

Social Networking As a Means to Engage Students

At least half of students ages 9 to 17 spend as much time online social networking as they do watching TV – about nine hours per week for teenagers. More than half (59%) report that schoolwork, college planning, careers, and jobs are part of those communications. These findings come from analysis of online surveys of 1,277 students and 1,039 parents and from telephone interviews with 250 school district leaders. Results are generalizable to online students and parents. While online, students are writing and posting messages, blogging, and developing multimedia communications using music and photos. They are also creating and updating their own sites.

While there is a desire to leverage students' interest in the Internet for educational purposes, schools must balance these online opportunities with concerns about student safety. Many schools limit access to social networking sites out of fear of online predators. Interestingly, in the study, 2% of students reported someone they met online wanted to meet in person, and 0.08% reported actually meeting someone without their parents' permission. While safety is a concern, many argue against limiting access. In summer of 2007, a panel on Internet security held at the National Governors Association urged states to require teaching strategies for online safety as part of K-12 curriculum.

School counselors can be leaders in teaching online safety while expanding social network opportunities for college planning including the exchange of ideas for college, courses, application processes, financial aid, and scholarships, paying careful attention to any digital divide that may exist in your community.

More information on the NGA recommendations for online safety can be found at http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2007/07/23/44ngapredator_web.h26.html. For the full report, "Creating & Connecting: Research and Guidelines on Online Social and Educational Networking," go to <http://files.nsba.org/creatingandconnecting.pdf>.

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59% of online students say they talk about education including college or college planning, learning outside of school, careers, and schoolwork.

50% of online students say they talk specifically about schoolwork.

71% of online students say they use social networking tools at least weekly.

95% of districts report that at least some of their teachers use Web pages to communicate assignments and curriculum content.