



Ethics and Community Building

ISSUE ORIENTED

Probably the most elusive and yet most important of the NETS is the one on social, legal, and ethical issues. For NETS for students, this is standard 2. For teachers and administrators, it is standard VI. It is elusive for several reasons. It is hard to find/develop curricula for this standard compared to the other standards. It's about attitudes and practices and, as a result, is hard to test or observe except in circumstances of blatant misuse.

Because technology is constantly evolving and changing and new technologies are being developed, establishing a body of acceptable practice is like trying to hit a moving target. Some technologies haven't been around long enough to know what ethical/appropriateness issues can arise from their use. The challenges come at us constantly and relentlessly.

Getting a handle on this standard and important topic is a matter of elevated discussion and consensus on policies and practices. This discussion needs to happen at every level from the classroom to the staff room, from faculty meetings to district meetings to school board and PTA/PTO meetings. And the discussion definitely needs to encompass all digital technologies as opposed to just computers.

Because it is a topic the whole district community or educational organization needs to be engaged in, perhaps a promising approach is as a community-building topic and issue. Think of the problems you could solve or prevent if the whole community including all stakeholders were involved in clarifying the issues; developing con-

sensus on right, wrong, and shades of gray; and developing sound policies and practices. Your school community is cognizant of ethical issues and appropriate use as well as mindful of new situations, knows right from wrong, and knows the consequences of poor choices. As new examples and issues arise, you would have a process in place to address them, and the community is in place to address other issues and concerns.

The topics are rich for discussion and research. Examples occur on personal, school, and professional levels in the news and on the Web. There are resources in the form of Web sites that explore the issues, and articles and books available on the Web or in print.

Students are a good choice to provide the initial research and examples. The topic is relevant to their daily lives, and they are making a contribution to the development of their school's policies and practices.

Take advantage of the teachable moments that abound for all stakeholders. Appropriate cell phone, e-mail, and instant messaging use is not just a student issue.

Passions are likely to be invoked about some aspect for everyone. Topics range from serious ethical/legal abuse/violations to basic etiquette and include plagiarism, hacking, cyberbullying, equitable access, technology-aided cheating, and annoying/disturbing those around you.

There is a role for everyone, and anyone can start the process although it will take leadership, good community-building tools and systems, and follow through to complete it.

By Anita McAnear

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