



Research Brief

Social Media

**Question: What do principals need to know about social media?
What are the implications for schools? How are schools responding to these issues?**

In A Nutshell

The growing use of social media by students and adults is impacting schools. A recent Pew study found that 73% of teens use social-networking sites to connect with others. Social media includes blogs, wikis, and podcasts as well as sites such as [MySpace](#), [Facebook](#), and [LinkedIn](#). While such sites promote connection with others, their use has created issues impacting schools. Students often don't understand the openness of such sites and frequently share potentially damaging or dangerous personal information, engage in electronic aggression because of the belief that their identity is masked by the anonymity of the Internet, join inappropriate or dangerous online communities or expose themselves to a predator.

While the potential dangers are real, schools have begun to recognize the potential of social media to positively impact instruction. The sites can be used to exchange curricular material or to engage students in discussion of class work. Many schools also use social networking sites to communicate with families and community. It is a way to promote their school and share information about the success of students and faculty.

Summary:

It's easy to dismiss social networking as solely a fascination of teen-agers and college students. But to do so would minimize one of the fastest growing trends in technology, the ability to easily and quickly connect with others. As with most innovations it has tremendous potential and serious risks. But social networking has quickly spread beyond teen-agers and is being used by businesses and professionals around the world to find jobs, market products and services, and connect with new clients. The fastest growing group of social networking users is grandparents who want to connect with distant grandchildren and share information about those grandchildren with family and friends. For many schools having an online presence has moved beyond the school website to include a Facebook page, (www.facebook.com) a Twitter account (www.twitter.com), and blogs by the principal and teachers.

A recent survey found that 73% of online teens use social-networking sites (<http://www.pewinternet.org/>). Most educators are aware of the explosive growth of social networking among students. The most popular sites are currently MySpace (www.myspace.com), Xanga (www.xanga.com) and Facebook (www.facebook.com). At social networking sites people can register, create their own personal profile including personal information and photos. They then make connections, or links, to other members in the virtual community. Members of each community can communicate with their "friends" and engage in a variety of communication including accessing personal web pages, blogs or discussion groups.

Particularly during high school teens become interested in attention and popularity. Social networking sites provide a way to socialize and meet new people. For some students this becomes a distraction. Begin part of a virtual community (MySpace has over 70 million visitors), is the digital equivalent of hanging out at the mall.

There are problems associated with social networking sites but generally are not the result of the site, but of the users. Every site includes a "User Agreement" that prohibits certain harmful activities but the sites do not generally monitor the use of their site.



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Social networking is characterized by the following (Mayfield, 2008):

- Participation – It encourages contributions and feedback from everyone who is interested.
- Openness – It is open to feedback and participation and encourages sharing of information.
- Conversation – It promotes two-way conversation rather than one-way communication.
- Community – It allows communities to form quickly and communicate effectively.
- Connectedness – It thrives on connectedness, using links to other people, sites and resources.

Social networking is a phenomenon impacting all segments of our society. Noted for its prevalence among teens, MySpace, is among the most popular with that group. Facebook, geared at college students, and LinkedIn, aimed at professionals, provide similar online communities. In all over 300+ social networking sites exist, some targeted at specific audiences (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_social_networking_websites, <http://www.socialmediawebsites.com/>).

A recent study (Pew Internet Life Project, 2009) found that 74% of Americans use the Internet and 60% have broadband access at home. The Internet and electronic devices designed to use the Internet are changing American society including American schools. A study funded by the Kaiser Family Foundation (2010) reported that 8 to 18 year-olds spend a great deal of time in various online activities.

Online Activities for 8-18 Year Olds	Participation
Social Networking	25%
Games	19%
Video Sites	16%
Instant Messaging	13%
Other Sites	12%
E-Mail	6%
Graphics/Photos	5%
Other	5%

Concerns About Social Networking

Real concerns about the use of social networking sites have emerged (Willard, 2006). The concerns emerged because the sites are attracting lots of teen users many of whom do not make good choices, many parents are not paying attention to what their children post on the sites, and dangerous strangers are attracted to the sites because users make poor choices and parents aren't paying attention.

The most frequent risky behaviors include:

- Disclosing potentially dangerous or damaging personal information. Many teens are unaware that what they post is public and will remain accessible to anyone.
- Spending an excessive amount of time online and avoiding other face-to-face interaction with teens and adults.
- Becoming seduced by a sexual predator or child pornographer, or posting sexually suggestive material.
- Being cruel to others or sending or posting harmful material online or through a cell phone (cyberbullying).
- Joining dangerous online communities by making connections with other at-risk youth or adults, sharing information, often creating the belief in the appropriateness of the shared activity.

(Adapted from Willard, 2006)

Implications for Schools



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The risks associated with social media are real. While the risks are serious, educators have begun to identify ways to leverage the potential of social networking to improve the educational experience of students. Both will be discussed in this section of the brief.

Social Networking and Youth Violence

As teens increasingly use social networking sites there is growing evidence that it may be used to promote inappropriate behavior. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (www.cdc.org) prepared a report on the impact of “electronic aggression.” The report found a growing problem with using electronic media for cyberbullying, Internet harassment and other forms of violent behavior. The study found that the percentage of young people reporting being a victim of electronic aggression between 9-35%. About 4% of youth reported behaving aggressively electronically. (http://www.cdc.org.ncipc/dvp/electronic_aggression.htm)

Social Media House Parties or Ragers – Students have always held house parties but more recently announcements about house parties have been shared on social networking sites. This has resulted in several cases where homes were significantly damaged and police needed to intervene to control the situation. The impact of a recent rager, posted on Facebook, is described in this ABC News report (<http://abcnews.go.com/GMA/TheLaw/teen-house-party-allegedly-caused-45000-damage-online/story?id=10258871>).

Flash Mob – A flash mob is a group of people who assemble suddenly in a public place for an event and quickly disperse. Social networking is used to announce the event. Recent examples include snowball fights during major snowstorms or gathering for a form of social protest. Several “flash mobs” have become violent when “uninvited” participants show up at the event. This story from a Philadelphia television station describes the impact of a “tweet” that convened a flash mob (<http://cbs3.com/local/Police.Respond.Thousands.2.1579054.html>). There are some examples of flash mobs in schools occurring after a “tweet.” This includes groups of students gathering after school both on and off of school grounds

Cyberbullying – The use of social networking sites or e-mail to threaten or harass others. Because virtually all students have access to the Internet or a cell phone they can easily connect to others. School personnel and law enforcement officials are more vigilant about intervening when instances of cyberbullying occur. A recent story about this issue is available at www.slate.com/id/2248764/.

What Schools Should Do

Schools need to work to limit non-educational access to the Internet, including social networking, during school hours. They should also be concerned about student use of these sites off-campus because involvement has the potential to negatively impact the school and its students.

Several steps for dealing with the use of social media have been identified.

- First, develop a clear policy with a focus on educationally valuable use of the Internet. Effective policies are supported by curriculum and professional development. Teachers should be expected to have students use the Internet only for high quality, well-planned instructional activities.
- Second, implement a comprehensive program to educate students and their families about online safety and responsible use.
- Third, develop a plan to monitor Internet use at school.
- Fourth, have appropriate consequences for inappropriate use of the Internet or social networking sites. Include administrators, school counselors, school psychologists, and school resource officers in developing an monitoring the plan.



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- Fifth, engage families in monitoring Internet use. Since most use occurs outside of school hours it is critical that parents understand the importance of monitoring their children's online activities and how they should respond when inappropriate use takes place.

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention provides the following specific suggestions for educators from *Electronic Media and Youth Violence: A Center for Disease Control Issue Brief* (www.cdc.gov/ncipc/dvp/YVP/electronic_aggression.htm).

1. **Explore current bullying prevention policies.** Examine policies to see if they need to be modified to reflect electronic aggression. If no policy current exists, look at samples from other school and district. Information about current laws on bullying and harassment are available at http://www.nasbe.org/healthy_schools/hs/index.php.
2. **Work collaboratively to develop policies** that protect the rights all of students and meet the needs of the state and or district served. Include district personnel, community members, families and students. The policy should also be based on evidence from research on best practices. The CDC provides the following suggestions.
 - Include a strong opening statement on the importance of creating a climate that demonstrates respect, support and caring and that does not tolerate harassment or bullying.
 - Be comprehensive and recognize the responsibilities of educators, law enforcement, caregivers, students and the technology industry in preventing electronic aggression.
 - Focus on increasing positive behaviors and skills such as problem-solving and social competency for students.
 - Emphasize that socially appropriate electronic behaviors will be exemplified by faculty and staff.
 - Clearly identify specific people and organizations responsible for implementing, enforcing, and evaluating the impact of the policy.
 - Explicitly describe codes of electronic conduct for all members of the school community, focusing on acceptable behaviors but also including rules prohibiting unsafe and aggressive behavior.
 - Explain the consequences for breaking rules and provide due process for those identified as breaking the rules.
3. **Explore current programs to prevent bullying and youth violence related to social media.** There are several evidence-based programs deal with both face-to-face aggression and electronic aggression.
4. **Provide training on electronic aggression for educators** and administrators. The training should include the definition, characteristics of victims and perpetrators, school or district policies, information about recent incidents in the district, legal responsibility for intervention and investigation, and resources for educators and other caregivers if they have concerns.
5. **Talk with Teens.** Provide students with an opportunity to discuss their concerns. For example, a writing assignment might be a way for students to discuss using electronic media safely and about the impact and consequences of its use.
6. **Create a positive school atmosphere.** Research shows that students who feel connected with their school, who think teachers care about them and are fair, who think the school rules are clear and fair are less likely to perpetrate any type of violence including electronic aggression.
7. **Have a plan in place for what should happen if an incident is brought to the attention of the school.** Rather than waiting for a problem to occur, be proactive and develop a thoughtful plan to address problems and concerns that are brought to your attention. Having a system in place may make students more likely to come forward with concerns and may support appropriate handling of the situation when it arises. Develop techniques for prevention and intervention that do not punish victims. Instead, create an atmosphere that



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encourages dialogue between educators and students and between families and children about their experience with electronic media.

8. **Work with Instructional Technology (IT) and support staff.** Often information is not shared with information technology (IT) staff so that they can respond and create the infrastructure and support necessary for classroom teachers to work effectively. They can help develop strategies to minimize the risks associated with electronic media.

Socializing Safely Online

OnGuard Online (www.onguardonline.gov/socialnetworking.html) a service of the Federal Trade Commission shares these tips for parents about safe social networking. The guidelines are also important for adults.

- **Understand what information should be private.** Tell them why it's important to keep some things – about themselves, family members and friends – to themselves. Information like their full name, Social Security number, street address, phone number, and family financial information — like bank or credit card account numbers — is private and should stay that way. Tell them not to choose a screen name that gives away too much personal information.
- **Use privacy settings to restrict who can access and post on you and your child's website.** Some social networking sites have strong privacy settings. Show your child how to use these settings to limit who can view their online profile, and explain to them why this is important.
- **Be clear that you should post only information that you are comfortable with others seeing.** Even if privacy settings are turned on, some — or even all — of your child's profile may be seen by a broader audience than you're comfortable with. Encourage your child to think about the language used in a blog, and to think before posting pictures and videos. Employers, college admissions officers, team coaches, and teachers may view your child's postings. Even a kid's screen name could make a difference. Encourage teens to think about the impression that screen names could make.
- **Remember that once you post information online, you can't take it back.** Even if they delete the information from a site, older versions may exist on other people's computers and be circulated online.
- **Know how your kids are getting online.** More and more, kids are accessing the Internet through their cell phones. Find out about what limits you can place on your child's cell phone. Some cellular companies have plans that limit downloads, Internet access, and texting; other plans allow kids to use those features only at certain times of day.
- **Talk with your kids about bullying.** Online bullying can take many forms, from spreading rumors online and posting or forwarding private messages without the sender's OK, to sending threatening messages. Tell your kids that the words they type and the images they post can have real-world consequences. They can make the target of the bullying feel bad, make the sender look bad – and, sometimes, can bring on punishment from the authorities. Encourage your kids to talk to you if they feel targeted by a bully.
- **Talk with your kids about avoiding sex talk online.** Recent research shows that teens that don't talk about sex with strangers online are less likely to come in contact with a predator. If you're concerned that your child is engaging in risky online behavior, you can search the blog sites they visit to see what information they're posting. Try searching by their name, nickname, school, hobbies, grade, or area where you live.
- **Tell your kids to trust their gut if they have suspicions.** If they feel threatened by someone or uncomfortable because of something online, encourage them to tell you. You can then help them report concerns to the police and to the social networking site. Most sites have links where users can immediately report abusive, suspicious, or inappropriate online behavior.
- **Read sites' privacy policies.** Spend some time with a site's privacy policy, FAQs, and parent sections to understand its features and privacy controls. The site should spell out your rights as a parent to review and delete your child's profile if your child is younger than 13.



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There are other examples of guidelines for the safe use of technology. They include:

Facebook – <http://www.allfacebook.com/2009/02/facebook-privacy/>

ConnectSafely - <http://www.connectsafely.org/>

SafeTeens.com – <http://www.safeteens.com.2009/09/02/back-to-school-advice-for-safe-ethical-social-networking/>

MySpace – <http://www.myspace-safety.org/myspace-safety-privacy-policy.aspx>

YouTube Safety Center - http://www.google.com/support/youtube/bin/request.py?contact_type=abuse&hl=en-US

How Schools Have Begun to Use Social Networking

Schools have begun to identify ways to capitalize on the advantages of social networking. These examples illustrate how schools have begun to use social media to improve communication and to instruction.

- iPhone “Apps” – Several schools have developed an iPhone app (<http://www.apple.com/webapps/>) for their school. The sites frequently share calendar information, student handbooks, school news, access to the school’s web site, and photos and videos.
- Facebook – Schools have begun to create their own Facebook (www.facebook.com) page. Other Facebook users can “friend” these pages and receive information about the school, its program, calendar events, and updates such as school closing.
- Twitter (www.twitter.com) – As with Facebook, some schools have begun to “tweet” parents and others about school activities, reminders about parent conferences or athletic events, and to announce school closings.
- Some schools use social networking to increase communication with parents and as a tool to recognize students and faculty.
- There are some social networking sites such as www.blogger.com, a free service from Google, where students can share their academic work with others.
- Many teachers and other staff members maintain their own profile on one or more social networking sites. There is growing concern about “friending” students because of the inability to control what may be shared or how students or their families might misinterpret it. But some districts limit employees having social networking accounts.
- Some schools use iTunesU (<http://www.apple.com/education/itunes-u/>), a feature of the iTunes store (<http://www.apple.com/itunes/>), that allows students to access, at no cost, instructional material provided by colleges, universities and some K-12 schools.
- Several schools encourage teachers and students to access podcasts and other social media as part of classroom instruction.
- Some schools have begun to use social networking sites for instructional purposes. Teachers use YouTube videos in classes, or ask students to create videos and post them on YouTube for others to access and critique. The Flat Classroom Project (www.flatclassroomproject.org/New+Projects+0910) is one example. At this site educators developed social-networking sites for use in class or for assignments to be completed at home.
- Some classes create their own web page and use it to create classroom community, to share information, or to recognize student accomplishments.
- Several states have course content available online at iTunes U. They include Utah, Florida, Michigan, Maine and Arizona.
- Some schools put information about school including student orientation programs, course selection information and material online or at iTunesU.
- Similarly some K-12 school districts have placed curricular materials for students online at iTunesU.
- Some schools are using social media to profile accomplishments of teachers and students.
- Some schools use social media to ask questions and gather feedback.
- It is common for schools to use a Wiki for large projects. Wiki’s allow members of a large committee or those working on a large project to share information and documents as well as comment on other work that is posted.
- Schools are beginning to consider the use of e-Books rather than adopting traditional hardcover textbooks.



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Terminology Related to Social Media

The growth of social media and digital technology has led to terms unique to the area. They include:

- Asynchronous** – Describes events where members gather at their convenience and do not require all participants to gather at the same time.
- Blended Learning** – Learning that includes both face-to-face experiences as well as technology supported learning.
- Blog** – A website that functions as a personal or corporate journal with comments, reflections, and hyperlinks to other sites and information. You can create a free blog at <http://www.blogger.com>.
- Chat Rooms** – A place online where a group of people can visit, or chat, and exchange views, opinions, and other information. Usually requires that the user sign in so that you have a name in the room and can then see who else is in the room.
- E-Mail** – A system for sending and receiving messages electronically over a computer network and between personal computers.
- Instant Messaging (IM)** – The ability to send another individual a text-based message in real time over the Internet.
- Podcast** – An audio or video file released on the Internet and available for download through various syndication services.
- RSS (Really Simple Syndication)** – A way to subscribe to a site's content and being alerted to new updates through the use of the site's web browser or an RSS aggregator like Mac OSX's NetNewsWire (www.newsgator.com/Individuals/NetNewsWire/) or SharpReader for Windows (www.sharpreader.net/).
- Social Bookmarking** – A way to create web bookmarks available to others. Sites providing this service allow users to categorized bookmarks with keywords.
- Streaming Audio or Video** – Content that is displayed as it is delivered and is not downloaded for viewing or listening.
- Synchronous** – Events that require participants to gather at the same time. Often used for collaborative activities or for a chat or phone call.
- Texting** - A colloquial term used to describe the exchange brief written messages between mobile phones.
- Webinar** – A web-based seminar or presentation that usually includes web-based audio and video to provide for interaction.
- Wiki** – A website that allows multiple users to add or edit content. Wiki's are great for collaborative work as when working on a large project with team members in more than one location. Free wiki's may be created at <http://www.wikispaces.com/> and <http://www.wiki.com/>.

Adapted from: Journal of Staff Development, February 2010, p. 8.

Social Networking Tools

- Diigo** (www.diigo.com) - Provides annotation, storage and sharing of web bookmarks with others.
- Dimdim** (www.dimdim.com) - Provides web conferencing services.
- Flickr** (www.flickr.com) - A site for posting, organizing and sharing photos.
- Moodle** (<http://moodle.org/>) - Free, open-source course management software.
- Ning** (www.ning.com) - Do-it-yourself, interest-based social networks.
- Skype** (www.skype.com) - Allows the user to make voice calls over the Internet.
- Teacher Tube** (www.teachertube.com) - Provides video clips that can be used in teaching as well as shared documents, photos and community forums.
- Twitter** (<http://twitter.com>) – A micro-blogging site where you can share information in no more than 140 characters.
- VoiceThread** (www.voicethread.com) - For development of collaborative slideshows that incorporate images, video, audio, written word and other media.



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Digital Library Tools

The ability to store and read books, newspapers and other materials on a single easy-to-use electronic device has arrived. There are several options but the most popular include:

Amazon Kindle – Currently the most popular device for reading e-books. It is very portable and uses the wireless Whispernet system to deliver books directly to the Kindle via a cell phone network. The basic Kindle can hold 1,500 books and the “big” Kindle holds 3,500. Increasing font size and moving books to your digital library are easy to do.

Sony Reader – There are two Sony Readers, the Pocket Edition and the Touch Edition. Both are simple to use and allow you to increase font size. Slots are included for expansion on the Touch Edition. Both versions have room for only 350 books in internal memory.

iPad – The most recent addition is the iPad from Apple. As this brief is written the iPad has just released. The early reviews are very positive about the ability to download all types of media, including books and newspapers. The iPad screen provides a larger and more versatile format for enjoying these media. Already several universities have said they will provide all students with iPad's that can be used to access digital media as part of class work.

Conclusion

The future of social media is difficult to predict. Whether we continue to use social networking sites and other forums (blogs, Wikis, podcasts) to communicate and interact is the subject of much speculation. What is certain is that the use of technology will continue to shape our lives and the relationships we have with others. As with most things, there are tremendous advantages as well as risks in embracing these new technologies.

Online Resources:

Popular Social Media Websites

Bebo	http://www.bebo.com
Blogger	http://blogger.com/start
Facebook	http://www.facebook.com
LinkedIn	http://www.linkedin.com
MySpace	http://www.myspace.com
Twitter	http://www.twitter.com
Wikia	http://www.wikia.com/wiki/Wikia
YouTube	http://www.youtube.com

General Information About Social Media

Wikipedia's List of Social Networking Sites as of March 2010

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_social_networking_websites

Directory of Social Media Websites

<http://www.socialmediawebsites.com/>

What is Social Media? – An e-Book (Mayfield, 2008)

www.icrossing.co.uk/.../What_is_Social_Media_iCrossing_ebook.pdf

Pew Internet & American Life Project

<http://www.pewinternet.org/>



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Impact of Social Media on Schools Wiki

<http://horizonproject.wikispaces.com/Impact+on+Education+SocialNetworking>

Information on Social Networking Safety

Guide to Social Networking Safety

<http://www.onguardonline.gov/topics/social-networking-sites.aspx>

Schools and Online Social Networking

www.educationworld.com/a_issues/issues/issues423.shtml

Center for Safe Schools

www.safeschools.info/resources.php

Center for Disease Control and Prevention – New Technology and Youth Violence

www.cdc.gov/ncipc/dvp/electronic_aggression.htm

Electronic Media and Youth Violence: A Center for Disease Control Issue Brief

www.cdc.gov/ncipc/dvp/YVP/electronic_aggression.htm

Podcast on Electronic Violence from Center for Disease Control

<http://www2c.cdc.gov/podcasts/player.asp?f=7306>

Advice for Safe and Ethical Social Networking

<http://www.safeteens.com/2009/09/02/back-to-school-advice-for-safe-ethical-social-networking/>

Online Safety Advice from MySpace

http://www.myspace.com/pressroom?url=/article_display.cfm?instance_code=myspace&article_id=1062

Online Safety Advice from Facebook

<http://www.facebook.com/help/?safety>

What Parents Should Know About Twittering

<http://blog.safetyclicks.com/2009/02/23/what-parents-should-know-about-twittering/>

YouTube Safety Center

http://www.google.com/support/youtube/bin/request.py?contact_type=abuse&hl=en-US

Family Online Safety Institute

<http://fosi.org/cms/>

Cyberbullying Information

www.cyberbully.org

ConnectSafely

<http://www.connectsafely.org/>



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Information on Educational Issues Related to Social Media

Social Media and Schools – Help for School Administrators

<http://socialmediaschools.com/>

Social Media Literacy: The new Internet Safety – From NetFamilyNew.org

<http://www.netfamilynews.org/2009/02/social-media-literacy-new-internet.html>

Pros and Cons of Blocking Social-Networking Sites

<http://internet-safety.yoursphere.com/news/schools-blocking-social-networking-sites-a-good-and-bad-thing-but-now-a-solution>

iTunes U – Information about Apple's free instructional tool

<http://www.apple.com/education/itunes-u/>

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