to cyberbullying, be not only consumers of online media but also creators, and understand how to protect their privacy online.

Between 2016 and 2018, OPS introduced \$8 million worth of devices into its secondary schools, with elementary schools soon to follow. OPS recognized that digital citizenship instruction needed to be a prerequisite for student technology access, so the district also implemented a plan to support students with both digital literacy and digital citizenship. To execute the plan, OPS hired Keegan Korf, a full-time Common Sense Education regional manager and OPS lead teacher focused on digital citizenship.

Prior to 2016, the district’s digital citizenship efforts focused on supporting individual teachers in receiving professional development and earning their Common Sense Educator Recognition. Starting in 2016, OPS shifted to a “whole-community approach” to digital citizenship, taking steps toward Common Sense School and District Recognition.

For the 2016–2017 school year, OPS earned Common Sense District Recognition for the first time. Common Sense District Recognition honors districts that are dedicated to taking a whole-community approach to digital citizenship by engaging students, staff, families, and the greater community in critical conversations about student media use.

According to Rob Dickson, executive director of information management services at OPS, “The Common Sense School and District Recognition programs provide a framework for our schools to both teach these lessons and provide outreach to the families in our school communities.” This important achievement acknowledges Omaha Public Schools for its commitment to preparing students for success in an increasingly digital world.

This effort aligns with OPS’s strategic plan and is woven throughout a strategy for technology device selection. Dickson refers to this strategy as a “planned obsolescence” of devices: As school and classroom technology ages, replacement technology needs to be purchased in a cycle every four to five years. OPS requires each school to become recognized for their digital citizenship efforts through the Common Sense Recognition program as the initial requirement for the school to receive new devices. OPS leadership felt it was important to create a process for educator voice regarding device selection and classroom instruction.

STATISTICS

No. of Students: 52,881

No. of Schools and Programs: 93

Ethnicity of Study Body:

Hispanic: 35.5%
 American Indian: 0.9%
 African American: 25.1%
 Caucasian: 27%
 Asian American: 6.1%
 Pacific Islander: 0.1%
 Multiracial: 5.3%

Economically Disadvantaged Students: 74%

English-Language Learners: 15%

To learn more about Common Sense Education, visit www.common sense.org/education.

Implementation

To achieve district-wide digital citizenship integration, Omaha Public Schools implemented a train-the-trainer model through their Microsoft Innovative Educators (MIE) program. The MIE program began as a way to offer professional development on tech integration across the district as OPS rolled out Office 365 products, district-wide, in addition to Surface Pro tablets into all secondary schools. The select cohort of innovative teacher leaders received training on how to support their colleagues in deep, meaningful, and effective tech integration.

In addition to serving as experts in tech integration, MIEs are also responsible for coordinating their schools' digital citizenship programs. They work with their administrators to determine the most appropriate implementation plan. As Keegan Korf explains, "Some MIEs directly teach Common Sense curriculum in their classrooms, while others serve as a voice and a liaison in their schools to support their colleagues who teach it." The OPS approach to digital citizenship implementation allows for individual schools to decide the best approach for their students and staff.

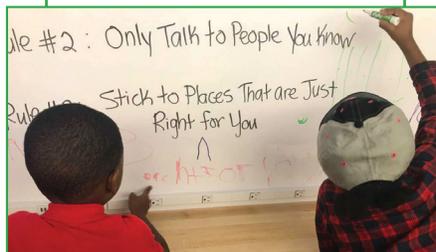
At Alice Buffett Magnet Middle School, students and staff kicked off the 2016–2017 school year with a day dedicated to digital citizenship, and then they revisited those lessons in the classroom all year long. Instructional facilitator and MIE Kristi Tolliver helped organize the Digital Citizenship Day event, which included a half day of instruction focused on digital citizenship lessons followed by parent-teacher conferences that evening. During the parent-teacher conferences, Keegan Korf facilitated community outreach by presenting families with helpful resources and guidance on managing their kids' media use.

For Wakonda Elementary School, the implementation strategy shifted over time. In their first year of the program, the school librarian taught Common Sense digital citizenship lessons. However, the following year, they instead targeted the third-, fourth-, and fifth-grade classrooms, as well as the library classes for younger students. According to Wakonda Elementary MIE Rebecca Chambers, "It was important that staff and students understand that digital citizenship is not just a library topic but rather a conversation that can stretch across all content and grade levels. Digital citizenship really should be an integral part of the education model."

The Wakonda teachers use a combination of Common Sense digital citizenship lessons, the Digital Passport student interactive game, and Connecting Families resources. Most of the lessons are introduced during the beginning of the school year, within what OPS calls the First 20 Days curriculum. In addition, Chambers explains that they work to integrate the digital citizenship lessons into teachers' existing content throughout the school year.

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**ROB DICKSON,
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF
INFORMATION MANAGEMENT
SERVICES AT OPS**



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**REBECCA CHAMBERS,
MICROSOFT INNOVATIVE
EDUCATOR (MIE) AT
WAKONDA ELEMENTARY**

Impact

Keegan Korf believes that integration through the MIE program was essential to getting the OPS teachers on board and reaching so many students. She explains, "The content from Common Sense is phenomenal, but the only way to spread the content far and wide is to create a group of evangelists who can share their passion and knowledge with their colleagues."

According to MIE Rebecca Chambers, the teachers at Wakonda Elementary appreciated the ready-made high-quality content and found it extremely helpful as a way to begin these important conversations with students. "The lessons and materials were ready to go and saved them time," Chambers adds.

Parent involvement will also be a key indicator in the success of the program. As Korf reflects on the Digital Citizenship Day event at Alice Buffett Magnet Middle School, "Having children, parents, and teachers focusing an entire day on the same conversation really makes an impact. I witnessed awesome conversations taking place, school-wide in all grades 5 through 8, during that terrific event."

Since district-wide digital citizenship is a new endeavor for Omaha Public Schools, the administration is still assessing the success and sustainability of the program. OPS has signed on with BrightBytes to gather data and analyze the effectiveness of their technology program. Part of that survey includes a section on digital citizenship, which will help inform the evolution of the program going forward.

When asked her thoughts on the future of the digital citizenship program in OPS, Korf was positive they will have more and more of the district's schools participating over time. "Because we earned Common Sense District Recognition, and with the positive public relations we've been able to provide our schools who are intentionally teaching this content, the good word is spreading like wildfire, and others want to be a part of it," Korf explains. "These skills are only growing more important, and I don't see that fire dying down anytime soon."

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