

CREATING & CONNECTING//RESEARCH AND GUIDELINES ON ONLINE SOCIAL — AND EDUCATIONAL — NETWORKING

NATIONAL SCHOOL BOARDS ASSOCIATION



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ABOUT THE STUDY

This study was made possible with generous support from Microsoft, News Corporation and Verizon.

The study was comprised of three surveys: an online survey of 1,277 nine- to 17-year-old students, an online survey of 1,039 parents and telephone interviews with 250 school district leaders who make decisions on Internet policy. Grunwald Associates LLC, an independent research and consulting firm that has conducted highly respected surveys on educator and family technology use since 1995, formulated and directed the study. Hypothesis Group managed the field research. Tom de Boor and Li Kramer Halpern of Grunwald Associates LLC provided guidance throughout the study and led the analysis.

A more detailed market research report based on this survey, including findings of interest to industry, is available commercially from Grunwald Associates (www.grunwald.com).



Online social networking is now so deeply embedded in the lifestyles of tweens and teens that it rivals television for their attention, according to a new study from Grunwald Associates LLC conducted in cooperation with the National School Boards Association.

Nine- to 17-year-olds report spending almost as much time using social networking services and Web sites as they spend watching television. Among teens, that amounts to about 9 hours a week on social networking activities, compared to about 10 hours a week watching TV.

Students are hardly passive couch potatoes online. Beyond basic communications, many students engage in highly creative activities on social networking sites — and a sizeable proportion of them are adventurous nonconformists who set the pace for their peers.

Overall, an astonishing 96 percent of students with online access report that they have ever used any social networking technologies, such as chatting, text messag-

ing, blogging and visiting online communities, such as Facebook, MySpace and services designed specifically for younger children, such as Webkins and the chat sections of Nick.com. Eighty-one percent say they have visited a social networking Web site within the past three months and 71 percent say they use social networking tools at least weekly.

Further, students report that one of the most common topics of conversation on the social networking scene is education. Almost 60 percent of students who use social networking talk about education topics online and, surprisingly, more than 50 percent talk specifically about schoolwork.

Yet the vast majority of school districts have stringent rules against nearly all forms of social networking during the school day — even though students and parents report few problem behaviors online. Indeed, both district leaders and parents believe that social networking could play a positive role in students' lives and they recognize opportunities for using it in education — at a time when teachers now routinely assign

homework that requires Internet use to complete. In light of the study findings, school districts may want to consider reexamining their policies and practices and explore ways in which they could use social networking for educational purposes.

CREATING & CONNECTING// THE POSITIVES

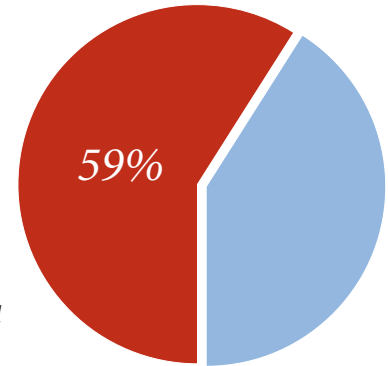
There has been explosive growth in creative and authoring activities by students on social networking sites in recent years.

With words, music, photos and videos, students are expressing themselves by creating, manipulating and sharing content online. This is how they're spending time:

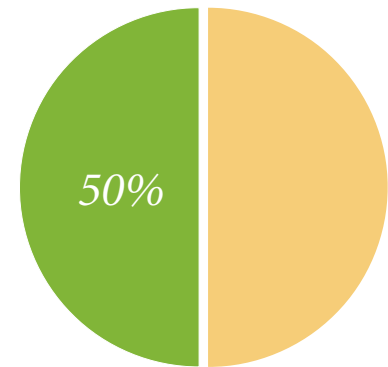
Posting messages. More than one in five online students (21 percent) say they post comments on message boards every day; four out of 10 (41 percent) say they do so at least once a week. In 2002, only 7 percent posted daily and only 17 percent did so at least once a week, according to a similar Grunwald Associates LLC survey.

A HOT TOPIC OF SOCIAL NETWORKING: EDUCATION

59% Percentage of online students who say they talk about any education-related topics, including college or college planning; learning outside of school; news; careers or jobs; politics, ideas, religion or morals; and schoolwork



50% Percentage of online students who say they talk specifically about schoolwork



Source: Grunwald Associates LLC

Sharing music. Nearly a third (32 percent) of online students say they download music or audio that other users uploaded at least once a week, or upload third-party music or audio themselves (29 percent). More than one in 10 (12 percent) say they upload music or podcasts of their own creation at least weekly.

Sharing videos. Nearly a third (30 percent) of online students say they download and view videos uploaded by other users at least once a week. Almost one in 10 (9 percent) say they upload videos of their own creation at least weekly. Overall, more than one in five online students (22 percent) say they have uploaded videos they created at some point.

Sharing photos. Nearly one in four (24 percent) of online students say they post photos or artwork created by others at least once a week. More than one in five (22 percent) say they post photos or artwork of their own creation at least that often. In 2002, only 12 percent said they “exchange pictures with friends”

once a week or more. Overall, nearly half (49 percent) say they have uploaded photos or artwork at some point.

Site-building. More than one in 10 online students (12 percent) say they update their personal Web site or online profiles every day; one in four (25 percent) do so at least weekly. In 2002, only 12 percent of tweens and teens even had a personal Web site or online profile.

Blogging. More than one in six (17 percent) of online students say they add to blogs they’ve created at least weekly; 30 percent of students have their own blogs. In 2002, blogs were a negligible blip on the online scene for students.

Creating content. In 2002, only about one in seven students (13 percent) said they were involved in online art and story-sharing, either creating it or looking at others’ work. Today, many more students report participating in just one creative process — authoring — every week — and the range of their content creation activities is much broader. One in

six (16 percent) say they use online tools to create and share compositions that are more sophisticated than simple art or stories, including virtual objects, such as puzzles, houses, clothing and games. One in seven (14 percent) create new characters at least weekly, with nearly a third of these students doing so every day. One in 10 (10 percent) start or contribute to online collaborative projects weekly or more frequently. Ten percent send suggestions or ideas to Web sites at least once a week as well. Nearly one in 10 (9 percent) submit articles to sites at least weekly or create polls, quizzes or surveys online.

Nonconformists — students who step outside of online safety and behavior rules — are on the cutting edge of social networking, with online behaviors and skills that indicate leadership among their peers. About one in five (22 percent) of all students surveyed, and about one in three teens (31 percent), are nonconformists, students who report breaking one or more online safety or behavior rules, such as using inappropriate

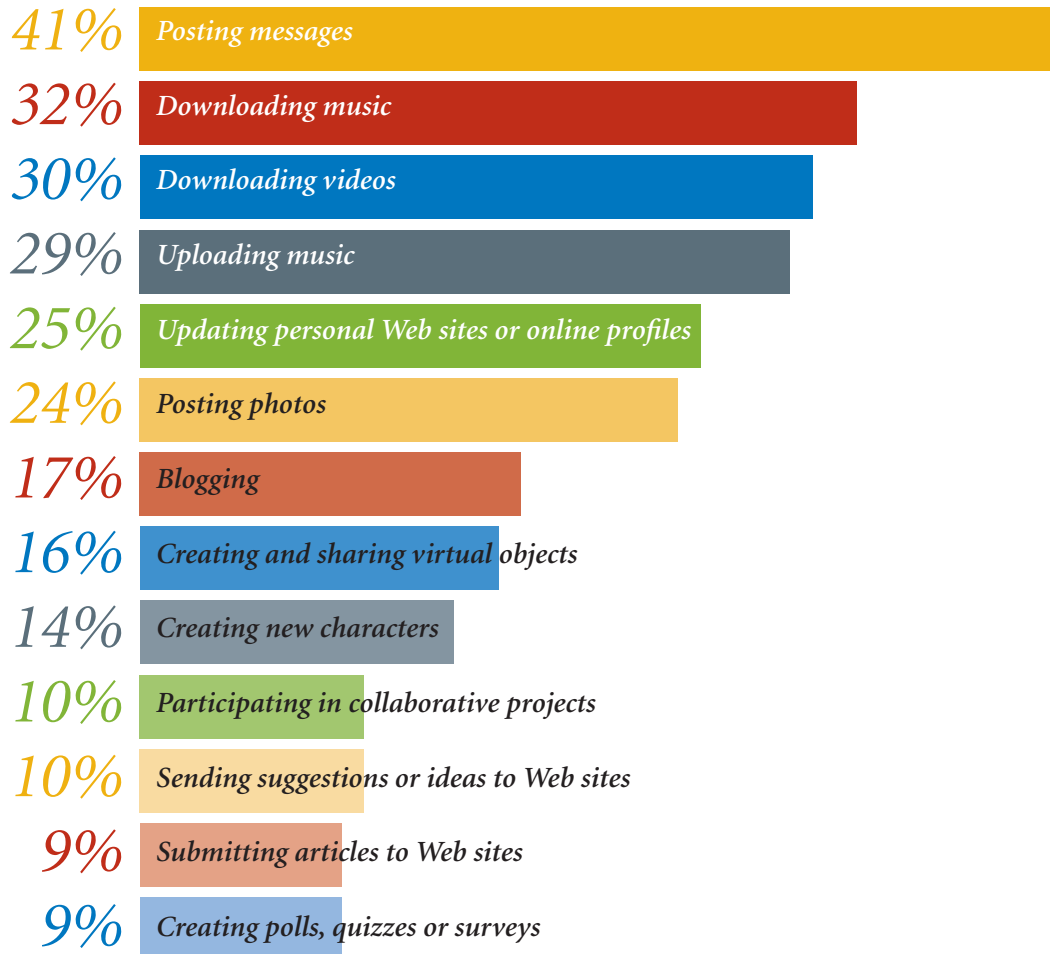
language, posting inappropriate pictures, sharing personal information with strangers or pretending to be someone they are not.

Nonconformists are significantly heavier users of social networking sites than other students, participating in every single type of social networking activity surveyed (28 in all) significantly more frequently than other students both at home and at school — which likely means that they break school rules to do so. For example, 50 percent of nonconformists are producers and 38 percent are editors of online content, compared to just 21 percent and 16 percent, respectively, of other students.

These students are significantly more likely to be heavy users of both new media (online, video games, handhelds) and old media (TV, videos/DVDs, radio). But they are significantly more likely to prefer new media to old. They also are disproportionately likely to learn about new sites and features online, through the “chat vine” or other online mechanisms, while other students are more

POPULAR SOCIAL NETWORKING ACTIVITIES

Percentage of online tweens and teens who say they do these activities at least weekly



Source: Grunwald Associates LLC

LEADING THEIR GENERATION

Nonconformists

are significantly more likely than other students to be:

Traditional influentials (students who recommend products frequently and keep up with the latest brands)

39%

27%

Promoters (students who tell their peers about new sites and features online)

41%

25%

Recruiters (students who get a disproportionately large number of other students to visit their favorite sites)

59%

32%

Organizers (students who organize a lot of group events using their handhelds)

23%

10%

Networkers (students with unusually large networks of online friends)

42 friends

17 friends

Source: Grunwald Associates LLC

likely to hear about them from parents or teachers. Ironically, nonconformists also are more in touch with their parents as well, communicating significantly more frequently with their parents in every way except in person — online or by cell phone, for example — than other students.

These students seem to have an extraordinary set of traditional and 21st century skills, including communication, creativity, collaboration and leadership skills and technology proficiency. Yet they are significantly more likely than other students to have lower grades, which they report as “a mix of Bs and Cs,” or lower, than other students. However, previous research with both parents and children has shown that enhanced Internet access is associated with improvements in grades and school attitudes, including a 2003 survey by Grunwald Associates LLC. In any event, these findings suggest that schools need to find ways to engage nonconformists in more creative activities for academic learning.

CREATING & CONNECTING// THE GAPS



While social networking seems omnipresent in the lives of most tweens and teens outside of school, most school districts are cautious about its use in school:

Most schools have rules against social networking activities:

- More than nine in 10 school districts (92 percent) require parents and/or students to sign an Internet use policy. Nearly all (98 percent) districts use software to block access to inappropriate sites.
- More than eight in 10 districts have rules against online chatting (84 percent) and instant messaging (81 percent) in school.
- More than six in 10 districts (62 percent) have rules against participating in bulletin boards or blogs; six in 10 (60 percent) also prohibit sending and receiving e-mail in school.
- More than half of all districts (52 percent) specifically prohibit

any use of social networking sites in school.

Still, despite the rules, there is some officially sanctioned, educationally packaged social networking occurring in schools. Almost seven in 10 districts (69 percent) say they have student Web site programs. Nearly half (49 percent) say their schools participate in online collaborative projects with other schools, and almost as many (46 percent) say their students participate in online pen pal or other international programs. More than a third (35 percent) say their schools and/or students run blogs, either officially or in the context of instruction. More than one in five districts (22 percent) say their classrooms are involved in creating or maintaining wikis, Web sites that allow visitors to add, remove or edit content.

Many school districts also use social networking for professional purposes. For example, more than one in four districts (27 percent) say their schools participate in a structured teacher/principal online community.

Interestingly, districts that report that their parents are influential in technology decision making are more active in social networking (71 percent vs. 59 percent in districts with low parental influence). Further, large, urban and Western districts are typically more active users of social networking than other districts.

Students and parents report fewer recent or current problems, such as cyberstalking, cyberbullying and unwelcome personal encounters, than school fears and policies seem to imply. Only a minority of students has had any kind of negative experience with social networking in the last three months; even fewer parents report that their children have had a negative experience over a longer, six-month period.

Most problems students and parents report are similar to the types of problems typically associated with any other media (television or popular music) or encountered in everyday life:

- One in five students (20 percent) say they have seen inap-

TEACHERS REQUIRING INTERNET USE FOR HOMEWORK

School district leaders report that teachers are now routinely assigning homework that requires Internet use to complete, no longer allowing equity concerns to be a barrier:

Nearly all school districts (**96%**) say that at least some of their teachers assign homework that requires Internet use to complete.

More than a third of all school districts (**35%**) say more than half of their teachers assign homework that requires Internet use.

More than nine out of 10 school districts of low socioeconomic status (**94%**) say some of their teachers assign Internet-based homework, and more than one in four of these districts (**27%**) say more than half of their teachers do so.

Nearly all school districts (**95%**) say that at least some of their teachers are using Web pages to communicate assignments, curriculum content and other information.

More than eight out of 10 school districts (**88%**) subscribe to online educational services or learning management systems, or both. Of these subscribing districts, 87 percent allow students to access these services from home.

*ONLY .08%
OF ALL STUDENTS SAY
THEY'VE ACTUALLY
MET SOMEONE
IN PERSON FROM
AN ONLINE ENCOUNTER
WITHOUT THEIR
PARENTS' PERMISSION.*

appropriate pictures on social networking sites in the last three months; 11 percent of parents, referring to their own children over the last six months, concur.

- Nearly one in five students (18 percent) say they have seen inappropriate language on social networking sites; 16 percent of parents concur.
- Personally directed incidents, which are of serious concern to students, parents and educators, are relatively rare. About one in

14 students (7 percent) say someone has asked them for information about their personal identity on a social networking site; 6 percent of parents concur.

About one in 14 students (7 percent) say they've experienced self-defined cyberbullying; 5 percent of parents concur. About one in 25 students (4 percent) say they've had conversations on social networking sites that made them uncomfortable;

3 percent of parents concur. Fewer than one in 30 students (3 percent) say unwelcome strangers have tried repeatedly to communicate with them online; 3 percent of parents concur. Only about one in 50 students (2 percent) say a stranger they met online tried to meet them in person; 2 percent of parents concur. Only .08 percent of all students say they've actually met someone in person from an online encounter without their parents' permission. The vast majority of students, then, seem to be living by the online safety behaviors they learn at home and at school.

- School district leaders seem to believe that negative experiences with social networking are more common than students and parents report. For example, more than half of districts (52 percent) say that students providing personal information online has been "a significant problem" in their schools, yet only 3 percent of students say they've ever given out their e-mail addresses, instant messaging screen names

or other personal information to strangers. Similar differences occur between districts' beliefs and students' and parents' reported experiences with inappropriate material, cyberbullying and other negative incidents.

CREATING & CONNECTING // EXPECTATIONS AND INTERESTS



While a significant percentage of educators require their students to use the Internet for homework, school policies indicate that many are not yet convinced about the value of social networking as a useful educational tool or even as an effective communications tool. This may indicate that their experience with social networking is limited. However, they are curious about its potential — a sign that there may be some shifts in attitudes, policies and practices in the future.

Both schools and especially parents have strong expectations about the positive roles that social networking could play in students' lives. District leaders say they hope social networking will help students “get outside the box” in some way or another. Nearly half of them (48 percent) expect social networking to introduce students to “new and different kinds of students.” More than four in 10 (43 percent) hope

social networking will help students “learn to express themselves better creatively” and “develop global relationships.”

But district leaders are skeptical at this point about the educational value of social networking. Fewer than one in three (29 percent) believe that social networking could help students improve their reading or writing or express themselves more clearly (28 percent). Somewhat more of them (36 percent) hope that social networking will help students learn to work together to solve academic problems.

Parents, on the other hand, have higher expectations. More than three in four (76 percent) expect social networking to help their children improve their reading and writing skills or express themselves more clearly; three out of four (75 percent) also expect social networking to improve children's ability to resolve conflicts. Almost as many (72 percent) expect social networking to improve their children's social skills as well.

Both schools and parents are interested in social networking as

an educational tool. Both also demand an educational value and purpose as a requirement for social networking in school.

Nearly nine in 10 district leaders (87 percent) say “strong educational value and purpose” will be a requirement for them to permit student access to any social networking site. Urban (89 percent) and rural (96 percent) districts feel particularly strongly about this, compared to their peers. More than seven in 10 parents (72 percent) agree that educational value and purpose are “important” or “very important.”

Large proportions of district leaders say that a strong emphasis on collaborative and planned activities (81 percent), strong tools for students to express themselves (70 percent) and an emphasis on bringing different kinds of students together (69 percent) would be required for them to buy into social networking for school use. But most also would insist on adult monitoring (85 percent) and would continue to prohibit chat and instant messaging (71 percent) as conditions of social networking use in school.

STRIKING A BALANCE// GUIDANCE AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS



Parents and communities place faith in school board members and educators to protect students during the school day — and that means securing their safety when they're online. It is

appropriate, then, for school boards to approach social networking with thoughtful policies that maintain their parents' and communities' trust.

At the same time, parents and communities also expect schools to take advantage of potentially powerful educational tools,

including new technology. Clearly, both district leaders and parents are open to believing that social networking could be such a tool — as long as there are reasonable parameters of use in place.

Moreover, social networking is increasingly used as a communications and collaboration tool of choice in businesses and higher education. As such, it would be wise for schools, whose responsibility it is to prepare students to transition to adult life with the skills they need to succeed in both arenas, to reckon with it.

Finally, despite the large majorities of students who seem to be highly active social butterflies online, equitable access is still a critical consideration for schools. It is incumbent on schools to recognize the silent minority of students who do not have easy access to computers, cell phones and other devices commonly used for social networking.

Here are some ways that school board members could strike the appropriate balance between protecting their students and providing a 21st century education:

Explore social networking sites. Many adults, including school board members, are like fish out of water when it comes to this new online lifestyle. It's important for policymakers to see and try out the kinds of creative communications and collaboration tools that students are using — so that their perceptions and decisions about these tools are based on real experiences.

Consider using social networking for staff communications and professional development. In districts where structured online professional communities exist, participation by teachers and administrators is quite high. Nearly six in 10 districts (59 percent) say at least half of their staff members participate, while nearly four in 10 (37 percent) say 90 percent or more do so. These findings indicate that educators find value in social networking — and suggest that many already are comfortable and knowledgeable enough to use social networking for educational purposes with their students.

*SAFETY POLICIES
REMAIN IMPORTANT, AS
DOES TEACHING STUDENTS
ABOUT ONLINE SAFETY
AND RESPONSIBLE ONLINE
EXPRESSION — BUT STUDENTS
MAY LEARN THESE LESSONS
BETTER WHILE THEY'RE
ACTUALLY USING
SOCIAL NETWORKING TOOLS.*

Find ways to harness the educational value of social networking. Some schools and educators are experimenting successfully with chat rooms, instant messaging, blogs, wikis and more for after-school homework help, review sessions and collaborative projects, for example. These activities appeal to students — even students who are reluctant to participate in the classroom.

Ensure equitable access. Schools have a role to play in closing the digital divide with social networking, just as they have with Internet access. Most students have some way to get online, either in their schools, at public libraries or at home — as educators apparently recognize when they assign homework that requires Internet use. But educators will have to consider the often-impromptu exchanges and instant access that are characteristic of social networking as they plan ways to incorporate it into educational experiences.

Pay attention to the nonconformists. The survey findings identify this group of students as highly engaged and skilled at social networking and as an influential leadership cadre among their peers. Yet they seem to be lukewarm about traditional schoolwork and academics, perhaps because the allure of social networking is more compelling than traditional ways of learning. By reaching out to these students and tapping into their interests, educators could yield a double benefit: a heads-up on the next new things that many other students are likely to gravitate to online and improved academic results for the nonconformists.

Reexamine social networking policies. Many schools initially banned or restricted Internet use, only to ease up when the educational value of the Internet became clear. The same is likely to be the case with social networking. Safety policies remain important, as does teaching students about online safety and responsible online expression —

but students may learn these lessons better while they're actually using social networking tools.

Encourage social networking companies to increase educational value. Educational leaders should work with social networking companies to increase services that are explicitly educational in nature, via informal or formal initiatives that highlight educational offerings.



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**THE NATIONAL SCHOOL
BOARDS ASSOCIATION**

is a not-for-profit federation of state associations of school boards across the United States. Our mission is to foster excellence and equity in public education through school board leadership. NSBA represents

the nation's 95,000 school board members that govern 14,890 local school districts serving more than 47 million public school students.



The Technology Leadership Network (TLN) is NSBA's district membership program designed for education leaders who establish policies and implement technology decisions that enhance teaching and learning, operations, and community outreach efforts.

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