

# GET CONNECTED, GET IN THE KNOW



## Online Respect and Responsibility

*Email ... the Internet ... cell phones ...  
BlackBerrys ... instant messaging ...  
MP3 players ... Chances are you used  
at least one of these technologies today.  
They have become a part of our daily lives.*



### Did You Know?



- Over 70% of Canadians are now online every month
- Canadians spend an average of 40 hours a month online.

*MBS Media Landscape 2007, data provided by comScore.*

These **technologies** are changing the way we communicate, access and share information. They make it easier to stay in touch with friends and family, do research and find homework help.

The Internet has opened the door to new learning and teaching opportunities. It has also raised issues about privacy, online respect, safety and appropriate uses for technology – both inside and outside the classroom.

## Ontario students have critical perspectives to share

It was my pleasure to meet with almost 50 students from across Ontario this past May. The forum opened what I believe will be an important provincewide dialogue about the impact of technology. While it is essential that student perspectives be reflected across all dimensions of education, there was a particular need to listen to our students first on this complex issue. Young people have embraced the Internet and other technologies as a primary social channel — a place of community and a vital part of everyday life. If we are to respond appropriately to the needs of Ontario students, we must begin by listening. I want to thank these students for the thoughtful perspectives and keen observations they shared with us. They will inform future directions in Ontario schools.

The Honourable Kathleen Wynne  
Minister of Education



### Hearing From Students:

In May 2007, the Minister of Education invited elementary and secondary students from across Ontario to participate in a student forum about online respect and responsibility.

Almost 50 students attended. They shared their experiences, talked about the issues and suggested solutions. Some of those discussions are captured here.

Find out what these students had to say, and think about starting a discussion in your school and community.



# Here's what students had to say...

**"...I use the Internet to help with my homework, getting homework or assignments in the event of a missed school day, and for academic support."**



## Technology

Every day, students use the Internet, email, cell phones, MP3 players and other technologies for:

- Connecting with family
- Doing research, e-learning and gathering information
- Social networking and communicating with friends.

## Technology and School

Some students defined "school climate" as how the school is viewed within the community.

Technologies can have a positive impact on schools because they:

- Support social interaction and generate a sense of community
- Allow people with common interests to talk and connect with people around the world
- Provide a forum for students to compliment, recognize and encourage others online.

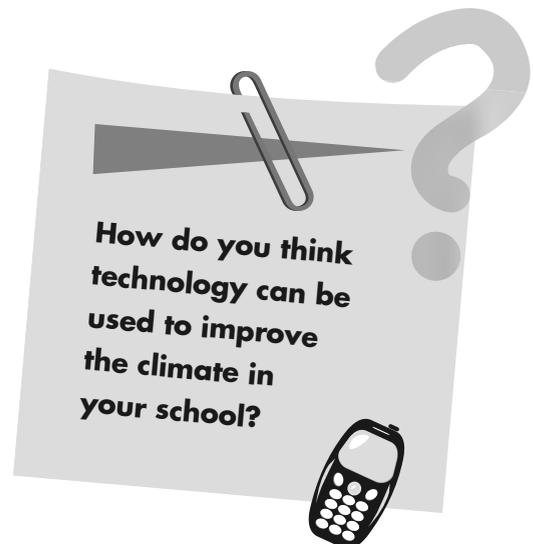
But, the inappropriate use of technologies can have a negative impact on the school climate. For example, even if cyberbullying takes place outside of school hours and off school grounds, it can:

- Make students feel unsafe
- Affect the reputation of the school
- Influence the spread of rumours about a student, groups of students or others in the school community.

**"People can post embarrassing incidents that happen to people and they post it as a joke but it can be very harmful."**

## Technology and the Media

Students expressed concern that the media focus on the inappropriate use of technology and that this can take the focus away from the largely positive uses.



**"... it's all interconnected - cyberbullying, [school] climate..."**

# So, what are the issues?

**“When someone bullies online, they don’t see them [the bullied person] on the computer and the effect they are having on them.”**



While the students talked about the positive uses for technology, they also recognized that technology can be used inappropriately. Many of them knew someone who had experienced inappropriate behaviours online, such as:

- Insults/belittling remarks
- Threats
- Rude comments
- Jokes at someone else’s expense
- Photos or videos of a negative or embarrassing nature.

Students also talked about the issue of cyberbullying. Cyberbullying differs from other forms of bullying because it:

- Can be spread to many people very quickly. For example, an embarrassing photo taken with a cell phone can be sent to dozens of classmates in minutes

- Can be anonymous, making continued negative and hurtful behaviour easier and encourage it to escalate
- May remain posted on the Internet for an indefinite period of time.

## **What Does the Research Say?**

- *Kids Help Phone conducted an online survey about cyberbullying. Over 70% of the respondents said they had experienced cyberbullying. When asked what would be helpful or would make it easier to come forward and talk, 53% said that they need somewhere they can safely report cyberbullying behaviour. (2007)*
- *Research and experience show that bullying is a serious issue that has far-reaching consequences for individuals, their families and peers and the community at large.*
- *According to the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health one-third of Ontario students are being bullied at schools and almost one-third of students report having bullied someone else.*



**Where can you go for help if you are aware of inappropriate uses of technology?**



**“...caring teachers make you feel safe.”**

# Finding Solutions

“... need to empower students ... have students discuss in classrooms what a positive climate means to them ... if they define it, then they’ll be more responsible.”

Students who attended the forum suggested a number of solutions to guide future discussions.

They said the solution to addressing inappropriate use of technology does not lie in blocking its use, but in **developing a broad understanding of the appropriate and inappropriate uses of technology** for all members of the school community.

The students felt that this could be accomplished by:

- Educating all students from a young age about safe and appropriate technology use
- Teaching students about the kinds of serious and/or dangerous situations other students have encountered online
- Helping all students have an understanding of how their online activities may affect others
- Equipping students with the interpersonal skills to respond online to an individual who is bullying
- Using online media to raise awareness and understanding of cyberbullying
- Providing ongoing training for teachers and administrators.

Students at the forum also suggested that **clear guidelines** are necessary. They said these guidelines should suggest who they can go to for help and a procedure for reporting behaviours like cyberbullying and other misuses of technology. Students want to be consulted when guidelines are developed.

Some students suggested that peer mediation could help make sure the guidelines are implemented effectively.

“[To help prevent cyberbullying]... students should not be afraid [to report an incident], know that what you’re saying is going to be listened to...”

What other ideas would you suggest to promote online respect and responsibility?

“communication – is key to solving the problem.”

Another group of students thought that schools should adopt a mediation “panel” involving both students and adults, so that a sense of shared decision-making is maintained.

The guidelines should also **be flexible** students said. Hard and fast rules will not be effective where technology is concerned as technology is constantly changing.

The students also suggested that **a supportive school climate** encourages them to ask for help, and supports those who experience negative online incidents.

School staff have a powerful influence on school climate, ensuring in particular that students feel safe and have someone to turn to.

**“...character development ... need to incorporate this concept in schools.”**

**The school community** – students, parents, teachers, principals and vice-principals, staff and others – **should be actively engaged** in addressing technology issues.

The students at the forum also said that **developing student leadership** and **engaging all students** can also make a difference. They said that students can make the biggest difference in addressing technology issues.



They said all students:

- Must take the lead on this issue
- Can influence each other
- Cannot afford to be bystanders and need to take action
- Need to model positive behaviour for each other
- Need to know the risks and understand the consequences of improper use.

In addition to provincial or regional youth forums, students suggested that at the school level, the views of all students should be represented, rather than those of a select few.

Students also said a **combination of disciplinary measures and incentives** would be most helpful in addressing technology issues.

In summary, students stated that the appropriate use of technology cannot be ‘legislated’ in the school. Rather, each student must arrive at responsible behaviour as an individual and as a part of the school community.

**All students can be leaders, problem-solvers, advice-givers, and change-makers.**



**“...the Internet cannot be turned off – it’s global and it’s evolving.”**

# What is the government doing to help?



Cyberbullying can affect many people, not just students. Did you know for example that 84% of Ontario teachers say they have been the subject of comment by cyberbullies?

(Ontario College of Teachers Report, 2007)

To help promote a positive school environment, the government:

- Introduced changes to the Education Act that added bullying as an infraction for which suspension must be considered
- Revised the Provincial Code of Conduct. It holds all members of the school community to the highest standards of respectful and responsible behaviour
- Introduced a Character Development initiative that supports academic achievement by developing well-rounded citizens who will help build a strong, caring and compassionate society
- Provided \$3 million for a partnership with Kids Help Phone to provide more resources for bullying and cyberbullying prevention support.

And that's just a start. Find out more at [www.edu.gov.on.ca](http://www.edu.gov.on.ca).

**Does your school have a list of resources on this topic? If not, can you help create one?**



# Let's Get Talking

"...This is a great start and we can relay these messages across the province; help those who are being bullied. Step in! You can have an impact."



Online respect and responsibility is an important issue, and one that is shared by all members of the school community.

We hope this paper will spark discussions among students, parents, educators, schools and school boards on the impact of technology in our schools and its effect on school climate.



## Questions for Discussion:

Here are a few questions to think about and get you started.

- How is technology used in your school community?
- How do you think technologies contribute to making schools positive and safe places to be?
- What do you think can be done to promote online respect and responsibility? What role can you play?
- As a member of a school community, how are you currently engaged in the promotion of online respect and responsibility?
- Are there policies or guidelines in place in your school or board?
- How can you share these ideas and resources from your discussion and get the whole school community involved?



## Acknowledgement

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