Online Safety Education

Key Points

- While the Internet is an extraordinary tool for learning, it may also expose youth to certain risks, such as inappropriate content, online bullying, loss of privacy, or identity theft. Comprehensive online safety education is a crucial part of helping to address these risks.

- Microsoft believes online safety curricula should become an integral part of schools' efforts to achieve technological literacy for their students, and should include online safety, online security, and online ethics.

- Microsoft supports comprehensive online safety education as part of school curricula. Legislation requiring schools to implement online safety education should be broad enough to account for local variations in curricula.

BACKGROUND

The Internet is an extraordinary tool for enabling children to learn and explore the world around them, and many parents and educators recognize that being a good digital citizen is a prerequisite for their students. Access to the Internet offers children many benefits, but it may also expose them to certain risks, including potential exposure to inappropriate content, contact with bullies or strangers, and loss of privacy.

Teaching young people about digital citizenship should include learning about those risks and how to avoid them, as well as developing positive online behaviors, such as respect for intellectual property and adherence to basic codes of acceptable conduct.

Digital citizenship is usually defined as "the norms of behavior with regard to technology use." But digital citizenship is about more than social norms—it is about preparing young people for living and learning in a technology-rich society. Digital citizenship helps young people develop a sense of ownership and personal responsibility that, in turn, will help them make appropriate, ethical decisions in the online world.

Many schools do not teach or have access to a comprehensive online safety curriculum, even though safety experts and many online safety organizations identify education as an effective means of protecting children from online risks. A comprehensive online safety education curriculum needs to address:

- **Online safety.** Children are taught basic online safety habits and ways to avoid potential dangers. They learn to address issues and when to report problems to the appropriate adult authorities.

- **Online security.** Children are taught how to protect their accounts, identities, and privacy online. They learn the importance of strong and secret passwords and how to update their computers and devices to help protect them from viruses, spam, and phishing scams.

- **Online ethics.** Children are taught how good citizenship also applies in the online world and the risks of bullying, plagiarism, and the theft of money or identity. Children are given resources to deal with online bullying or harassment, and will understand the impact their postings or comments may have on others as well as the consequences of their actions.

MICROSOFT APPROACH

- Microsoft's approach to children's online safety includes technology tools; education and guidance; robust internal policies and practices for moderating content and addressing online abuses; and relationships with government, industry, law enforcement, and others to help create safer, more trusted computing experiences for all.

- The Microsoft Safety & Security Center provides age-based guidance for Internet use, including tips on how to teach children what's appropriate to view and share online. The site covers many topics including online bullying, safer social networking, using mobile devices more safely, responsible online gaming, and inappropriate online behavior.

POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

- **Integrating online safety education in the school curriculum.** A number of jurisdictions have required that online safety education be an integral part of school system efforts to achieve technological literacy for their students. Given the pervasiveness of technology in today's classroom, Microsoft believes that online safety education is an important component of any school curriculum.

- **Promoting online safety in the professional development of teachers.** Just as students need education about safer Internet use, teachers also need guidance and skills to stay ahead of the technology curve. As teachers receive training on how to more effectively use technology in the classroom, they also need to understand current Internet dangers, recognize when students may be subject to online risk, and guide them on conducting themselves ethically on the web.

- **Restricting online access is not a substitute for education.** Controlling children's Internet access may be appropriate in some areas, including instances where age restrictions currently exist in the physical world—like gambling and pornography. But most safety experts agree that access restrictions alone are not enough, and that education needs to play a vital role in online safety.

- **Online safety education should involve industry.** Many employees of technology companies are prepared to serve as volunteers to introduce and implement online safety programs. In Australia and the United Kingdom, a program called ThinkUKnow pairs Microsoft employees with local law enforcement officials to deliver online safety education and resources to parents, teachers, and children. Industry involvement in online safety education from 26 Microsoft subsidiaries across Europe reaches more than 90,000 teachers, parents, and students with online safety education.

Helpful Resources

The Microsoft Safety & Security Center, with age-based guidelines for Internet use
www.microsoft.com/security

Microsoft Digital Citizenship in Action Toolkit
aka.ms/DC-Toolkit

European Commission Safer Internet Programme
aka.ms/EC-SaferInternet

National Cyber Security Alliance safety tools and materials
www.staysafeonline.org/teach-online-safety/