# An Investigation of Teachers, Administrators, Parents and Students Perceptions of Online Safety Protocols at a Selected Private School in Ohio

**By,**

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## Table of Contents

**Abstract**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the perceptions of teachers, administrators, parents and students regarding online safety at a small private school in Ohio. A related purpose was to identify factors that could improve communication between teachers, parents, and students surrounding their online activities and digital footprint. Data were collected from parents and their children using an online survey, interviews, and focus groups to determine their perceptions of online activities. Similarly, data were collected from teachers' and administrators' perceptions of online safety using interviews. The results revealed several themes including parents' and teachers' desires to engage in open dialogue with children, parents' unfamiliarity with new technology and applications, students' fears of being hacked, and teachers' desires to add technology to curriculum. The results suggest that a proactive approach is needed to enhance online safety protocols.

*Keywords:* digital citizenship, online safety, parents and children's perceptions of online activities, digital footprint of students, teachers expectations for use of technology by students

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

I have fond memories of my first computer class in fifth grade at Burr Road Middle School. My teacher, Mrs. Cowell taught us how to type and code, although then we did not call it coding. We only knew we had to enter a series of numbers and letters on the screen in order to get to the applications we wanted to use that class period on the computer screen. If we did well on Fridays we played "Oregon Trail," and at lunch we all talked about who died of dysentery on the trail, West. My junior year of college, I got my first cell phone. It was a simple flip phone incapable of texting just yet; it was nowhere near smart enough to give me answers to algebra tests or translate a foreign language. It has been more than 30 years since I was in fifth grade, and I found it ironic that a remake of "Oregon Trail" was a popular free time activity in my fifth and sixth grade classes last year. As they giggled about who lost oxen due to starvation and who just got a snake bite, I sat there pondering how much technology really has changed since my fifth grade computer course.

The media often presents "sensational" stories of children and the dangers of social media, but is it all that bad? The public hears about the worst case scenarios as teens are lured off by sexual predators and cyberbullies tragically influence a preteen to take their own life (Gleason & von Gillern, 2018). These examples demonstrate the negative impact technology and social media may have on children. As schools are continuing to embrace all the positive aspects to providing education with technology in the classroom, it is vital to increase communication and awareness around the student's use of technology (Mark & Nguyen, 2017). The *Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015,* has brought with it some one on one device incentives which will support connectivity, resources, and teacher support as classrooms embrace technology to meet

educational goals (Mark and Nguyen, 2017). As social media and educational applications (apps) grow in popularity within schools and are increasingly viewed as an extension of self-expression (Gleason & von Gillern, 2018); it is important that classrooms prepare students for life in both the "real world" and the digital one as well.

Scholars in the fields of education, communication, and political science have all established definitions for digital citizenship (Gleason & von Gillern, 2018). Martin referenced Kim and Choi as defining digital citizenship as "knowledge, attitude, and behavior" about online activities (Martin, 2019). He concludes that digital citizenship is developing "responsible digital habits for students to function in a digital world" (Martin, 2019). Outside of a student's academic goals, teachers are assigned the responsibility of helping them grow socially also. Digital citizenship means a student is relating to others in a caring and considerate manner online. Respectful digital discourse should be discussed with students as soon as they start interacting with others online.

As students continue in their education and technology use increases, it is imperative they are prepared. Some day they may participate in social causes and politics through the internet. It is possible their entire career could be working remotely from home or a coffee shop anywhere around the world. They must be adequately prepared to engage online in this ever growing digital world. Students should know what behavior is appropriate online and how to be responsible with their technology usage. Teachers can use technology experiences in class to help students learn how to access trustworthy information. Essays can become a lesson in improving writing skills while learning to follow copyright laws. When students register for a new educational app meant to help them prepare for a test, it is important that a discussion about improving their security habits online ensue. There are 5 elements of digital citizenship that

Ribble believes imperative to helping students engage with technology in a positive way: cyberbullying, digital footprint, digital privacy, digital netiquette, and digital identity (Martin, 2019). Over the course of their education, students should be given the opportunity to participate in meaningful dialogue and training in each of these areas. Students will graduate with a high school diploma in one hand and their cell phone in the other. Hopefully the knowledge they gained throughout their education will mean their digital footprint leads to gainful employment or college scholarships, instead of causing an employer or college to question their character.

It is not a question of who bears the sole responsibility of instilling digital citizenship in children. Parents and educators should share the duty of preparing children for their future online. The AACAP (The American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry) advises non-academic screen time be limited based on a child's age (AACAP, 2021). Parents and educators are encouraged to limit screen time in order to decrease concerning issues like social isolation, sleep deprivation, and even mood problems (AACAP, 2021). "Practices in digital society encompass those involving both young children's health and wellbeing, and their educational and developmental outcomes" (Edwards, Nolan, Henderson,Grieshaber, Highfield, Salamon, Skouteris, & Straker, 2020). The team of researchers asserts that digital society is almost never "value-neutral" (Edwards, Nolan, Henderson, Grieshaber, Highfield, Salamon, Skouteris, & Straker, 2020).

Our society does not allow children to operate a motor vehicle on public roads until they are sixteen, have proper training, and have taken a driving test. Currently it is not uncommon for a five year old to be on an iPad driving down the information superhighway completely untrained and unsupervised. When we require teenagers to take driver's education courses, we are sending the message that responsible citizens follow rules to keep everyone safe and out of

harm's way. Should we not offer our children some sort of training to keep them from experiencing or causing dangerous situations online? Children need open communication and dialogue with adults at home and in school to navigate the digital world as safely as possible.

More often classrooms are using tablets and computers to improve a student's educational experience (Martin, 2019). Martin (2019) expresses that waiting to teach digital citizenship until later in a student's academic career is not the best solution. Rather, more digital citizenship instruction and training is needed through varying grade levels as students interact online through their devices (Martin, 2019). Educators surveyed in Martin's study indicated an interest in further professional development to train students to be prepared for the digital world (Martin, 2019). Teachers also expressed a desire to impart this knowledge to parents who help students be more aware of their presence online (Martin, 2019). Parents and educators can work together to help students examine their perceptions and knowledge while they engage in online learning and socialization. Students need to be able to critically evaluate the benefits and possible detrimental effects of online activities (Martin, 2019). In chapter two, a further review of literature will provide more insight into apps and educator's current practices and trends in regards to digital technology in the classroom.

Throughout the research I've conducted there have been many benefits to a more proactive and engaged approach to helping students increase their digital literacy skills and citizenship. A Greek study conducted in 2012 found that even 9 years ago, students whose parents engaged in dialogue about their child's online activities, reported their child was more likely to express favorable experiences and opinions about their online experiences (Floros, Siomos, Dafouli, Fisoun, & Geroukalis, 2012). Problems seemed to occur more often for students and parents who had no security measures in place in their homes (Floros, Siomos,

Dafouli, Fisoun, & Geroukalis, 2012). Professional development for teachers and education for parents could decrease the likelihood of students experiencing cyberbullying and harassment because they are being taught how they engage online matters (Gleason & von Gillen, 2018). In one cross-sectional study, researchers found that communication between parents, students, home and school should be often, open and honest in regards to internet safety (Sampasa, Goldfield, Kingsbury, Clayborne, & Colman, 2020). Much research has been conducted about the connection between school and home. When there is a positive relationship between a student's home and school, students show academic growth and experience more positive feelings about school. A more in depth look at parents' and students' thoughts about technology in school and at home will be discussed in the review of literature, chapter two.

As a middle school teacher, I have all kinds of conversations about my students with their parents. We work together to ensure a healthy diet, character growth, and even work through their social squabbles on the playground. We partner together to make sure their child is healthy, safe and growing in the physical world of school. How can parents and educators develop a partnership that will be more proactive as students take more of their social life and academic work online? The rules at home and school should be consistent and involve the students (Mark & Nguyen, 2017). Adults have always had the responsibility to raise responsible citizens, that responsibility should extend to our digital world too.

## Statement of the Problem

We know digital technology use increases as a child gets older, and that many educators are embracing technology as a means to increase student engagement. A wealth of quantitative data exists in regards to children and the time they spend online (Common Sense Media, 2021). There is little existing research about the effectiveness of online safety protocols and the

involvement of parents, teachers and administrators in developing digital citizenship in children. This study was performed to assess the perceptions of students, parents, teachers, and school administrators in regards to online safety protocols. Through qualitative data collected, the researcher attempted to make recommendations to improve the awareness and safety of students online.

## Purpose of the Study

As technology use increases among students and the line between our physical and virtual worlds blur, it is imperative that students are educated in digital citizenship. Many education standards and curricula have moved towards developing students with 21st Century Skills. With the frequent use of educational apps and technology in school and at home, students should be prepared for the encounters they will have online. Some research exists over the past several years that indicates teachers feel a lack of professional development in online safety. Parents report a lack of knowledge and struggle to keep current with new education and social media applications (apps). The purpose of this study was to produce and examine qualitative data on the perceptions administrators, teachers, parents, and students have about online activities and safety protocols in place at a selected private school in Ohio.

## Significance of the Study

This study sought to discover the perceptions of students, teachers, and school administrators as they use technology throughout the school day. Because many aspects of homework have moved to a digital format, this investigation attempted to assess parent's perspectives of online safety and usage of digital devices in student's homes, as well. This research can have implications on how families and schools approach raising digital awareness

and safety for students. The study may also promote self regulation for students while they engage online in school work and have social interactions on their digital devices.

## Limitations of the Study

The following were considered limitations in this study:

- participation of individuals, as all participants were completely voluntary
- coordinating future meetings, as previous commitments conflicted with meeting times
- size of the school, as it only provided a small sampling of participants

## Definition of Terms

Applications (apps): software used to perform tasks, interact with other participants, or for entertainment purposes on digital devices

Digital citizenship: knowledge, attitude, and behaviors about online activities (Martin, 2019)

Digital devices: refers to any device used to interact with information or individuals online, i.e. smartphones, tablets, personal computers, laptops, video game consoles

Digital footprint: “trail of data you create while using the Internet; includes the websites you visit, emails you send, and information you submit to online services” (Barrow County Schools, 2021)

Digital literacy: “the ability to effectively find, identify, evaluate, and use information” that is found online using any digital device (Common Sense Media, 2021)

Online activities: any task performed while accessing the internet

Parent Perceptions: the thoughts and feelings of the parents of students at small private school in Ohio about the internet usage and safety of their children online

Social Media: any application that allows a person to interact and communicate socially with others online

Student Perceptions: the thoughts and feelings of the students at a small private school in Ohio about their personal internet usage and safety online

Online Safety: safeguards and considerations for minors as they engage with digital content through their electronic devices, usually these safeguards are provided by school administrators for school electronic devices and guardians for electronic devices used at home

## Organization of the Study

With so much of the information we obtain coming from the internet, students need to develop digital literacy skills. As social interactions take place in a virtual world, students should understand that their digital footprint might essentially be their future resumé. The purpose of this study was to produce and examine qualitative data on the perceptions administrators, teachers, parents, and students have about online activities and safety protocols in place at a selected private school in Ohio. Chapter one of this study includes an introduction, the statement of the problem, the purpose and limitations of this study, a definition of important terms, and an overview of the study. A review of the literature pertaining to this study can be found in chapter two. Chapter three explains the methodology and procedures in this study. It will also provide descriptive details of the population, participants, and tools used to collect the qualitative data. The research questions and hypotheses are also laid out in chapter three. Chapter four yields the data collected and describes the methods the researcher used to analyze the data. In conclusion, chapter five, summarizes the findings and provides further recommendations and implications of study.

# Chapter 2

# Literature Review

## Introduction

Recently I asked a student in my sixth grade homeroom class to answer the landline phone in my classroom while I was working with another student across the room. Weaving my way through the groups of students working throughout the room meant I might miss an important call from our school office staff. I thought a student could answer the phone, giving me just a bit more time to make it there. Even with her facemask shielding her entire facial expression, the look of panic in her eyes told me that this was indeed the first time she had ever been asked to answer a telephone call. I ran over and answered the phone in the nick of time, but this situation made me realize how much things had really changed. Technology has made answering the phone unnecessary for most of my students, most of the time. There is no need to train children on phone etiquette, when texting has its own grammatically incorrect code language, *LOL*. Teaching phone etiquette in my classroom was our on the spot lesson that day, but I wonder how long my students will really put that lesson to good use. While students continue to live with one foot in the physical world and another in a digital world, I wonder how I should help prepare them for both.

Just as getting that first handwritten note passed from a friend in class, or your very first personal telephone call on the family's phone in the kitchen was a pivotal adolescent rite of passage, engaging with peers through the internet is an integral part of adolescent development today (Zilka, 2018). Times have changed in many ways, but much of what young people desire is the same, connectedness. The world is more connected to one another every day and technology is causing this shift (Palfrey & Gasser, 2020). Much of the research conducted by Common

Sense Media involves surveying parents and children about their use of technology. In their work, Common Sense Media, considers technological devices used to consume media through the internet as: tv sets, computers, tablets, smart phones, e-readers, tablets, video game consoles, virtual reality headsets and smart speakers (2019). These devices deliver music, television shows, movies, games, social media apps. via what used to be called the information superhighway. Shapiro succinctly states, “The new toys are more engaging because they involve a different way of interacting with the world, a different way of thinking, a different way of living, learning, and loving” ( Shapiro, 2020, p. 45). These toys are helping kids prepare to connect with the entire world. The internet is not just used to connect with the people students see face to face at school every day. Students can connect to people all over the world via a small handheld device or even their favorite video games.

**Time Spent Online**

The amount of time children spend on electronic devices engaged in media consumption through the internet is sobering considering that for the most part, around seven and a half hours of their day is already spent at school. More children are using social networking apps. to continue connecting with their peers as they head home from school (Zilka, 2018). Many video games have a social aspect to them as users can battle friends from school while they chat with them through headsets or chat features built into a game’s software. The average American adult checks their cell phone 80 times per day, once every 12 minutes (Geddes, Swalha, & Adams, 2018). In a qualitative study, Palfrey and Gasser (2020) report teens prefer texting one another, 35%, over face to face communication. 16% of teens prefer social media contact and 10% would rather video chat their friends than meet up in person (Palfrey & Gasser, 2020). Qualitative studies by Leemis, Espelage, Basile, Mercer, and Davis (2019) conclude that 95% of teens have

a cell phone and 45% of them report being on it "almost constantly." Common Sense Media reports 53% of 11 year olds, 69% of 12 year olds and 84% of 13-18 year old teenagers have their own smartphone, whereas only 1 out of 5, 8 year olds has one (Common Sense 8-18, 2019). In their research, Geddes, Swalha, and Adams (2018) found that 91% of young people believe they have a healthy relationship with their electronic devices despite the amount of time consumed by using them.

One of the leading sources of the media consumption of children is a non-profit organization called Common Sense Media. Although they do research on print media consumption, most of their recent research is around the topic of children and their experiences with media consumption through the internet via their personal media devices. An online survey conducted in 2019, of 1, 677 young people ages 8-18 revealed that tweens (children ages 8-12) consume just under 5 hours of digital media per day, while teenagers (young people ages 13-18) consume nearly 7.5 hours per day (Common Sense 8-18, 2019). In another survey of 1, 440 parents from February to March of 2020, Common Sense Media reported that children 0-8 spend just shy of 2.5 hours per day consuming media via the internet connection on their devices at home (Common Sense 0-8, 2020). While the length of time spent online varies greatly from young children to the internet habits of tweens and teenagers in the United States, certainly an important aspect of a child's life is the time they spend online.

With all of these hours on their technological devices, what do they do while connected to wi-fi? Common Sense Media statistics show that around 69% of children watch online videos every day (Common Sense 8-18, 2019). By 8 years of age, 56% of children are watching online videos every day, while children ages 0-7, only 37% consume online video content each day (Common Sense 8-18, 2019). It is worth noting that YouTube is a popular streaming platform

reportedly used by children of all ages and the required user age is 13 (Common Sense Media 8-18, 2019).

Outside of consuming shows or videos on streaming platforms, 63% young people are using the internet to spend an average of 1.10 hours on social media per day (Common Sense Media 8-18, 2019). Tweens tend to spend their device time mostly watching tv and streaming videos, while mobile and video games wrap up their entertainment choices online. (Common Sense 8-18, 2019). Teens spend a majority of their time listening to music, followed by streaming online videos, and perusing social media apps. (Common Sense Media 8-18, 2019).

While they are young, children are developing habits that will shape the way they interact with one another in the future in the digital age. It is important to note the increase in the amount of time spent on the internet as a child gets older. Shapiro (2020) poignantly asserts the idea that play is childhood-whether digital or otherwise- it is not unimportant. Play is where children do their best work. The option of the internet search engine, essentially their new age library, is at their fingertips or voice command. They have potential to acquire so much diverse knowledge through the digital world (Roberts, 2019). The question is do they know how to use technology wisely (Mark & Nguyen, 2017)?

**Positive Advantages of Technology**

The advantages of having so much information available in seconds contrasts with some of the threats to children while they are online (Tomczyk & Potyrala, 2021). Seigle distinguishes the fact that technology is only beneficial if it is used "properly" (Siegle, 2017). Palfrey and Gasser (2020) have found that between one and two hours of screen time per day can actually build a child's self-esteem and connection to others. Even if a child spends a lot of time on their devices though, it does not mean that it will always have a negative impact on them (Palfrey &

Glasser, 2020). Freitas collected research through interviews with college students and found that the next generation is not less engaged or socially inept, in fact they are working on their social skills more online (Freitas, 2019). Teens report a great amount of fulfillment from their interactions with friends and family online (Palfrey & Gasser, 2020). Social media might actually help develop appropriate social cues rather than harm them. Experts refer to social media as developing conscientiousness, agreeableness, emotional stability, openness, and extroversion (Palfrey & Glasser, 2020). The use of smart devices can foster stronger bonds between young people who are taking in the world around them and learning to develop meaningful social interactions every day (Shapiro, 2020). These meaningful interactions fostered by digital experiences can mean meeting and connecting with a more diverse group of people than ever possible throughout a young person's life before now (Palfrey & Gasser, 2020).

Growing in social awareness is not the only benefit of a child's internet consumption. Siegle (2017) suggests access to technology opens endless possibilities for creativity and resources for gifted students. His statement is true for all students, not just those that are gifted. Palfrey and Gasser (2020) confirm that art and creativity can thrive through the use of digital platforms. Many of the skills students build through their use of technology could benefit them in their future employment (Palfrey & Gasser, 2020). Real digital experiences can function essentially as at home project based learning experiences (Shapiro, 2020). Video cameras and other expensive filming equipment can be replaced by a free digital editing software and a smartphone (Siegle, 2017). Siegle concludes, "Thanks to tech, a fifth grader in middle America has the publishing power of the New York Times" (2017, p.2)

Students with interests in any range of subject matters: math to art, foreign languages to engineering can learn and collaborate via some well designed apps. and internet access (Siegle,

2017). It is not a huge stretch to see the benefits of technology for children. As they improve their gaming skills, they are developing problem solving skills (Shapiro, 2020). Where some students may lack effective feedback on their work, most mobile games provide instant feedback that promotes a growth mindset (Shapiro, 2020). A child might lose a life in the virtual world but that world allows them to come back again, swinging, hindsight on their side this time. They are learning to separate their personal failures from those online, and increasing their grit and determination to overcome the challenges life throws at them (Shapiro, 2020).

**The Negative Impact of Technology**

Not surprisingly, most internet searches will turn up some unwanted material for young eyes. News headlines frequently herald the dangers of young children interacting with sexual predators online. Parents share posts on Facebook, horror stories of how young children accidentally ordered thousands of dollars of product through their smart speaker, or ran up the bill on their credit card making in-app purchases. Is the internet really dangerous, though? Children don't necessarily go looking for trouble online (Geddes, Swalha, & Adams, 2018). They are naturally curious and may just wonder what is out there on the internet. Still no matter their motive, not everything about their internet use is positive.

Social media brings with it some level of anonymity, if the user desires. Many children have multiple accounts across multiple social media platforms. Chaffin is cited as pointing out that the internet invites students to engage with one another anonymously (Leemis, Espelage, Basile, Mercer & Davis, 2019). This feeling of being unknown may make some young people feel less concerned about getting caught for saying something offensive or mean online. Bullying and sexual harassment have long been school district health concerns, as students interact in

person. The digital age has brought with it increased potential for bullying to occur between adolescents as they engage with one another online (Leemis, Espelage, Basile, Mercer & Davis, 2019). Zilka agrees based on the research conducted with students in Israel that showed that social networking applications could pose dangers to their users. These dangers include: shaming, bullying, harming others, distribution of harmful content or exposure to it (Zilka, 2018). Cyberbullying appears to be one of the most identified dangers of the internet, as much research surrounds this topic.

Bullying isn't the only concern, as children might encounter inappropriate content. Content of violent or sexual nature would be very difficult for them to share or show an adult (Roberts, 2019). Roberts (2019) research discovered that 4 out 5 teens surveyed have seen hate-filled comments made to others online. Siegle confirms the concern of children viewing inappropriate sexual content even at school. The Children's Internet Protection Act established a law that all schools must safeguard students by installing screening software to block content that is not appropriate for children (Siegle, 2017). The problem is no firewall or safety software works 100% of the time, and some students have no problem working their way around a firewall meant to protect them (Siegle, 2017). Viewing pornography whether on purpose or by pop-up is not something most parents would prefer their children experience (Roberts, 2019). As children start to use their technology, it's quite possible that they will go looking for answers. The internet may be a source for information on some of their sexual questions too, and it might even mean coming across some pornographic content (Roberts, 2019). 90% of children 8-16 years old have watched pornography online at least once (Geddes, Swalha, and Adams, 2019). One quarter of these young people have had pornographic images or videos sent directly to them (Geddes, Swalha, and Adams, 2019). Some of these images may be so embarassing, a child

would not even want to discuss it with their parents or teachers. Leaving them to process the new information and images, alone or possibly amongst their peers.

A student's online privacy is of concern, as well. Many students surveyed in Zilka's (2018) research feared that their personal texts and photos might be shared without their permission or knowledge. Mark and Nguyen (2017) agree cyber victimization and sexting are major concerns as young people engage with the world at large online. Geddes, Swalha, and Adams (2018) draw attention to some concerning statistics; 69% of teens say they have talked to a stranger online and have not told an adult about it. Do not talk to strangers is age old advice, but the internet apps say otherwise (Geddes, Swalha, and Adams, 2018). Concerns of privacy also lead to concerns of a students' long lasting digital footprint. Will what they have done online as a child lead to their future college scholarships or employment being affected? Could one bad decision to plagiarize an internet source mean their college career is over? Even small things that most parents may not even consider could have a negative impact on these young internet users. One of these concerns being studied is the impact computers, cell phones and other devices have on the development of a child's muscle-skeletal system (To-Miles and Shaw, 2012). It is hard to just ignore these perceived risks to our children as they become more involved digital citizens.

**Adult Roles in Supervising Technology**

Because so many youth report going online so often, and research indicates that is true, it might be easy to assume they know their way around the internet (Kodama, Subramanian, & Taylor, 2017). Digital literacy or citizenship is defined as the thoughts, skills, knowledge and attitudes a person has while he or she engages online (Tomczyk & Potyrala, 2021). In another research project on online safety Tomczyk and Eger include the idea that digital literacy refers to the "skills required to achieve digital competences, the confident and critical use of information

and communication technology for learning, leisure, communication and future work" (2020, p. 12). Over time children have increased their proficiency at using their personal digital devices. Younger children are able to accomplish more as they observe and use technology at younger and younger ages (Tomczyk & Potyrala, 2021). 78% of parents think that technology is a good educational resource that will have a positive impact on their children's future success (Mark & Nguyen, 2017). Technology will not have that kind of impact, positively shaping their future, without the encouragement and support of adults around them.

One prevailing theme throughout this review of literature on the topic of online safety was the necessity of open and frequent communication between young people and the adults in their lives, concerning technology. Hofmann (2014) ascertains parents can set up rules, guidelines, and contracts to help set clear expectations for their child's behavior online. He concludes mutual respect and responsibility will guide them to live fully and safely in the digital landscape (Hofmann, 2014). Geddes, Swalha, and Adams (2018) continue this idea that even the safety controls and apps parents place on their child's devices cannot replace the importance of authentic communication. Being connected to the child and having some awareness of current technology is essential to communicating expectations, but encouraging positive conversations as the child matures (Palfrey & Gasser, 2020). Parents should not just express thoughts that express worries, but should engage in what their children are interested in (Geddes, Swalha, & Adams, 2018). Roberts (2019) also encourages frequent and positive check-ins with children. That positive element will keep an ongoing dialogue as opposed to constant correction (Roberts, 2019).

Talking to children is essential but perhaps more important is considering what is modeled before them. Parents serve primarily as role models, especially for young elementary

aged children. As they observe their parents' habits, they make decisions about acceptable usage of their own digital devices (Tomczyk & Potyrala, 2021). It is not a new concept that a child's thoughts and behavior are shaped by their home (Tomczyk & Potyrala, 2021). The goal of parents is to embrace the benefits the internet has to offer while trying to lessen the negative parts of it (Palfrey & Gasser, 2020). If the child knows more than their parents about technology, this should not cause alarm. Instead Palfrey and Gasser (2020) suggest making them a part of the essential safety dialogue. Children and adults should work together to create the guidelines that shape their experiences (Palfrey & Gasser, 2020).

Parents alone should not bear the entire responsibility of developing conscientious digital citizens. The community can have a great influence over young internet users (Mark & Nguyen, 2017). Being proficient online requires a person to have knowledge of how to use the technology, but also the skills to engage with it safely (Tomczyk & Eger, 2021). The work done in Israel, from research conducted by Zilka (2018), associates online safety can be related to ensuring privacy, preventing cyberbullying, avoiding violent and sexual content, assessing exposure to biased and discriminatory information, as well as decreasing the usage of coarse language and engaging with strangers. Parents support the idea that their children need guidance over time as they grow in their knowledge and engagement with a digital world (Tomczyk & Potyrala, 2021). Parents and teachers should work together to equip children to stay safe online.

An interesting study about middle school engagement was done by Fisk. Through the study, Fisk (2016) found that using technology had a great impact on student engagement. Without technology, 40.7% of students were not on task. When technology was integrated into the lesson the students' active participation increased to 85.3% (Fisk, 2016). Fisk (2016) asserts that students who learn through digital means may be more motivated to stay on task. It's not

enough to just incorporate technology and assume students will arrive ready to learn. Even though they may be on their phones and devices daily, research has proven students often lack basic internet research skills and do not readily recognize credible sources (Kodama, Subramaniam, & Taylor, 2017). An interesting project in Estonia followed educators who gave students specific guidelines on how to manage threats while engaging in online activities (Lorenz, Kikkas, & Laanpere, 2012). Afterwards the researchers sought to find out if the Estonian students applied the knowledge to their daily interactions online. Their conclusions suggest that short-term instructional courses may not be enough to help students stay safe online (Lorenz, Kickkas, & Laanpere, 2012). Even though adult guidance was given throughout the online safety course, Lorenz, Kikkas, and Laanpeere (2012), found students still turned to their peers or the internet to solve problems they ran into online. What was eye opening was the attitude of the parents and faculty towards the responsibility of influencing their children and students to be safe online. While parents looked to the school to guide their children in the technological advancements of the world, the school was viewing the parents as responsible and no one really took care of the needs of the children to communicate openly and honestly about their online engagement (Lorenz, Kickkas, & Laanpeer, 2012). This demonstrates that technology rules should be consistent between home and school (Mark & Nguyen, 2017). Parents, teachers, and students should work together to have open dialogues on a consistent basis about technology (Mark & Nguyen, 2017). Allowing students to have a voice in the creation of these guidelines will foster a sense of self-regulation and accountability as they mature.

While parents bring concerns about their child's privacy and exposure to inappropriate materials to the conversation, teachers believe that digital citizenship encourages smart, ethical choices while students are online (Common Sense 21st, 2019). In a survey of educators in the

21st century classroom, only 4 out of 10 teachers received any sort of professional development to help in their use of technology in the classroom. Common Sense Media reported that one third of the teachers reported not using the technology purchased for them by the district at all (Common Sense 21st, 2019). Common Sense also found most educators' concerns for their students centered around their lack of skills to critically evaluate online information and the influence commercial advertising has on them when it mixes with learning (Common Sense 21st, 2109). Teachers may focus on different aspects of online safety, but their concerns are just as valid as those of parents. Children will only benefit from having parents and teachers working together as they navigate this digital age.

## Conclusion

The studies mentioned above come to conclusions about the necessity of parental and school involvement in keeping children safe online, there was not much existing research about the success of their involvement. The data from Common Sense Media focused on statistically significant encounters that children ages 0-18 have online, it did not account for personal experiences and insight through a qualitative process. Certainly one can not conclude that technology is a completely treacherous place for our young people to explore. The research clearly shows that there are many positive aspects to engaging in technology even from young ages. The amount of time a child spends on their devices needs to be considered, but spending a lot of time does not necessarily mean there will be a negative impact on their future. The positive aspects of technology point toward an interesting future for children. As they engage with and manipulate technology to gain more knowledge about the world around them, it is interesting to think about what this will change for them as adults. Will they be more advanced in problem

solving? Will they create and invent technology at younger ages? Will they be more empathetic and socially active because of their relationships with diverse peers from all over the world? The research in this project will begin to ask questions about the thoughts and habits of a small sample of students in Ohio. It is with the hopes that what is learned will lead to better understanding about the perceived dangers of technology, and also an effort to increase open communication between parents, teachers, administrators and students.

## Chapter 3

## Methodology and Procedures

After school activities look very different than they did 20 years ago. Drive by any bus transporting students to and from school, and it is plain to see that the physical playground has gone digital. Children interact with one another through their technological devices. Used for social connections and entertainment, a review of literature confirms that children spend much of their free time online (Common Sense 8-18, 2019). It has always been the duty of parents and educators to help prepare children for the future, and now educating them on how to use technology appropriately is a vital part of that preparation. Many of the studies reviewed assess the amount of time children spend online each day, but there is little information concerning the value of preparing students for the digital age through ongoing conversations with their parents and teachers throughout their academic careers. This study investigated the practices and perceptions of parents, teachers, administrators and students regarding their use of technology and discussions surrounding online safety. In this chapter, information about the specific population involved in this study, the procedures for selecting the participants, data collection

instruments for this work, and the procedures and guiding questions for this research will be discussed.

## Population

The site of this qualitative study will be one select private school in Ohio. The total number of pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade students enrolled is 285. That number consists of 40 pre-kindergarten and kindergarten students. There are 131 elementary (grades first through fourth) students, and 71 middle school students (grades five through eight). In the high school there are 43 total students. This school has 8 administrative positions, and 22 teachers. There are 7 classroom aides in grades pre-kindergarten through fourth grade, with 2 special education intervention teachers. The 285 students enrolled are made up of 203 individual households. (O. Truesdale, personal correspondence, Oct. 11, 2021). This school is located in a large suburb, north of a major metropolitan city in Ohio.

## Participants

The participants of this study include a typical sampling of the aforementioned population described above. All students, grades 4-12, were invited to participate by completing an anonymous online survey. Following the survey submissions, three focus groups were formed. Each group consisted of 5-7 representatives from the survey participants. One group represented the students from the middle and high school grades, another the parents, and a final group was conducted with third grade students. Interviews with specific participants were conducted one on one to glean more specific insight into the themes and perceptions that developed over the course of the data collection and analysis. Six teachers were also interviewed and asked specific questions in regards to the themes that emerged from analyzing the online surveys.

## Data Collection

Data collection was conducted using a variety of methods. The researcher supplied a Google Form survey to all participants in order to provide a confidential open-ended questionnaire. Parents were sent this survey via email. Students in grades 4-12 were emailed a separate Google Form survey, as well. Third grade students were given a paper copy of the survey to complete voluntarily, as they did not have a school email address at this point in their academic career. All information and responses were stored on the researcher's university issued Google Workspace. The semi-structured interviews were conducted, asynchronously when possible, one on one with school administrators, teachers, students and parents, as further follow up after the questionnaires to examine participants' thoughts and experiences. Focus groups were interviewed in person or via Google Meet when necessary. The participant names and contact information were provided by the school administration.

## Procedures

Before conducting any research, this study was reviewed and tentatively approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Milligan University. After which point, permission was obtained from the head administrator and school board of the specific school site where data was collected. Once permission was obtained from the school site, final approval was given by the Milligan University IRB and data collection began. Potential participants were emailed a cover letter that explained the research project and an informed consent form to be completed by either the participant or the parent or guardian of each participant. Once the consent forms were returned, the online survey was emailed to the participants who returned consent forms. Participants were given two weeks to return surveys and complete consent forms. Once the surveys were completed, the analysis of data began. After the initial analysis of the data collected

from the surveys, the researcher formed three focus groups and conducted several one on one interviews with a sampling of participants to further investigate the emerging themes from the collected survey data.

## Research Questions

As a qualitative research project, themes and questions continued to evolve as more data was collected and assessed. The researcher used semi-structured interviews in order to address the emerging themes throughout the project. Research questions for this project included:

1. How much time do you spend online each day?
    a) How many personal digital devices do you own?
    b) What types of devices do you use to go online?
2. What online safety protocols are in place in your home or classroom?
    a) Do you use any programs or apps to protect your students or children's online activity?
    b) Do you have any guidelines or rules for your child/student while they are online?
3. What are students' attitudes towards online safety and digital citizenship importance?
    a) Have you ever been a victim of cyberbullying or negative experiences online?
    b) How did you share your negative experience?
    c) What online safety protocols do you have in place at home and at school while you are on your devices?
    d) What role do you think parents and teachers play in helping students navigate online experiences?
4. What role do teachers and parents play in developing good digital citizenship in their classrooms and homes?

5. What are your experiences in discussing online safety with your students/children?

    a) What are the guiding principles you use to keep your students/children safe?

    b) If no conversations have taken place in your home or classrooms, why do you think that is?

    c) If conversations have taken place, what have been your experiences?

# Chapter 4

## Data Analysis and Findings

### Introduction

Children are always learning. In the past, the vehicles that carried knowledge to them included hands-on experiences, face to face social experiences, printed textbooks, manipulatives, and worksheets. More recently, children are learning via their digital devices. All of these new technological devices allow children to access information more quickly and connect with people all over the world (Palfrey & Gasser, 2020). While all of these technological advancements have put information literally in the fingertips of children, it is critical they are provided with education to navigate these advancements. They need to be considerate of the impact of their digital footprint while interacting with others in a safe and age appropriate manner.

This qualitative study sought to examine the perceptions students, their parents, and teachers have about technology usage. Aimed at determining the perceived role of parents and teachers in educating children about online safety, the researcher identified several themes throughout the study when evaluating these different perceptions. Using data evaluated through Creswell's six step process (2013), the researcher conducted an online survey of parents and students, interviewed teachers and held focus groups with several groups of students to find

relevant themes and their possible implications. The first step in Creswell's method involved organizing and preparing the data for the study. In the second step, the researcher read through all of the data collected searching for common emerging themes. The third step of Creswell's method involved categorizing keywords to examine them for meaning. Once keywords were identified, the researcher noted common themes throughout the different sources of data: surveys, interviews, and focus groups. After evaluation of data, the researcher reported the findings in step five. Using a qualitative research narrative, the researcher reported the analysis of the study's findings. Finally in step six, this study evaluated the themes and interpreted them for meaning, implications and application.

## Analysis of Data

The primary researcher in this study began by conducting an online survey with consenting parents and their children in a small private school in Ohio. The online surveys were examined for insight and meaning in light of the study's guiding research questions. The researcher proceeded to interview six faculty members at the small private school to gather data on their perceptions of student's internet activity within the classroom. Data were also collected from the students and parents using focus groups and interviews. Once themes were identified from the data, the researcher sought to connect or correlate them to the essential research questions of this study. Detailed demographics of the students and parents who completed the online survey is provided in Table 1 and 2.

Table 1

*Demographics of Students Surveyed*

| Student Grade Level | Total Number of Students |
|---|---|
| 4 | 7 |
| 5 | 3 |
| 6 | 5 |
| 7 | 0 |
| 8 | 2 |
| 9 | 4 |
| 10 | 4 |
| 11 | 1 |
| 12 | 1 |
| **Gender** | |
| Male | 11 |
| Female | 11 |
| Prefer Not to Answer | 5 |
| Total Number of Student Surveys | 27 |

Table 2

*Demographics of Parents Surveyed*

| Grade Level of Child(ren) | Total Number of Parents per Student Grade Level |
|---|---|
| Prekindergarten | 2 |
| Kindergarten | 4 |
| 1 | 4 |
| 2 | 3 |
| 3 | 5 |
| 4 | 5 |
| 5 | 3 |
| 6 | 6 |
| 7 | 2 |
| 8 | 6 |
| 9 | 2 |
| 10 | 3 |
| 11 | 1 |
| 12 | 1 |
| No Children | 2 |
| Gender | |
| Male | 8 |
| Female | 19 |
| Prefer Not to Answer | 0 |
| Total Number of Parent Surveys | 27 |

Following the surveys, small focus groups were created in order to facilitate an open discussion about some of the perceptions and feelings found throughout the online survey data. One focus group consisted of four, third grade students. This focus group was established because the third grade students had difficulties comprehending the questions on the online survey. The researcher found it more advantageous to ask third grade students these questions directly. Another group of six middle school and high school students was created to foster open

dialogue and further examine their perceptions and experiences while they are engaging with technology. Four teachers at the Ohio private school consented to participate in the researchers' individual interviews. The focus groups and interviews allowed for a more open and dynamic discussion surrounding the themes emerging from the data and responses to the study's research questions. All interviews and focus groups were conducted on the private school campus, in person.

**Research Questions**

1. How much time do you spend online each day? (1a) What types of digital devices do you own? (1b) What types of devices do you use to go online?
2. What online safety protocols are in place in your home or classroom? (2a) Do you use any programs or apps to protect your students or children's online activity (2b) Do you have any guidelines or rules for your child/student while they are online?

3. What are students' attitudes towards online safety and digital citizenship importance? (3a) Have you ever been a victim of cyberbullying or negative experiences online? (3b) How did you share your negative experience? (3c) What online safety protocols do you have in place at home and at school while you are on your devices? (3d) What role do you think parents and teachers play in helping students navigate online experiences?

4. What role do teachers and parents play in developing good digital citizenship in their classrooms and homes?

5. What are your experiences in discussing online safety with your students/children? (5a) What are the guiding principles you use to keep your students/children safe? (5b) If no conversations have taken place in your home or classrooms, why do you think that is? (5c) If conversations have taken place, what have been your experiences?

All of the data for this study were evaluated using an inductive qualitative analysis. All data were examined to identify themes in the content as well as provide the basis for a narrative analysis. The researcher looked for similarities and differences amongst the responses to the online surveys to analyze and make recommendations for further study.

**Research Question 1 Findings**

The first research question asked participants to quantify the amount of time they spend on digital devices in their home and what types were used to access the internet. The data from the online student and parent surveys revealed that smartphones, tablets, laptops, and video game consoles were the most frequently used digital platforms. From the combined middle and high school student focus groups some emerging themes were developed. Students prefer the smaller personal devices in order to travel with them from places like sibling ball games, family road trips, to church on Sunday mornings. The data from the online surveys revealed that students spend more time online on the weekends, Fridays through Sundays, than they do during the school week, Mondays through Thursdays. The number of hours students reported spending online both during the school week and the weekend was more than what parents reported on their surveys. The results of online hourly activity are displayed in Figures 1, 2, 3 and 4.

Figure 1

*Parent Survey: Hours Spent Online Monday-Thursday*

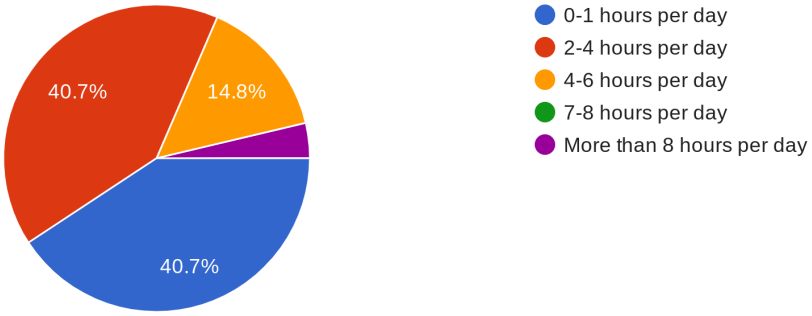



Figure 2

*Student Survey: Hours Spent Online Monday-Thursday*

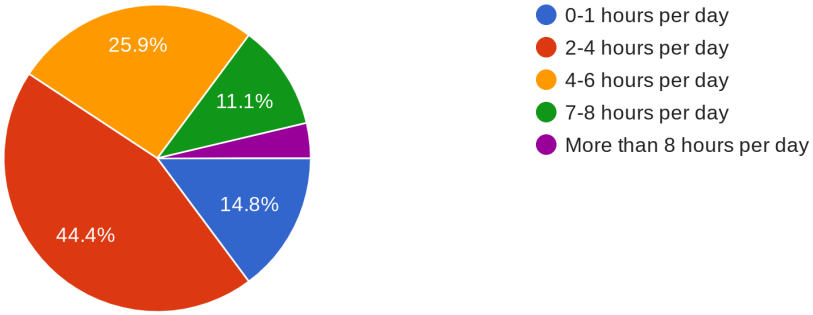


Figure 3

*Parent Survey: Hours Spent Online Friday, Saturday and Sunday*

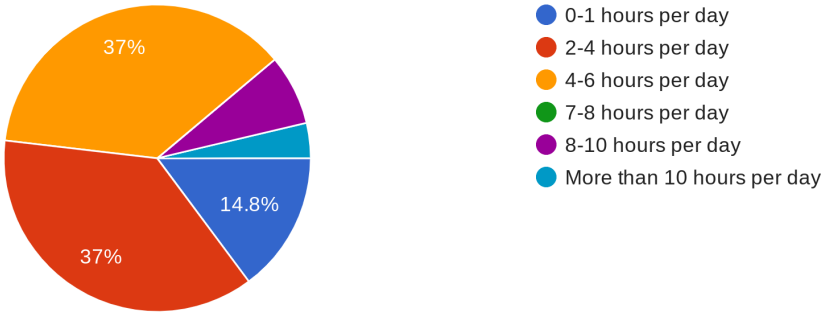
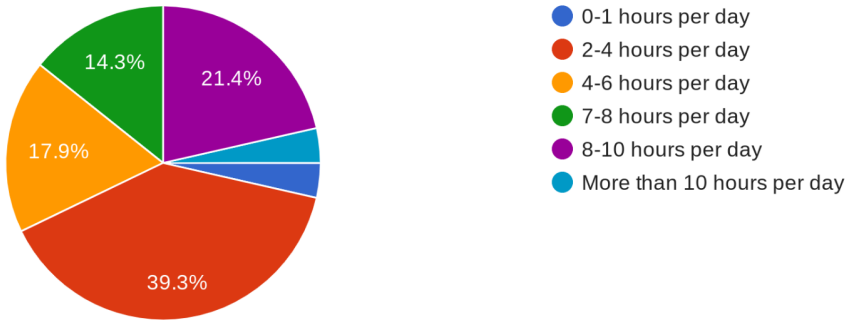



Figure 4

*Student Survey: Hours Spent Online Friday, Saturday and Sunday*




**Research Question 2 Findings**

In addition to the amount of time spent and number of devices owned, students and parents were asked, in research question two, to discuss their perceptions and feelings about online safety guidelines in their homes. Through individual teacher interviews, data were collected from teachers about their experiences with digital activities and online safety guidelines within the classroom. Various themes and points of interest were discovered through the

narrative analysis of the data collected. First, a majority of parents said that they had discussed their expectations and guidelines with their child specifically in regards to their digital devices. Parents and students seemed to clearly identify that there were set expectations when engaging in online activities. Only three parents surveyed said they had no rules or guidelines in place for their children online. While four children stated there were no behavior expectations or advice given by their parents in regards to using their personal electronic devices. Although not a large number, three students said they were not sure what their parents thought about online safety or technology. In the parent focus group, one common expectation for their children was the expectation that if the child felt scared or concerned about something online, the child would agree to come and discuss it with their parents. Several students in the focus group verbalized this idea of open communication with their parents about their social media accounts in particular. One student clarified, “I’m supposed to tell my parents when something goes wrong or I have concerns about content on my phone or laptop, but sometimes I worry it will get my friend in trouble if I say something.” Other students agreed that it can be easier to discuss concerns over someone having hacked your email account as opposed to telling their parents about a friend who seems depressed or is talking to strangers online in a concerning manner.

Teachers agreed that students needed guidelines and those should be directly taught by parents and teachers as a unified team as much as possible. Teachers should be, according to one teacher, “ensuring students are aware they have a digital footprint from a very young age.” One parent felt it would be helpful if there was more communication between the school and parents in regards to current trends in technology and advice on appropriate applications for schoolwork. Another theme that came up in reviewing the data is that parents sometimes felt frustrated still with their ability to interact with all of the necessary information teachers post on Google

Classroom. The complaint seemed to center around the need to use the student's identification to login and not be able to view all the coursework without the use of the student login identification and password. When the researcher further probed the parent focus group, one mother said, "I can't be expected to help my child be accountable for school work if I can't see everything he needs to do. Some children may be more self-motivated but mine needs me to prompt them and double check." In the teacher interviews all of them agreed that conversations should be occurring at home and in the classroom on a regular basis. More information should be given as the child gets older, with late elementary and middle school being the most critical time to introduce safety guidelines. There was some concern over what would be a teacher's responsibility and what should be taught at home. The themes and supporting evidence are displayed in Table 3.

Table 3

*Perceptions and Feelings About Online Safety Guidelines*

| Themes: | Supporting Evidence |
|---|---|
| Parents Expectations and guidelines for digital devices | -Rules and guidelines are in place at home<br>-Open discussions with children<br>-Children report when there are concerns about devices |
| Parents frustration with Google classrooms | -Access to all the information is limited from parent view<br>-Need access to all of the details to support children with assignments at home |
| Teachers desire to teach guidelines | -Students have digital footprint<br>-Digital safety should increase<br>as a student gets older |

**Research Question 3 Findings**

The online surveys were helpful in determining whether a child experienced any fear, concern or worries while navigating the world online. The parents and students who responded to the survey had some notable differences in their responses. In the surveys only 5 students reported having been concerned about their safety while online; while 12 parents said they currently had some concerns about their children's online activities. One student reported that they only sometimes experienced fears and one parent of a younger student reported they had not experienced any yet but anticipated that might change as their child got older. When asked about their concerns online, students reported a variety of reasons. One of the most common concerns surrounded the concept of identity theft or being "hacked." Many students felt that someone else taking over their computer would be terrifying. Many also worried about someone taking over their social media accounts or using their information in inappropriate manners online. One high school student shared, "I am not afraid of being lured away by a kidnapper, but I don't like the idea of someone stalking me online."

While student concerns were similar, parents shared no concerns about identity theft for their children. Instead their fears were over lack of knowledge about social media applications and new technology that might prevent them from guiding their child's safety. "It's hard to keep up. Every week I feel like there is a new game or app. and my child wants it. How do I know which ones are okay for them?" one parent from the focus group shared. Many parents in the group conferred when one shared a fear of their child getting involved with pornography and obscene images. Most did not feel their child would go looking for this material, but concurred if

they stumbled on pornographic images, there child would not likely share that with them. Two parents made recommendations that devices should not be allowed in bedrooms, instead house rules should be provided that the child only go online in a shared room or living space in the main area of the house.

Both parents and students who participated in the online survey and focus groups agreed that their homes had clear, safe guidelines in place. Students overwhelmingly agreed that their parents had rules for them online. Twenty of the surveyed students said their parents had expressed guidelines for their online behavior choices. Four students reported there were no rules they needed to follow while online that had been discussed. Three students expressed that they were unsure what their parents expectations were for their online behavior. Parents also emphasized that their child(ren) knew their rules for having privileges to engage online with others and their personal devices. Twenty-four parents said they had provided specific guidelines for their children, while only one said they had not laid any ground rules out. Two parents said they were not sure if they had expressed online safety rules with their children.

After discovering that most families felt they had established clear boundaries for their children while engaged in online activities, the researcher wanted to gauge how often the parents checked in on their children's electronic devices. The most common response was that there had been one conversation about the device when they first gave it to the child. This conversation encompassed everything from the amount of time they could be on the device to what would be considered appropriate activities. Many students perceived they could go to their parents with questions about the device, but one student stated, "I just don't need to." Another student from the middle school group replied, "usually they can't help me anyways. My dad doesn't know much about technology." Parents most frequently said they check in with their children when

they have questions or concerns about their children's device and activity, but there is not a consistent day or time that they check in. Two parents reported checking their child's device daily, and two stated they check "more like monthly." One parent liked the idea of "random check-ins." This parent said they do not regularly check their child's device on a schedule. Instead preferred the "element of surprise" in order to catch them off guard and make sure they did not have time to hide any activities from their parents.

Many different types of applications exist to help parents who want to safeguard their children's phones, laptops and tablets. Parents indicated using a variety of safety applications to monitor their child(ren)'s experiences online. Most parents relied on the parental control device settings on the device itself. Eighteen parents said that they use parent controls to filter language and age appropriate content for their children. Six parents expressed not having any parental controls or safety applications on their children's devices. Thirteen students reported no parental controls or applications to keep them safe on their own electronic devices. One parent in the focus group suggested that the most appropriate way to keep a child safe was to share all accounts with the child. Setting up any social media, entertainment applications directly to the adult so that the child does not have any autonomy online. What mattered most to parents concerning their child's safety online was expressed by a parent, "We want to be a team with the school. We want our children to be hearing the same messages about how to be polite, kind, and safe online from their teachers as they do from us at home. It is a partnership, not a one man job." The themes and supporting evidence are listed below in Table 4.

Table 4

*Parent & student: Worries, concerns or fears while online*

| Themes: | Supporting Evidence |
|---|---|
| Students were concerned with stalking or being hacked | -They know better than to give away personal information<br>-Do not like the idea of someone following them online that is creepy. |
| Parents worried about keeping up with all of the technological advances | -Cannot help their children if they are not aware of apps<br>-Not sure what to ask about |

**Research Question 4**

Every teacher interviewed agreed that education about digital safety and technology usage should happen in the classroom to some degree. Three teachers interviewed stressed the importance of open communication and monitoring at home, especially in regards to social media applications. All the teachers surveyed said that this small school uses a program called GoGuardian to monitor every student's personal Chromebook or tablet while they work during class. No students are permitted to leave the building with a school issued device except in cases of extended illness or quarantines. Overall the teachers felt the monitoring program in place was very sufficient. GoGuardian allows them to message students directly and see what is happening on a student's screen in real time. The teacher can even control which tabs and how many can be opened at a time. Two teachers interviewed had major concerns about their student's ability to

connect with one another socially. These teachers have had many years of teaching experience and more recently notice a lack of picking up on facial expressions and body language of some of their peers. The teachers wondered if perhaps more social interactions online have led to a decline of social skills, especially in their young students who were home for the last two school years because of Covid-19. One other theme that was threaded throughout the interviews indicated teachers do not want to cross any parental boundaries when teaching about devices. As one teacher said, “It is hard to know whether what I believe and want to teach is what the family desires when it comes to technology. I feel like I have to tread somewhat lightly.” Themes and supporting evidence are laid out in Table 5.

Table 5

*Teacher Perceptions and Feelings About Online Safety Guidelines*

| Themes: | Supporting Evidence |
|---|---|
| Teachers want to help train students | -Teachers feel it is important to engage in conversations about internet safety in the classroom<br>-Teachers use software to help be the eyes and ears of the classroom while student are on the internet |
| Partnership between school and home | -Teachers would like more information on what is being taught at home<br>-Teachers do not want to violate any parent preferences when teaching about digital safety in the classroom |
| Teachers perceive a lack of social interaction | -Students do not seem to be able to read social cues<br>-Students prefer the anonymity of the screens |

**Research Question 5 Findings**

Finally, the parents who participated in the focus groups had immediate answers explaining their experiences in discussing online safety at home with their children. Adamant that an initial conversation had taken place with their child, one parent thoughtfully reflected to the entire group, "Is one conversation about safety enough?" Several parents responded and expressed their concerns. One parent brought to the group's attention, "Pornography is not the only threat on the internet. Social media can be detrimental to their mental health too. What do we do to make sure they aren't destroyed by the comments and unrealistic expectations that pressure them from online?" The parents agreed that their initial conversations had gone well with their children. The children were respectful about the rules and expectations, but many agreed that after the initial conversation not much else had occurred. The group explored together the idea that maybe these conversations about online safety should be more ongoing. Another parent seemed frustrated, "It's true that they need to be talked to more but sometimes they won't even answer me when I ask how their day went at school." One consistent theme emerged in analyzing the data collected, parents wanted practical advice and helpful tools that were not too time consuming so they can have meaningful, ongoing dialogue with their children while they continue to engage in a digital society. The major themes and supporting evidence are listed in Table 6.

Table 6

*Parent experiences discussing online safety at home*

| Themes: | Supporting Evidence |
|---|---|
| Initial conversations went well children | -Rules and expectations placed on children at the onset of device usage went well<br>-Children were respectful about the conversation because they wanted the device |
| Parents are not sure how to continue conversation | -As the child(ren) mature the conversations get more difficult because they do not talk much about anything<br>-parents unsure what to ask |
| Parents desire access to information about new trends | -A quick guide or not too time consuming summary would be helpful to keep parents up to date on current apps and trends |

## Chapter 5

### Summary of Findings, Discussions, Recommendations, and Conclusions

This chapter provides a summary of findings, a summary of the discussions, as well as the conclusions drawn from the data collected in this research study. The recommendations provided may be used by school administrators, teachers, and parents as they continue to guide children in their use of technology throughout their education. This qualitative study attempted to gather the perceptions and feelings of parents, students and teachers regarding online safety and the use of technology. The study also sought to gather specific data that could be used in making

recommendations for the school site to consider for future implementation of online safety protocols and guidelines. The following research questions guided this qualitative study:

1. How much time do you spend online each day? How many personal digital devices do you own? What types of devices do you use to go online?
2. What online safety protocols are in place in your home or classroom? Do you use any programs or apps to protect your students or children's online activity? Do you have any guidelines or rules for your child/student while they are online?
3. What are students' attitudes towards online safety and digital citizenship importance? Have you ever been a victim of cyberbullying or negative experiences online? How did you share your negative experience? What online safety protocols do you have in place at home and at school while you are on your devices? What role do you think parents and teachers play in helping students navigate online experiences?
4. What role do teachers and parents play in developing good digital citizenship in their classrooms and homes?
5. What are your experiences in discussing online safety with your students/children? What are the guiding principles you use to keep your students/children safe? If no conversations have taken place in your home or classrooms, why do you think that is? If conversations have taken place, what have been your experiences?

This research study collected qualitative data from three separate focus groups, three teacher interviews, and fifty-four online surveys from parents and students. The interviews and focus groups were guided by the use of open ended questions. All of the data were collected

during the 2021-2022 school year from the parents, students, and staff at the small private school in Ohio. The data were recorded, written down, and coded in the effort to glean the major themes to answer the five research questions that guided this research study.

## Summary of the Findings

Based on the guiding research questions, the findings of this study resulted in several themes based on the perceptions of parents, students, and teachers at the private school concerning their perceptions of online safety. Overarching themes included the need for ongoing communication with students about their use of the internet and social media and the importance of adults staying abreast of current applications students are using. The research included factors that provide some guidance and safety for the students, while revealing some areas where students may need additional support. The findings also indicate a desire for parents and teachers to collaborate while developing students to have a positive presence online.

When students were asked about the devices they use to access the internet, most responded that they used multiple devices to engage online. The most commonly used device was a smartphone, followed closely by the use of a laptop computer. Many students also reported using video game consoles, tablets and smart televisions, especially for entertainment purposes. Students varied on their preferred activities while using these devices. Most frequently, students use their technology devices to watch movies or television (YouTube), play video games, and text. Video conferencing and using educational applications were also found to be important to the students who use the internet. Interestingly, parents and their children reported the same types of devices were used to access the internet, but parents varied on the reasons their children were using the devices. While the students surveyed said the most popular reason to be online was to watch television or movies, parents reported that their children were online to use educational

applications primarily at home. When the researcher sought more information about the discrepancy between the parent and student responses in the focus groups one student said, “It is easier to be able to get my parents to let me go on my device if I say I need it for homework.” The focus group of middle and high school students agreed that they might spend a couple minutes “studying” in order to spend more time playing games, especially during the school week. When the researcher asked parents about their perceptions in the discrepancy, one parent spoke for the group, “Mostly, I assume they are doing what they say they are on their device. I think as long as they are following the rules we set up for them while they are online, I don’t mind if they aren’t just studying at night.”

Overwhelmingly, parents and students recorded the use of parental control settings on the devices themselves as their primary means of online safety. The teachers at the private school reported using GoGuardian every time they allow their students to access the internet for more than a few minutes. While relying on these tools to filter out certain mature content and language, the parents agreed the safety software is not enough. In the parent interviews two common themes emerged as far as the guidelines in place to protect their children at home. First, most parents did not allow their children to have unlimited access to the internet. The amount of time children were allotted online each day varied for each family, but overall parents agreed that the time should be limited for children while they are online. Secondly, most parents divulged the need to have an open and ongoing dialogue with their children about their use of the internet and social media devices. The parents of young children revealed more strict guidelines, with the majority of those parents not allowing their children unsupervised access to the internet. A few parents found it best for their young children to be in the same room as an adult while online.

Teachers ascertained when the school purchased the GoGuardian software they felt much more confident in their ability to provide a safe and secure environment to allow students to go online.

When asked about digital citizenship, the student focus group was not familiar with that term. The researcher defined the term in accordance with the definition of this project and continued to seek information about their perceptions of the importance of their digital presence online. One student brought up their most pressing concern, “I am so worried about being hacked. I don’t want someone to get my parents banking information or my personal information. Another student agreed, “I like social media and having a way to express myself, but it’s terrifying considering the thought that someone might take over your account or worse make a fake account where they act like they are you.” Only seventeen percent of students surveyed said they have ever felt worried, nervous or concerned about their online activities. One student disclosed being directly messaged by strangers on multiple occasions and one incident in particular involved inappropriate sexual content being sent. Overall the students concurred having your identity faked or stolen was their major concern online. When asked about their communication about these concerns with their parents or teachers, all of the students said that this was the first time they were discussing any of them with an adult.

In the parent surveys and focus groups, two themes emerged concerning their concerns about their child(ren)’s safety online. One concern centered around their children’s exposure to mature content. Several parents surveyed felt their child(ren) would come across mature advertisements, pictures or dialogue and be exposed to information that was not age appropriate. Two parents mentioned a deep seated concern over exposure to pornographic images. While the content children are immersed in was important, of greatest concern was interacting with people the child does not know. One parent detailed his concern, “When my child plays a new game

online, I am concerned he doesn't share all of the ways he can interact and communicate with others online while playing. I think he leaves details out because he wants the game so badly, but doesn't tell us because he knows we will say no if we are aware how much interaction there will be with people he doesn't know." In general, the parents felt their child was not aware of the risks involved in communicating with someone they do not know online, no matter how much the parents stressed this was important.

The research from the teacher interviews revealed teachers perceive it is important to discuss online safety and digital citizenship in the classroom. All three of the teachers interviewed have directly discussed tips for using the internet wisely, while sharing the possible dangers a student might face online. All of the teachers shared that while they believe it is vital they have these discussions, they were not sure how in depth to go with the students. One teacher stated, "While I might have personal beliefs on the amount of time a student should spend online, what they should be doing, and how they should behave, it's quite possible that is different from the parents' views. I don't want to overstep by imparting my thoughts on their child and then get an angry email about it later." The teachers were in agreement that educators could benefit from the use of a curriculum that would aid them in providing the best information for each grade level, while giving them accurate details about current trends and applications students are engaging with while online. "Having a curriculum that has already done the work of figuring out what to teach in regards to online safety would be helpful, I could even use it to start a discussion in our morning meetings from time to time," one teacher concluded. Another teacher felt students should be learning these concepts at school, but worried about how to work the information into an already full school day, "I wish we had technology as a special. This would be the best place for this information to be disseminated." The private school currently does not

have a technology class, although technology is an integral part of the classroom. The teachers agreed that the school should seriously consider creating a class that not only addresses digital citizenship, but prepares the students for a world whose workforce is required to be proficient in so many different aspects of technology.

## Conclusions

After studying the data, the major conclusion of this study is that parents and teachers are essential in initiating and guiding ongoing conversations with children while the children utilize technology for their education and personal entertainment. Teachers, at minimum, should have access to a curriculum. Students should be offered courses that prepare them for successful entry to a technologically driven workforce, while incorporating guiding principles that influence them towards positive outcomes as digital citizens. The data made apparent that parents and teachers would like to work together to protect children as they learn to use technology throughout their academic career. Creating opportunities for teachers and parents to improve their communication surrounding perceptions and feelings about the school's role in educating children about technology should be considered. While most parents are relying on parental control settings to filter unwanted content, many could benefit from education of the advantages of using other applications to protect their child online. Students should be able to identify the effects their digital footprint can have on their future academic and professional careers so that they can consider the implications of their decisions as they use the internet.

## Recommendations for Practice

As a result of the study it is apparent parents and teachers share the concern of educating children about technology throughout their academic careers. The adults agree ongoing communication and building skills would directly benefit the children at this school. Parents seek

detailed information about new applications and trends in an effort to maintain effective and open dialogues as their child uses social media, especially. There exists a genuine connection between the teachers and parents as they share their concerns and perspectives over online safety.

School administrators and leaders should implement a technology curriculum or course that would improve the student's understanding of how to use their devices, applications and address key concepts concerning their digital citizenship. Additionally, professional development should be provided to the educators who are using GoGuardian. Although all agreed they use the application in their classrooms, the teacher's varied on their confidence they were implementing the software in the most effective manner.

The school community should also consider a forum that would increase communication from the parents to the school leaders. Allowing the parents to share what they perceive as important in regards to technology will have a positive, direct impact on the students in regards to opening communication for the necessary ongoing dialogue. The school community would benefit from an anonymous reporting system that allowed students and their parents to report any concerns they have over online activities or new social media trends. This information could be disseminated to parents so they can engage in meaningful dialogue with their children and watch for specific indications that could be concerning.

Although only a subtheme, a committee could be formed to address the parents' frustrations with not being able to access all of the information on Google Classroom. Many parents did not share this concern, but the ones who felt their student could benefit from the parents being more aware of assignments and deadlines might offer some insight into how to improve communication for those students who struggle with some executive function skills and would benefit from increased accountability from their parents.

Finally, parents need access to the latest technology trends and applications. The school could include references and links to websites and articles in their weekly newsletters. Administrators should create a page on their parent resources section on the school website that offers links to organizations like Common Sense Media for those families who would like more education on how to improve their communication and awareness of technology. Without access to current information, parents can only speak in general terms with their children about safety concerns. Knowing more specifically what an application entails will help the parents be more specific when talking to their children about their online activities. Feeling out of touch, parents might avoid some conversations with their child. Access to these resources would build a parent's knowledge of technology and offer more confident footing as they address concerns moving forward.

## Recommendations for Further Study

The data collected in this research study only applies to a small population at this specific private school in Ohio. Further study could be conducted by expanding the online survey to include other school buildings and districts across the state. The results from these studies could be assessed and analyzed to find connections between the perceptions and feelings of the student, parents, and teachers at the other school sites. These data could be used to confirm the findings of this particular qualitative study and identify possible new themes as the data are studied from the expanded research.

A quantitative study could be conducted after the implementation of this study's recommendations at the school. Researchers could evaluate the data collected in pre and post tests particularly in regards to improved knowledge the students have about the essential

standards for technology use and digital citizenship. Evaluating the program for areas of strength and needs for improvement, could have a long lasting impact on each student as they mature.

Finally, further focus groups could be formed to identify the perceptions and feelings of school administrators across a broader sample in order to determine the most effective path to implement changes and address parent and teacher concerns from the study. Additionally, focus groups and interviews could be conducted with a larger student population to assess their experiences and feelings about their use of technology.

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Date: November 11, 2021

Principal Investigator: **Julie Weber**, Graduate Student, Milligan University
From: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Milligan University
Project: *An Investigation of Teachers, Administrators, Parents and Students Perceptions of Online Safety Protocols at a Selected Private School in Ohio*
IRB Tracking Number: **2021-20**
IRB Approval Number: **Exp2111111538**
Subject: **Final Approval**

On behalf of the Milligan University Institutional Review Board (IRB), we are writing to inform you that the above-mentioned study has been approved as expedited. This approval also indicates that you have fulfilled the IRB requirements for Milligan University.

All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission, meaning that you will follow the research plan you have outlined here, use approved materials, and follow university policies.

Take special note of the following important aspects of your approval:

- Any changes made to your study require approval from the IRB Committee before they can be implemented as part of your study. Contact the IRB Committee at **IRB@milligan.edu** with your questions and/or proposed modifications;
- If there are any unanticipated problems or complaints from participants during your data collection, you must notify the Milligan University IRB Office within 24 hours of the data collection problem or complaint;
- Milligan University requires specific formatting when collecting demographic data on gender; please contact me if you need assistance with this formatting.

The Milligan University IRB Committee is pleased to congratulate you on the approval of your research proposal. Best wishes as you conduct your research! If you have any questions about your IRB Approval, please contact the IRB Office and copy your faculty advisor if appropriate on the communication.

On behalf of the IRB Committee,

Trini Rangel, Ph.D.
Chair, Institutional Review Board
Milligan University

## Appendix A
## Teacher and Administrator Interview Questions

1. What digital devices do students use in your classroom?
2. Do you use any apps/services to protect their privacy or keep them safe while they are online?
3. What role do you think teachers should play in keeping students safe while they are online?
4. What role do you think teachers should play in educating students about digital citizenship and safety?
5. What role do you think parents should play?
6. What do you see as the positive experiences of having technology in your classroom?
7. Do you have any worries, concerns or fears about your students as they interact with each other and the world around them through their use of technology?

## Online Survey Questionnaire (Parents and Children)

1. Grade Level
2. Gender:
3. What devices are used to go online at home?
4. On average how much time is spent online at home during the school week, at home?
5. On average how much time is spent online on the weekend, at home?
6. What activities are participated in while using the device at home online?
7. What safety applications are installed on the device(s) at home?
8. Have there been any discussions surrounding online safety in your home?
9. Have there been any discussions surrounding online safety at school?
10. Are there any required safety precautions to use devices at home while online?
11. How often are the online activities and safety discussed at home?
12. Have you ever felt nervous, scared or concerned while online, while your child is online?
13. What are the advantages of being online?
14. Please explain any more specifics of having concerns about online activities.

**Appendix B**
**Letter of Completion**

Dear Students, Parents, Teachers and Administrators,
I would like to make you aware thatI have completed my master's research thesis and published the results. If you would like to read the published thesis you may do so on Milligan University's Online Library.

I also wanted to remind you that any information provided will be kept confidential and will not be shared. Any personal information provided will not be used for any purpose other than this research study. Any data collected will be kept safe and secure using password protected devices. Data will be kept for a period of five years, as required by Milligan University.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me, my research mentor Dr. Patrick Kariuki, or Milligan University's Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Most Sincere Thanks for Your Time and Input,

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