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A Need for Digital Citizenship

Media and technology are increasingly important in the lives of children and teens, bringing both opportunities and risks. Media and technology use by children continues to rise year over year, with an average of five hours and 33 minutes of screen media per day for tweens, and eight hours and 39 minutes per day for teens.¹ Today, most teens (95%) have access to a smartphone,² and nearly half of teens report that they are "almost constantly" online.³ Watching online videos on apps like YouTube and TikTok is one of the most popular activities among teens, and social media use is increasing.⁴ Younger children age 0–8 use nearly two and a half hours of screen media a day, with TV and online video viewing as their main activity.⁵ Technology use among 5- to 8-year-olds has become more independent, mobile, and social.⁶ In today’s environment, digital life offers children and teens both tremendous opportunity and significant risk, a reality that was magnified and exacerbated by the pandemic.

When used effectively, technology paves the way for new approaches to learning, allows for increased social connection and relationship building, and gives children and adolescents access to a breadth of new skills and opportunities for creativity. We believe there are incredible opportunities for digital media to inform and educate kids, aid in identity development, inspire creativity, and connect them with their communities and the broader world. The internet and digital media can help young people develop a sense of belonging and self-esteem through connections with friends and involvement in diverse communities. It can connect them to helpful information and resources to support their development, as with mental health support. For instance:

- Three in four parents of children age 0–8 are satisfied with the amount and quality of the educational media available to their children, with 72% reporting that the media their child uses helps with the child’s learning, and 60% saying it helps the child’s creativity.⁷
- The majority of teens report that their phones help them connect with people (84%) and learn new things (83%).⁸
- Two thirds of teens say that social media helps people their age interact with people from diverse backgrounds, explore different points of view, and show support for causes or issues.⁹
- Nearly 70% of 14- to 22-year-olds have used mobile apps related to health issues, and 47% have connected with a health provider online.¹⁰
- Social media has been shown to support the mental health of LGBTQ youth through peer connection and social support.¹¹

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¹ In this research, tweens are age 8–12, and teens are 13–18. These amounts do not include screen time while in school or doing homework. See Rideout, V., Peebles, A., Mann, S., & Robb, M.B. (2022). The Common Sense census: Media use by tweens and teens, 2021. Common Sense Media.
However, young people also struggle with the potential downsides of a culture of ubiquitous technology, including challenges that range from negative impacts on sleep and physical activity to technology addiction, privacy concerns, exposure to harmful content, hate speech, mis/disinformation, and impacts on their mental health (e.g., harassment and bullying, anxiety, and social comparison). In 2023, the U.S. surgeon general published an advisory on the impacts of social media use on youth mental health, summarizing research on these negative impacts and calling on the nation to act in regard to this public health crisis.\footnote{Office of the U.S. Surgeon General. (2023). Social media and youth mental health: The U.S. surgeon general’s advisory.} To illustrate these challenges:

- Three quarters of parents of children age 0–8 are very or somewhat concerned with the amount of time their children spend with media, and their exposure to sexual or violent content.\footnote{Rideout, V., & Robb, M. B. (2020). The Common Sense census: Media use by kids age zero to eight, 2020. Common Sense Media.}
- About one in four 14- to 22-year-olds say they "often" encounter hate speech or other abusive and harmful content on social media, including body shaming and racist, sexist, and homophobic comments.\footnote{Rideout, V., Fox, S., Peebles, A., & Robb, M. B. (2021). Coping with COVID-19: How young people use digital media to manage their mental health. Common Sense and Hopelab.}
- Teens who spent more than three hours per day on social media faced higher rates of depression and anxiety.\footnote{Riehm, K. E., Feder, K. A., Tormohlen, K. N., Crum, R. M., Young, A. S., Green, K. M., Pacek, L. R., La Flair, L. N., & Mojtahab, R. (2019). Associations between time spent using social media and internalizing and externalizing problems among U.S. youth. JAMA Psychiatry, 76(12), 1266–1273.}

And unlike in prior generations, a significant amount of young people’s social interactions, identity development, and learning occur online. As the world has shifted to the digital, there has been an exponential increase in the volume and sources of information that young people use to learn about the democratic process and be informed about the news and the world around them. Furthermore, social platforms are growing as news sources for kids, with over half of teens saying they get their news from social media sites and YouTube more so than from news organizations.\footnote{Common Sense Media and Survey Monkey. (2019). Teen news engagement: Key findings and toplines.}

As young people spend more of their time online, they are witnessing and perhaps even participating in online incivility, as evidenced by the ongoing rise in hate speech, trolling, and cancel culture. And with recent advances in artificial intelligence (AI) technology, the very way in which young people are interacting with each other, with social platforms, and with information is changing by the day, presenting new challenges around ethical use, the continued proliferation of misinformation, and safeguarding their own identities.

In today’s landscape, children are not all acquiring the skills they need to take advantage of technology’s opportunity or avoid its harms. To date, there has been no national adoption of a curriculum or training that imparts the skills or dispositions that children need to find healthy media balance, protect their privacy, navigate cyberbullying, hate speech, and digital mis/disinformation, and become critical thinkers and content creators, all in a technological landscape that is constantly evolving. While various curricula exist in the realm of online safety, the vast majority are limited to a small age range and focus on harm avoidance, rather than concurrently teaching students to effectively navigate the digital world and harness its power for a better future.
The Solution: Common Sense Education Digital Citizenship Curriculum

Common Sense's mission grew out of the belief that we can improve outcomes for all kids and families by providing the trustworthy information, education, and independent voice they need to thrive in a world of media and technology. Over 12 years ago, the organization helped bring the term "digital citizenship" into the common vernacular with the launch of its first Digital Literacy & Citizenship Curriculum. This launch spearheaded a shift from the fear-based and protectionist online safety curricula of the time to a more empowering, student-centered pedagogy that encouraged young people to think critically about their digital lives and participate in safe, healthy, and responsible ways.

**Digital citizenship refers to a set of skills and dispositions in which we think critically, make healthy choices, and participate responsibly in the digital world.**

Since then, Common Sense has built an award-winning K-12 Digital Citizenship Curriculum that is comprehensive and of high quality, based on the best available research and thought leadership in the space. We have consistently seen strong teacher demand for our curriculum specifically, and for resources to support educators and cultivate their confidence and skills when teaching thorny topics and addressing digital dilemmas. And Common Sense has developed a trusted brand in delivering this educational intervention. Today we reach 1.2 million educators in 88,000 schools across the U.S. Our reach is primarily public and charter schools, including 80% of Title I schools. Internationally, we reach 4,900 schools, with a fifth of our educator audience from regions around the globe.\(^7\)

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\(^7\) The top countries we reach include Canada, U.K., and Australia.
Today we reach 1.2 million educators, 88,000 schools in the U.S., 80% of Title I schools, and 4,900 schools internationally.

After assessing schools’ needs, and with supporting resources, we launched the first free, comprehensive Digital Literacy & Citizenship Curriculum for schools in 2010. Developed in partnership with Professor Howard Gardner and the Good Play Project at Project Zero at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, the curriculum was based on research that showed young people were falling into ethical fault lines in their use of new media. The curriculum, available in English and Spanish, includes 73 lessons across grades K–12 (age 5 to 18) and incorporates engaging videos, activities, and thought-provoking dilemmas, as well as student interactives and games, and also includes resources for parents and caregivers, professional development for educators, and implementation guides for schools.

We designed the program to take a whole-community approach to digital citizenship, knowing that the challenges and opportunities for students’ use of media span the domains of school and home, and that this issue involves key stakeholders across the school community. We have partnered with schools and districts across the country by helping them implement our Digital Citizenship Curriculum, and we support them to develop a positive culture of digital citizenship.

"The students I teach are spending about 7 hours consuming digital content each day. I believe educators need to have a bigger role in helping students manage their digital life. I would like to help students develop effective strategies in balancing their digital and non-digital lives."
— High School Teacher, CA

"The importance of digital citizenship has expanded since the pandemic and remote learning so this has truly helped my students become more autonomous, responsible, and confident with digital resources."
— Middle School Teacher, New York City

18 The original curriculum was made possible by support from the MacArthur Foundation.
20 We offer the following digital games and interactives that can be used in conjunction with the Curriculum: Digital Passport, Digital Compass, Social Media Test Drive, and Digital Connections. Note that Digital Passport and Digital Connections will be retired as of June 2024.
21 We also offer the curriculum in U.K. English and Welsh.
Our Approach

Common Sense takes a whole-community approach to digital citizenship by including students, educators, school leaders, and families in learning. To support schools and educators in implementing the curriculum effectively, we offer robust professional development opportunities through targeted support in person and online via live webinars, interactive workshops, and self-paced training. We also provide opportunities for educators, schools, and districts to get recognized and badged for their work through our Common Sense Recognition program. In addition, we provide family engagement resources that help to foster a strong home-school connection by providing parents and caregivers with tips and activities to reinforce learning at home and increase their engagement in their children’s digital lives.

As with any curriculum on media and technology, our Digital Citizenship Curriculum has been revised and iterated upon multiple times since 2010, with the most recent major overhaul released in 2019. In this version of the curriculum, we continued being advised by and collaborating with Project Zero at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, and specifically by Dr. Carrie James and Dr. Emily Weinstein, based on their latest research on the pressing needs of students, teachers, and families, and the latest methods of teaching digital citizenship effectively.

The Digital Citizenship Curriculum is framed around six core topics—informed by research, including Project Zero’s studies of young people—that pose opportunities and challenges for young people. Each grade level includes one lesson per topic, and each topic is addressed using developmentally appropriate pedagogical approaches from grades K–12.

The Digital Citizenship Curriculum is designed to foster both the necessary skills and the essential dispositions for digital citizenship. Although it’s important for students to learn the practical skills needed to navigate the digital world, they also need to cultivate dispositions to enact those skills in healthy ways in their everyday lives. We need to help students develop crucial digital citizenship skills, like how to create strong passwords and protect private information, assess the credibility of online sources, and consider how an online comment might make another person feel. But we also want to build dispositions that will help them put those skills into practice. Based on the research from James and Weinstein, we developed five Digital Citizenship Dispositions that guided the development of the pedagogical approach and lessons in the curriculum.22

As the media and tech landscape continues to evolve, so do the needs and priorities of schools and districts. Whether it’s new topics and trends that arise (e.g., the rise of artificial intelligence) or shifts in priorities and programming for schools (e.g., distance learning during the pandemic, the need for shorter, more student-directed lessons, or the emphasis on social and emotional learning), we continue to create new, relevant digital citizenship resources that are meant to expand upon and offer additional entry points for educators beyond our flagship curriculum. For example, we’ve developed more in-depth sets of lessons and resources to help students explore Digital Citizenship Quick Activities (2020), News and Media Literacy (2020), Digital Life Dilemmas (2021), SEL in Digital Life (2022), Civics in Digital Life (2022), and in 2023 Digital Well-Being lessons to support youth mental health and well-being as part of our Healthy Young Minds initiative.

This report looks at what we know and what we have learned about the impact of our latest Digital Citizenship Curriculum program. We will look at three core areas: how schools implement our Digital Citizenship Curriculum, the impact on student learning, and how schools are engaging parents and caregivers.

**Six Digital Citizenship Topics**
- Media Balance & Well-Being
- Privacy & Security
- Digital Footprint & Identity
- Relationships & Communication
- Cyberbullying, Digital Drama & Hate Speech
- News & Media Literacy

**Digital Citizenship Disposition**
- Slow down and self-reflect
- Explore perspectives with curiosity and empathy
- Seek facts and evaluate evidence
- Envision options and impacts
- Take action and responsibility

**Implementing Digital Citizenship in Schools**

Although schools across the country are increasingly incorporating digital citizenship and online safety into education plans, there is little information in the research literature on how educators, schools, and districts are implementing digital citizenship. In our 2019 survey, we found that approximately 60% of U.S. teachers reported using digital citizenship materials in their classrooms, with cyberbullying cited as the most frequently addressed topic.  

At Common Sense, we support schools and provide resources that accompany the Digital Citizenship Curriculum to aid teachers, schools, and districts in implementation. We provide professional development training, videos, webinars, an implementation guide, and a self-paced Teaching Digital Citizenship course. We have a team of staff who work with schools and districts on the ground in different regions across the country and in the U.K., and we deeply engage with districts including Los Angeles Unified Public School District, Omaha Public Schools, and the New York City Department of Education. And over the years we have learned a great deal about how schools are implementing digital citizenship education. We have seen a growing need for digital citizenship in schools, and they have prioritized it as an important foundation for effective digital learning. As schools use technology, they want to mitigate the negative issues that arise, and enhance the positive, collaborative, and effective uses of technology for learning. They recognize that digital citizenship is a set of essential life skills for students.

Digital citizenship is a fairly new discipline, and we have observed that many schools don’t know where to start. Some schools have initiatives that they connect digital citizenship to, such as social and emotional learning, STEM, restorative justice, and computer science. We also see digital citizenship being taught in subject area curricula, including English language arts, history, social studies, civics, math, and science. We also see it as part of advisory, homeroom, or an elective. Additionally, we know that digital citizenship is taught by educators in different roles, whether classroom teachers, library or media specialists, technology coordinators, health educators, or school

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24 An average of 2,000 users per month complete the Teaching Digital Citizenship self-paced course.
25 The U.S. regions we have supported since 2010 include: San Francisco Bay Area, CA; Los Angeles, CA; Omaha, NE; Denver, CO; Pittsburgh, PA; Chicago, IL; New York, NY; Texas; and Washington, D.C. In 2023, we have staff on the ground supporting schools in the San Francisco Bay Area, CA; Los Angeles, CA; Chicago, IL; New York, NY; and Omaha, NE.
counselors. Sometimes teaching falls to one person, whereas at other times it is spread across a faculty team in the school or district. There isn’t a one-size-fits-all approach to implementing digital citizenship—it’s taught in many different areas, by educators in different roles. However, we have learned about who is most likely to teach digital citizenship, in what grade levels, and how they are implementing our curriculum.

Implementation: Key Findings

The six key findings below are from a 2023 survey of educators who report using and implementing Common Sense's Digital Citizenship Curriculum.26

1. The Digital Citizenship Curriculum is used mostly by veteran classroom teachers,27 librarians/media specialists, technology coordinators, and instructional coaches in public and charter schools.28

The Digital Citizenship Curriculum is used by a broad audience of educators to equip students with digital citizenship skills and dispositions. Seventy-two percent of survey respondents teaching digital citizenship work in public or charter schools, 15% work in private or independent schools, and 5% are district professionals. Forty-five percent of respondents work in Title 1 schools, although the percentage from this survey is lower than our overall audience reach into 80% of Title 1 schools. Most surveyed (72%) are veteran educators of 13 or more years. And a high percentage of respondents have been teaching our Digital Citizenship Curriculum for several years, including 46% for three to six years, and 21% for more than seven years.

26 To learn more about how educators are implementing the Digital Citizenship Curriculum, in May 2023 we worked with researchers at the University of New Hampshire to conduct a survey of educators (educators registered with Common Sense Education) who report using our Digital Citizenship Curriculum. Of the 2,097 educators who responded to the survey, 83% (n=1,749) reported that they have used or overseen the Digital Citizenship Curriculum at least since 2019. These findings are based on that sample of educators.

27 A “veteran educator” typically refers to someone who has worked in education for more than three years, but in this survey many respondents were quite beyond that qualification at 13 or more years working in education.

28 Note that this finding does not indicate low usage in independent schools, but it aligns with the breakdown of the school types in the United States.
The Digital Citizenship Curriculum is used by educators with varying job titles and roles, and across different subject areas. We found that most educators are classroom teachers, followed by librarians or media specialists, and then technology coordinators or instructional coaches. Below are some use cases of how these audiences typically integrate digital citizenship:

- Classroom teachers incorporating digital citizenship in their lessons
- Librarians and media specialists teaching students online safety and effective use of technology
- Technology coordinators and instructional coaches supporting schools with online safety, STEM, and responsible use of technology
- School and district leaders, including principals, curriculum specialists, and other technology leads, who oversee site-wide implementation of digital citizenship to support policies and standard

2. The Digital Citizenship Curriculum is taught most often in grades 3–6, with half of students in all grades receiving all lessons in all topic areas.

Though the Digital Citizenship Curriculum includes lessons for grades K–12, according to several data sources, including our survey, lesson quiz traffic data, and website traffic data, grades 3–6 receive the most digital citizenship education. And based on an estimate from our lesson quiz data, the average teacher reaches 37 students per lesson taught.  

The curriculum includes six topics, with one lesson per topic, per grade level. Educators report that they teach an average of 4.5 of the 6 lessons, with nearly half (49%) reporting that all six topic areas are covered. There were some differences by grade level and topic. While 54% of elementary school-level respondents covered all six topics, 40% of middle or high school-level respondents reported this.

Elementary schools teach a greater number of topics in general than middle and high school. There were also notable grade-level and school differences across educator goals in teaching digital citizenship. High school-level educators identified critical thinking and media literacy as a more important goal than did elementary educators. For elementary educators, balance around screen time and caution about who students talk to online was significantly more important than for educators of older students. Title 1 schools were less likely to teach News & Media Literacy than non-Title 1 schools (54% versus 62%, respectively).

![Figure 3. Percentage of Topics Covered](image)

29 To learn more about our lesson quiz data, see the next section, “Assessing Student Learning.” Note that this figure is based on three percent of our total users who utilize our digital quizzes.
3. Most digital citizenship is taught at the classroom level, and elementary educators have more time for lessons than do middle and high school educators.

Of survey respondents, 48% taught digital citizenship only, 42% taught and oversaw digital citizenship implementation, and 10% oversaw implementation. The level of digital citizenship implementation (meaning how widespread implementation is at any given site) occurs mostly in classrooms. In 53% of cases, one person is responsible for teaching multiple lessons and classrooms across the school. For 23% of respondents, individual teachers can teach whichever lessons they like. And 13% of respondents report that a group of teachers split the lesson teaching responsibilities across classes. Elementary schools were more likely to implement the curriculum school-wide and district-wide than middle and high schools.

The time spent teaching digital citizenship ranged from 20–40 minutes per lesson for most educators (57%), to one quarter spending 40–60 minutes per lesson. Elementary school educators reported having a longer period of time to teach each lesson than middle and high school educators, who reported having to fit lessons into time slots of 20 minutes or less. Title 1 schools tended to have shorter lessons and less time to teach digital citizenship. This may be due to a particular set of challenges with school structure, implementation, and student population.

The length of time spent teaching each unit of digital citizenship also varied, with over half of educators (55%) reporting teaching lessons within a time frame of 2–12 weeks. Middle and high school educators were more likely to complete the full curriculum over a shorter period of time, including 20% who completed the lessons within a week.

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30 Note that, unless respondents are in charge of digital citizenship for their school or district, they may not be fully knowledgeable about the level of implementation at their sites.

31 Each grade level (except for K–2) includes six 30–50 minute lessons, addressing one lesson per digital citizenship topic.

32 Each grade level (except for K–2) includes six 30–50 minute lessons, addressing one lesson per digital citizenship topic.
4. Most digital citizenship is taught because it aligns with the school's mission, because it aligns with SEL education, and/or because of concerns about online privacy, sharing, and cyberbullying.

The reasons for implementing the Digital Citizenship Curriculum relate to a variety of needs for schools. Over half report the reason they are teaching digital citizenship is to align with their school's or district's mission. In Title 1 schools, mandates are a more common driver of digital citizenship education than in non-Title 1 schools.

When asked about the top behaviors that educators most wanted students to develop as a result of digital citizenship education, respondents reported that they most hoped to achieve awareness about sharing online, data privacy, and reducing cyberbullying.

More than 40% of respondents selected the top three goals below:

- Being aware of the implications of what they’re posting online (46%)
- More caution with their online data privacy (43%)
- Reduced cyberbullying and hate speech (42%)
- Critical thinking and media literacy skills about information online (37%)
- More balance around screen time (32%)
- More caution around who students talk to online (27%)
- Awareness of how the internet may affect mental health and well-being (25%)
- Reduced sexting behavior (3%)

FIGURE 5. Reasons for Implementing Digital Citizenship

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alignment with school mission</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part of Social-emotional learning</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology use and remote learning</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fulfill school/district mandate</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Onboarding for school devices</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Response to a negative incident</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
When asked about the types of behavior that respondents most hoped students would learn from the lessons, educators from elementary schools were more concerned about screen-time balance and students being cautious about who they were talking to online, while middle and high school respondents were more concerned about critical thinking, media literacy, and the implications of what gets posted online. And while the top concerns of Title 1 schools included students' awareness of the implications of what they post online, data security, and reducing bullying and hate speech, non-Title 1 schools were more likely to want student outcomes around media literacy and media balance.

"Any school or district with 1:1 technology implementation should have an adopted digital citizenship curriculum. Most districts are either unaware of the importance or indifferent to the need."
— Educator

5. Educators love lesson videos and adhere to the lessons, with some adaptations.

The Digital Citizenship Curriculum includes lesson plans with slides, worksheets for students, parent engagement materials, a lesson quiz, and several of the lessons include a video. The lessons are under a Creative Commons license, which allows teachers to adapt certain materials to meet the unique needs of their classrooms.

In addition, Common Sense provides interactive games that can be used optionally alongside the Digital Citizenship Curriculum. Some educators reported using the games as well, the largest portion of which were elementary educators using Digital Passport.

"I always look at everything you create, and it forms most of my ideas for what I teach. However, I try to continue to be responsive to my students' needs and also bring my own ideas to the course. So, I often manipulate and alter your resources."
— Educator

Of the lesson materials, educators reported most often using lesson plans (80%), slides (79%), and videos (86%). Most educators (71%) report adhering "somewhat" to what is provided in the lessons, with some modifications, whereas 24% adhere to the lesson plans completely. The lesson plans and slides were the most adapted materials. There were also a number of differences in the types of materials used by different grade levels. Elementary school users were significantly more likely to use family tips and activities, videos, slides, and lesson plans. Middle and high school users were more likely to use end-of-lesson quizzes.

33 Quizzes are included for grades 3–12.
6. Educators feel mostly supported by schools to teach and implement digital citizenship, but there's room for improvement.

Over half of the respondents either strongly agreed (24%) or somewhat agreed (29%) that they received adequate support from their school or district in teaching or implementing the Digital Citizenship Curriculum. That said, 18% disagreed that they had received adequate support.

The majority of educators (64%) received training by completing digital citizenship professional development, including the "Teaching Digital Citizenship" self-paced online training provided by Common Sense (26%), Common Sense webinars (20%), in-person training provided by their school or district (11%), and in-person training by Common Sense staff (4%). Most educators feel supported by their school or district, but many indicated the wish for more training and support.

"I think that I have become more aware of concepts that I knew existed but did not know how to apply it within my daily teaching and classroom activities. The [Common Sense] digital citizenship course is one that truly opened my eyes to the things that our students should be cognizant of while interacting online."
— Teacher, Anguilla

To provide guidance, support, and to recognize the great work that schools are doing in implementing digital citizenship, in 2015 we launched the Common Sense Education Recognition program. Our Recognition program provides a road map for educators, schools, and districts to implement digital citizenship and create a positive culture of digital learning. This free program includes professional learning, teaching lessons, tips and resources for engaging families, and opportunities for educators to reflect on their own classroom technology practices. Educators get a certification and a badge that illustrates their work and commitment. We also provide an Ambassador program for those deeply engaged educators who are digital citizenship leaders in their school communities. Each year on average, we certify:

- 5,000 educators
- 1,500 schools
- 40 districts
- 150 Ambassadors

Through our Recognition community, we estimate reaching 3.8 million students directly with our lessons and resources.

In summary, these survey findings indicate high levels of satisfaction by educators who use and implement Common Sense's digital citizenship program. We see that classroom teachers, librarians, and media specialists are teaching most of the lessons in the Digital Citizenship Curriculum, with upper elementary and lower middle schools students as the largest percentage of students receiving our curriculum. About half of the respondents implemented the curriculum fully, with some adaptations, and comments suggest that overall they find our resources helpful and necessary. We hear that schools are implementing digital citizenship mainly because of their mission and as part of SEL education, and that they are most concerned with online sharing, data privacy, and preventing cyberbullying. And though many educators are receiving training, there is room for improvement and they want more support.
Assessing Student Learning

The Digital Citizenship Curriculum has always included tools for educators to assess student learning and measure progress, in the form of formative assessments within lessons, lesson quizzes, and in prior iterations of the curriculum, unit quizzes. In earlier versions of the curriculum, though we provided assessments, we lacked the technical functionality to be able to safely and anonymously collect assessment data from students. This changed in 2020 when we launched a digital version of our lesson quizzes that allowed us to collect anonymized data from students. This latest set of digital lesson quizzes is available for grades 3–12, and was designed for educators who use the Google Classroom integration. Though the lesson quiz data provides us with meaningful insights about student learning, it is important to acknowledge that it’s not representative of all curriculum users, as the digital quizzes are accessed by only a small portion of our overall user base.

How We Assess Student Learning

At the time we were developing the digital quiz tool, we were also collaborating with Project Zero at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, and Cornell University’s Social Media Lab, to revise our assessments. These revisions were based on the learning goals in the newest version of our curriculum, as well as research developments in how to measure digital citizenship. In the lesson quizzes, we use a triadic approach in which we measure three factors: knowledge, inclination, and sensitivity. Each of these factors is used as a proxy for measuring behavioral change for each of the six core topics of digital citizenship covered in the curriculum. We also include a fourth measure of confidence, which measures students’ feelings of confidence in understanding and enacting the learnings of the lesson. Though the quiz questions that measure knowledge, inclination, and sensitivity have correct and incorrect answers, confidence uses a self-reporting scale.

The triadic approach we use for lesson quizzes is derived from a theory called “triadic dispositions” in which there are three distinct components that are necessary for dispositional behavior: knowledge (ability), inclination, and sensitivity. Below is a breakdown of quiz question measurement factors and examples.

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34 Note that our digital lesson quiz is available only for teachers using Google Classroom integration. We chose this option due to technical constraints on data collection with other methods. The quiz user base is only a percentage of the overall number of educators and students using our lessons. Other educators can use a printable version of the quiz, but we are unable to access or collect that data. For more information, see the End-of-Lesson Quiz Guide.

35 Confidence is an ungraded question; it does not factor into the correct and incorrect lesson scores for the triadic factors.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Quiz Question Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Knowledge  | Knowledge (ability) concerns the basic capacity to carry out a behavior. Knowledge questions assess comprehension of key digital citizenship concepts, including defining vocabulary terms, or matching definitions to examples. | Which of the below is a clue that a message or email might be phishing?  
 a. It's from a "friend in trouble."  
 b. The message has a sense of urgency.  
 c. There are spelling and grammar errors in the message.  
 d. All of the above. |
| Inclination| Inclination concerns the motivation or impulse to engage in the behavior. Inclination questions measure the likelihood that a student would be able to demonstrate prosocial behaviors and digital citizenship skills from the lesson in their own lives. | Benny sees that Sasha is sad after playing a game online. A player posted mean comments about her. What should Benny do?  
 a. Tell Sasha to get over it.  
 b. Tell Sasha to send mean messages to the other player.  
 c. Ignore Sasha. It's not that big a deal.  
 d. Comfort Sasha and let her know that he's her friend. |
| Sensitivity| Sensitivity concerns the likelihood of noticing when it would be appropriate to engage in the behavior. Sensitivity questions focus on understanding why a situation is a problem, and identifying actions to address the problem. Frequently, these questions ask students to respond to scenarios and dilemmas. | Alejandro downloaded a new game on his phone. The game has two default settings. One setting sends notifications whenever one of your friends starts playing the game. The other displays a tracker of how many days in a row you have played the game. Why might Alejandro consider changing these default settings?  
 a. The default settings will make it more difficult to concentrate on the game.  
 b. The settings might distract him from other things he enjoys doing, and he'll end up spending too much time playing the game.  
 c. Not many of his friends play this game, so the settings are unnecessary.  
 d. You don't get a reward for playing the game, so the tracking display is not meaningful. |
| Confidence | Confidence questions use a three-point scale to measure students' perception of confidence in their ability to apply the learnings from the lesson in their own lives. | How confident do you feel in understanding the responsibilities you have to yourself and others when posting on social media?  
 a. I feel very confident.  
 b. I feel somewhat confident.  
 c. I do not feel confident. |

Every grade from 3–12 includes six lessons, with one lesson per topic. And each lesson quiz includes five questions per quiz. The questions vary in terms of the number of items that measure knowledge, inclination, and sensitivity, though each quiz typically includes at least one of each triadic factor. The final question of every quiz measures student confidence.

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37 This quiz question is from the sixth-grade lesson "Don't Feed the Phish." (The bolded answer is correct.)  
38 This quiz question is from the fourth-grade lesson "Be a Super Digital Citizen." (The bolded answer is correct.)  
39 This quiz question is from the 11th-grade lesson "Can Media Be Addictive?" (The bolded answer is correct.)  
40 This quiz question is from the eighth-grade lesson "Social Media and Digital Footprints: Our Responsibilities." For this question, there is no correct answer, since student responses will vary.  
41 We do not offer lesson quizzes for grades K–2, due to developmental appropriateness and low reading level. We do provide grades K–2 with a "Pause and Reflect" lesson wrap-up where students can demonstrate their learning.  
42 Quiz question types include multiple choice, true/false, fill-in-the-blank, multi-select, and drag and drop.
Student Learning: Key Findings

In the following data from our lesson quizzes, we see the promising impact of our Digital Citizenship Curriculum on students. From quiz data spanning 2020–2023, we have an average of:

- 616,380 total quizzes taken
- 7.2 million student responses
- 289,515 unique students have taken a quiz
- 7,761 unique teachers have assigned quizzes
- 37 students are reached on average per educator

We see the highest rate of quiz completions in grades 5, 6, and 7, which aligns with our website traffic and usage data.

Based on the data from our lesson quizzes from August 2020 to September 2023, we found several key findings that demonstrate the impact of the lessons on students:

1. Students scored an average of 77% correct on lesson quizzes.

   In looking at student performance across all question types, digital citizenship topics, and grade levels, we see a fairly stable average score of 3.1 out of 4 questions marked correctly—or a 77% average correctness score. This average score is fairly consistent across all grades, ranging from 3 to 3.4 out of 4. Broken down by grade level, the average correctness score increases by grade level, with 76% in grades 3–5, 80% in middle school, and 83% in high school. This could mean that as students get older, gain more access to and usage of technology, and are exposed to a variety of situations and dilemmas in their digital lives, they gain more life experience to support their knowledge, inclination, and sensitivity.

   ![FIGURE 6. Average Quiz Score by Grade](image)

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43 This time frame includes all lesson quiz data available to date through September 30, 2023.
44 According to educators responding to our 2022–2023 annual survey data.
2. Students scored highest on inclination and sensitivity questions.

In breaking down the quizzes by question type, we see the following average correctness scores across all grades:

- 74.4% for knowledge questions
- 81.2% for sensitivity questions
- 81.6% for inclination questions

Inclination increases in each grade band, which shows that as students get older, they are increasingly likely to recognize and demonstrate digital citizenship behaviors in their own lives. There is also a jump in performance on sensitivity questions from grades 3–5 to grades 6–8, which shows that students are making strides from elementary to middle school in demonstrating an understanding of why certain dilemmas in their digital lives are problematic, and being able to identify appropriate responses.

While we see slightly lower scores for knowledge across grade bands, this may indicate that vocabulary or terminology might be challenging, especially in middle school where concepts such as humane design or hate speech are introduced and discussed. Even so, students are showing—through their inclination and sensitivity scores—that they are likely to understand and enact the digital citizenship behaviors that are at the heart of each lesson.

![Figure 7. Question Type Performance](chart)

*FIGURE 7. Question Type Performance*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade 3-5</th>
<th>Knowledge</th>
<th>Inclination</th>
<th>Sensitivity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>74.7</td>
<td>79.1</td>
<td>76.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade 6-8</th>
<th>Knowledge</th>
<th>Inclination</th>
<th>Sensitivity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>73.7</td>
<td>81.9</td>
<td>84.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade 9-12</th>
<th>Knowledge</th>
<th>Inclination</th>
<th>Sensitivity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>76.4</td>
<td>88.5</td>
<td>84.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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45 Response data from 660,000 lesson quizzes completed during the 2021–2022 school year.
3. Lessons about "Relationships & Communication" and "Digital Footprint & Identity" scored highest across all grade levels.

In looking at student performance in all of the lesson quiz questions broken down by topic, we see that the highest scoring topics for all grade levels were for Relationships & Communication, and Digital Footprint & Identity. In grades 3–5, the second tier scores were for Media Balance & Well-Being, and Cyberbullying & Hate Speech lessons. Third tier scores were for Privacy & Security, and News & Media Literacy. Interestingly, the second and third tier scores by topic were reversed for middle and high school as compared to elementary school.

This shows that overwhelmingly, all grades show the most knowledge, inclination, and sensitivity related to learning outcomes for the topics Relationships & Communication (i.e., how to communicate safely and effectively, and build relationships with others online) and Digital Footprint & Identity (i.e., how to be careful and thoughtful about what you share online). Though the differences between tier scores are a matter of just a few percentage points, there is a slight trend that secondary students may struggle more with issues related to Media Balance and Cyberbullying, whereas upper elementary students may need more support understanding Privacy & Security as well as News & Media Literacy concepts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tier 1 (highest score)</th>
<th>Tier 2</th>
<th>Tier 3 (lowest score)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grades 3–5</td>
<td>Relationships &amp; Communication</td>
<td>Media Balance &amp; Well-Being</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Digital Footprint &amp; Identity</td>
<td>Cyberbullying &amp; Hate Speech</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grades 6–8</td>
<td>Privacy &amp; Security</td>
<td>Privacy &amp; Security</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grades 9–12</td>
<td>News &amp; Media Literacy</td>
<td>Cyberbullying &amp; Hate Speech</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. Most students report confidence in understanding the learnings from each lesson.

When looking at measures of student confidence, the majority of students reported an average confidence rate of 94% across all topics. As for confidence compared by grade band, high school students report 98% confidence, followed by 94% for middle schoolers, and 90% for elementary. One interpretation of this finding is that, as students get their own devices, they may be exposed to more opportunities and dilemmas in the digital world where they have been able to learn and apply real-world skills. That’s why it’s important to start teaching these skills early in the elementary and middle school grades.

94% of students feel confident in understanding the lessons.

5. Most educators say that their students have learned digital citizenship skills.

In addition to the findings of the quiz data, according to our end-of-year survey results, 93% of educators report that based on using our Digital Citizenship Curriculum, their students have learned digital citizenship skills. Trends from our annual surveys show that educators who use our resources report high levels of satisfaction with the impact of our digital citizenship resources. Over the years, we have received thousands of testimonials from classroom teachers, tech coaches, librarians, principals, curriculum specialists, and more stating that they see the impact of our curriculum in their students and school communities.

"My students were very engaged in the conversations surrounding these topics. I think they actually understand the importance of this to their real lives."

— Elementary School Teacher, Maryland

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46 Response data from 660,000 lesson quizzes completed during the 2021–2022 school year, including “very confident” and “somewhat confident.”
47 This average is from end-of-year surveys from the following school years: 2020–2021, 2021–2022, 2022–2023.

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"I have been teaching with these resources for 5 years now and I see quite a difference in the students' knowledge of how to respond to problems in the online gaming world. I used to worry about the students giving too much information to strangers, but now they are excited to tell me how they respond to unsolicited information requests. I'm so proud that they know how to keep safe online. It is still important to continue to stress those skills, but I feel they are understanding and using them."
— Technology Coach, West Virginia

"I believe my students are more inclined to be an upstander rather than a bystander when it comes to recognizing when a friend is being cyberbullied. A student came forward with an image that had been shared without another students' consent. I was told of this issue and it was promptly resolved. This friend was an outstanding upstander, and I believe the curriculum helped students see that they can act to protect their friends."
— Middle School Teacher, Idaho

All in all, the impact of the Digital Citizenship Curriculum on student learning shows positive results in quiz scores in knowledge, inclination, and sensitivity; high confidence levels; and testimonials from educators and schools. Overall this data is promising, showing that students are grasping the learning objectives of the lessons, and learning skills and dispositions across the six digital citizenship topics. This quiz data also illustrates that students are indicating high sensitivity in understanding why certain situations can be problematic or challenging, and understanding what actions they can take when faced with dilemmas in their digital lives. In essence, students are learning the skills and dispositions to think critically, make healthy choices, and participate responsibly in the digital world.

Engaging Parents, Caregivers, and Families in Digital Citizenship

Parents and caregivers have many concerns about media, technology, and devices. Two thirds of parents say that parenting is harder today than 20 years ago, with technology and media use as the top two reasons. Whether it's screen time, inappropriate content, online privacy, or supporting their children with learning at home, parents look to schools and educators for advice. As part of the Digital Citizenship Curriculum, we provide schools with take-home resources that accompany the lessons as they're taught, including conversation starters and tip sheets available in 20 languages. We also provide schools with videos and turnkey workshops for parent education events, for uses that include hosting a family night, sharing in newsletters, or as a link on the school or district website.

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When Montour County School District in Pennsylvania implemented a one-to-one laptop program, parents and caregivers voiced concerns about the readiness of all students to have direct and immediate access to an internet-enabled device. To address this need, the district adopted the Digital Citizenship Curriculum to help students establish habits for using technology in safe, healthy, and responsible ways.

Each year, in our Recognized Schools and Connected Schools, we reach 850,000 families. Most educators (61%) said they shared resources with parents and caregivers, with the most shared resources being printed handouts sent home with students, and links to Common Sense's articles and resources on the school or district webpage or parent portal. As part of a whole-community approach to digital citizenship, schools can engage parents and caregivers, many of whom have questions and concerns about how to guide their kids' media use. Similar to how schools vary their approaches to teaching digital citizenship to students, there is no one-size-fits-all approach to engaging parents, since each parent population is unique. Many schools reach parents through the educators teaching our lessons, who distribute materials for students to explore at home with their families. They also reach parents through in-person and virtual parent education events, newsletters, emails, and communication through apps and parent portals.

"I am excited to use this program as not only a parent, but an educator. As we go into a new world of digital technology and education, we have to adapt and ready our future generations to be prepared on how to be a digital citizen. I am excited to be a part of that change."

— Common Sense Educator, California

Common Sense's school outreach teams regularly conduct on-the-ground focus groups and online surveys to better understand the concerns and needs of families in these communities. For example, in California, Texas, and Arizona, Common Sense has worked with districts and schools to train teachers to address privacy concerns among undocumented immigrant families. Through schools, we are reaching millions of families to support digital equity via affordable internet access and digital literacy. In districts across the country that have seen a rise in racially targeted cyberbullying and online hate, Common Sense is working with district leaders and educators on

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49 We have impacted this many families through our Recognized Schools Program and Connected Schools Program, which require schools to share resources, educate, and engage parents and caregivers.
50 Based on our 2023 digital citizenship implementation survey.
implementing our Digital Citizenship Curriculum and family support as part of initiatives in mental health, student well-being, and racial and social justice. Demand for the curriculum and teacher support is high in districts with high proportions of students of color and new immigrant families. Teaching young people media and news literacy and how to recognize and combat the spread of misinformation on social media platforms is a top concern for educators and parents in these communities, but so is teaching digital literacy skills that parents view as essential to college and career readiness.

We continue to stay on top of the latest research and trends that parents and caregivers are concerned about, and provide family-friendly resources for schools to share with households. Schools remain an essential connector to families in supporting a whole-community approach to digital citizenship.

"Common Sense has had a profound impact on my role as a Digital Citizenship Teacher. I feel more comfortable keeping up with the ever changing technology/Digital Citizenship landscape. I also feel more comfortable sharing my knowledge with other educators or parents. In order for DigCit education to work, the parents and school building have to both be committed to providing the best content for kids. I have been so pleased with the updates made to the DigCit online curriculum!"

— Common Sense Educator, New York

"An impact Common Sense has had on our students is choosing what media to interact with and how to balance their online activities with other activities in their lives. They are pausing & thinking before posting or commenting on different media platforms. Parents and caregivers are taking time to have conversations with their children on media use. For our school culture, staff and students are making efforts to be positive and respectful when interacting with others in real life or online."

— Common Sense Educator, Virginia
Conclusion

These findings show great promise and potential for digital citizenship education and the impact of our Digital Citizenship Curriculum. We are working to continue learning, iterating, and refining our program to support educators who teach with our resources, to aid classrooms, schools, and districts with implementation, to continue to gather data and measure student performance, and to provide schools with family engagement resources. With the challenges that the increasingly complex world of media and technology presents for the next generation, Common Sense will be there to help young people take control of their digital lives. By addressing the real-life challenges that students face today, we are equipping them with the skills and dispositions they need to succeed as digital learners, leaders, and citizens of tomorrow.