

Internet Safety for Parents (by Mark Pennington, Hinsdale South Assistant Principal)

Do you know if your child has an account in an online social network?

Do you know what type of information your child is posting on this network, including photos, references to their school, home address, email address, etc?

Have you seen your child's postings?

Do you know all of your child's email addresses?

These are some of the questions that parents of Hinsdale Central students should be asking of their children. Given the power, sophistication, and ease of use of today's search engines it does not take very much information to be able to locate an individual (home address, phone number, school, etc.) Major concerns have arisen nationally over the online social networks such as MySpace.com and Facebook.com following assaults of teenagers who met individuals whom they thought were teens, but turned out to be adults who prey on children. These types of websites offer teenagers the opportunity to share their favorite music, activities, etc. with friends and others who share their interests. This is the positive side of being involved in an online social network. The flip side that is of great concern is the detailed information that students provide about themselves that make it all too easy to be identified by individuals whose interests are criminal.

The number of blog sites is increasing exponentially. Blocking access to blog sites may appear to be a solution but only causes students to go find another blog site and really does not strike the core of the problem: educating all concerned on the real danger that is present in this electronic environment. It takes a proactive effort to gain the benefit of a powerful technology while protecting the safety and privacy of individuals. This requires active engagement with your children. Help them understand dangers of navigating on the Web.

Below are lists of links to articles that can provide insight into the issues of concern regarding the cavalier use of social networks and the potential dangers that exist for our students.

MySpace, Other Social-Networking Sites Pose Serious Risks

<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/11473141/>

As Teens Embrace Blogs, Schools Sound An Alarm, by **[Alorie Gilbert](#)**
Staff Writer, CNET News.com
Published: November 15, 2005, 4:00 AM PST
http://news.com.com/2102-1025_3-5952141.html?tag=st.util.print

Teen Bloggers at Risk for Cyberstalking
<http://www.technologynewsdaily.com/node/2118>

Illinois Attorney General's information for parents
<http://www.illinoisattorneygeneral.gov/children/parentstip.html>

There are many positive aspects to the blogging phenomena, particularly in education. The point is that caution must always be taken. Hinsdale Central is looking seriously at the potential benefit of using blogging environments in a closed and controlled manner for student learning.

We would like to thank Mark Pennington, Hinsdale South Assistant Principal, for preparing this information.

What are they?

A **Blog** is a **website** in which journal entries are posted on a regular basis and displayed in reverse chronological order. The term blog is a shortened form of weblog or web log. Authoring a blog, maintaining a blog or adding an article to an existing blog is called "blogging". Individual articles on a blog are called "blog posts," "posts" or "entries". A person who posts these entries is called a "blogger". A blog comprises **hypertext**, **images**, and links (to other web pages and to **video**, **audio** and other files). Blogs use a **conversational** style of **documentation**. A given blog will usually focus on a particular "area of interest".

Why are they significant for educators?

Blogs can engage people in knowledge sharing, reflection, and debate and bring people together who are willing to share information, opinion, rationale and perspective on issues of common interest. Blogs are becoming an ever increasing and important component of the Internet. Blogs are easy to start and can immediately provide uncensored avenues for information that can create opportunities for discussions on new or timely topics. Blogs have the potential to foster the growth of communities, and may provide new ways to evaluate and critique student-created knowledge.

The educational community is carefully evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of Blogs and is learning what guidelines and expectations need to be set to maximize the instructional benefits. Best practice to date is pointing to structured exercises and the setting of clear goals to enhance the value of Blogs in education. The effective use of a blog in the student learning experience has the potential to be a very effective, authentic, and powerful instructional tool; and what that looks like is only limited by a teacher's creativity.

What are the downsides?

All that is listed above... Just as you might expect, without structure and goals Blogs have the potential to interfere with the learning process if they are lacking an instructional purpose. Blogs are created by individuals and therefore may contain biased or inaccurate information and may be viewed as factual or authoritative when, in fact, they are the electronic equivalent of a soap box. Blogs can be a place for personal opinion, ideas, and attitudes and may not serve an instructional purpose. There is an increasing concern regarding student use of Blogs, in particular MySpace.com, for the social posting of personal perspectives.

Blogs can be volatile and contributors may perceive that they have a venue where they can say anything about anything while not understanding the potential vulnerability to which they expose themselves when sharing too much personal information to others unknown to them.

What do I do?

If Blogs are not instructional tools that you are using, you can default to the district/school perspective that appropriate use of the Internet by students is defined by the teacher who is supervising students in an instructional setting. If the parameters for Internet use given to students by a teacher do not include blogging then a student who is on a blogging site is not appropriately using the Internet and can be disciplined. This situation is no different than if a student was emailing or browsing web sites when their instructional assignment for that period of time did not include those activities. District 86 is currently not blocking student access to blog sites. However, this policy could change if the use of a blog site disrupts the educational process. Please refer to the District 86 [**Appropriate Use Policy**](#) for guidance.