During the past decade, the rapid development of internet technologies and the increasing use of social networking websites and cellphones have created both opportunities and challenges for secondary school leaders. Consider the following findings from recent studies.

- Nearly three-quarters of teens have an online profile on a social networking website, where many teens have posted photos of themselves and their friends, among other personal information (Cox, 2009).
- 50% of high school students “talk” in chat rooms or use instant messaging with internet strangers (Cox, 2009).
- 65% of high school students admit to unsafe, inappropriate, or illegal activities online (Cox, 2009).
- About one in five teens have engaged in sexting—sending, receiving, or forwarding sexually suggestive nude or nearly nude photos through text message or email—and over a third know of a friend who has sent or received these kinds of messages (Cox, 2009).

93% of all youth ages 12 through 17 use the internet, and 75% have a cellphone.
Students are increasing their use of technology at a rapid pace in all grades. This includes using the internet for research, and doing multimedia presentations for schoolwork (Cox, 2009).

29% of 10- to 17-year-olds have been cyberbullied, and 52% know someone who has experienced cyberbullying (Pieters & Krupin, 2010).

Young people who were harassed online were significantly more likely to use alcohol or other drugs, receive school detention or suspension, skip school, or experience emotional distress than those who were not harassed (Ybarra, Diener-West, & Leaf, 2007).

These findings reveal a new social and academic environment with enormous potential for innovation in teaching and learning; unfortunately, they also represent a safety minefield for students and the adults who care for them. To address this topic, school leaders need guidelines that are rooted in a balanced approach that recognizes the beneficial aspects of technology as well as its potential dangers.

NASSP GUIDING PRINCIPLES

NASSP believes that the role of school leaders is to prepare students for the world in which they will graduate. Technology is, without question, an integral part of that world.

NASSP believes that family involvement is an essential component in advancing student learning. Families and other community partners can be powerful allies against the victimization of children, particularly on the Internet.

NASSP believes that student safety is the highest priority in schools because no learning can take place without it.

NASSP believes that internet service providers and social networking websites have an obligation to offer their clients safeguards against predators and other cyber criminals.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SCHOOL LEADERS

School leaders face the triple challenge of protecting their students against online predators while safeguarding students’ First Amendment rights and encouraging the use of the internet as a legitimate pedagogical tool. To assist them in this effort, NASSP recommends that school leaders:

- Educate themselves about all aspects of computer and wireless technology, including the mechanics of the internet, blogs, social networking websites, and the liability issues associated with the use of these technologies.
- Form a technology team that comprises of staff members, parents, and students to act in an advisory capacity to the larger school community.
Provide staff members with professional development on how to ensure student safety while using technology as an educational tool, including recognizing the signs and possible effects of cyberbullying.

Formulate clear guidelines to protect students and teachers against cyberbullying and other criminal activities.

Establish clear policies to address sexting as part of the school’s acceptable use policy or student code of conduct.

Conduct orientation sessions for parents regarding student use of the internet and wireless technologies.

Reinforce the guidelines with parents and encourage them to be vigilant about their children’s internet use at home, including the elimination of derogatory statements against other students or staff members.

**RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICYMAKERS**

- Formulate policies that reinforce a balanced approach to the use of internet and wireless technologies, and protect students and personnel from internet crime.

- Ensure that schools and districts have comprehensive and effective student conduct policies that include clear prohibitions regarding all forms of bullying and harassment.

- Build the capacity of central office staff members to be the clearinghouse for districtwide technology issues where appropriate.

- Hold internet service providers and social networking websites accountable for reporting criminal behavior to the appropriate authorities.

- Reward schools that are using technology in an effective and innovative ways. Solicit, showcase, and recognize these best practices.

Provide funding and other resources to support ongoing professional development of school leaders and staff on internet and wireless safety issues and help them meaningfully address issues associated with bullying and harassment.