

COMPUTERS ARE PRESENT IN CLASSROOMS, BUT CYBER SAFETY SEEMS ABSENT

BY AEDRIC HORTON

Ninety-five percent of schools have Wi-Fi in every room. Counter-intuitively, “Only 24 percent [of teachers] feel very well-prepared to teach about protecting personal information online; 23 percent feel well-prepared to teach about the risks of cyberbullying; and one-third feel well-prepared to teach basic computer security skills, such as password protection and backing up data,” as Campus Safety Magazine reports on a recent National Cyber Safety Alliance study. These statistics show our disability to move into the digital age.

All around the world, people of all ages are struggling with computers. According to the Children’s Partnership, an organization that represents innovation and collaboration in the children’s advocacy field, “In 14 percent of schools in Florida, the majority of teachers (at least half) are ‘beginners’ when it comes to using technology,” with the national average being 15 percent. Of Colorado’s 200,000 unemployed adults, an estimated 66,000 lack foundational digital skills. They are struggling to open a Word document, failing to connect to the Wi-Fi, and worst of all, accidentally stumbling across something inappropriate.

People need to learn at a very early age how to avoid these problems. Even a student at our school, Ben Spoto, was surprised by a virus that took weeks to remove. He was just looking things up when a pop-up said that he needed something called “Wave Browser.” It seemed very legitimate, but he did not think to look it up on a different device. Sadly, he was then infected with much worse than a virus. He was infected with a different kind of malware, which secretly installs other viruses into your computer, which took weeks to remove.

As Florida Detective Adam Granit, a Task Force Officer of the FBI of Miami and the Davie Police Department, said, “You don’t just give your kids keys and tell them to drive, so why give them the internet and tell them to just be safe?” Parents and teachers struggle to put enough emphasis on teaching these basic skills necessary for practically every job nowadays. Seventy-seven

percent of jobs in Colorado only require computer skills. It seems most schools don’t have any sort of computer classes. However, not all hope is lost. Some agencies are traveling around the country conducting special classes, helping kids learn how to use computers. This is just the beginning of the total transition to the digital age.

People all over the world are struggling with computers. Struggling to do even the simplest tasks. They might be accidentally downloading a virus, falling for a phishing scam, or seeing things they will regret for the rest of their lives. Schools should be teaching kids how to avoid it, but it appears most are not. It is sad, to say the least, how one of the most useful inventions yet, does not appear to be of precedence to the school system. A poll done by M.I.T in 2002 says that according to the students, the personal computer was the most useful tool in the 20th century. Even the parents’ poll concluded that it was the second most useful tool, only behind pacemakers. Keep in mind that this was in 2002, when the first iMac to ever have a flat-screen came out, and only a year after the first iPod.

However, the overall lack of computer and internet literacy in the world is not only the teachers’ fault. A parent’s job is to look after their children. Sometimes teachers cannot teach a sensitive or personal topic at school, and it is the parents’ job to educate their children on those subjects. It is not always as simple as schools not being able to teach a subject, it may be that the school lacks funding for another course. To fix this, the government could provide additional funding for computer and internet courses. This would benefit the government as well, since more computer classes means less money in Informational Technology costs and more money back from more people with more jobs, therefore causing the economy to improve. The government could also fund a variety of traveling computer agencies that travel around certain states giving classes to those in need.

A few actions are being taken to help with this problem. One is a collection of agencies that travel throughout some states and teach classes about



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– DETECTIVE ADAM GRANIT
Task Force Officer of the FBI of Miami

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internet safety. It is known as the Digital Equity Program. It began in August 2023 and continues to educate kids around Colorado. Even better, it has free courses and will provide a budget Chromebook computer for the user to purchase if necessary, along with mobile internet. It is also available in Spanish, allowing more exposure. Right now this program is based in Colorado, but with enough support, it can begin to travel around the United States and help more people.

Detective Granit helps keep children safe on the internet. He is part of the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC), a police division dedicated to helping children who have been abused or extorted over the internet. He has helped save countless children from permanent trauma or worse. People online have begun to get into fake, close relationships with young teenagers. After forming a “bond,” they coax the kids to send over inappropriate photos. As soon as the photo arrives, depending on the goal, they either demand more photos, gift cards, or money in exchange for keeping the image private from the teens’ friends and family. First of all, it is quite unlikely that any teens reading this are carrying or have quick access to a couple hundred dollars. Also, these people typically set time limits, making these teens want to quickly drive to the store and get gift cards, which may cause accidents. Luckily, people like Detective Granit are here to help prevent situations like this and even worse.

Sometimes the detective goes online and poses as a teenage girl. In doing this, he attracts the “bad people” to him. He plays along and arranges a meeting place. When the bad person arrives, he is greeted by a small SWAT team that arrests him, thankfully, before he gets to a real girl. What makes these scenarios worse is that these teens typically don’t want to tell their parents, probably out of fear of getting into trouble. So, if any teens out there get involved in these sorts of things, talk to a parent about what’s going on and ask them to report it to CyberTipline, a system from the NCMEC, a non-profit organization. The detective

used to receive about 15 cases of this kind per month. Since COVID, when the internet was used even more, that number has gone up to 30 or 40 cases per month. This makes it all the more likely that the child of a parent who is reading this may be getting in this kind of trouble.

Parents, don’t punish your kids for getting into this kind of trouble. Instead, stay calm, talk to the police, and talk to your kid. They are probably pretty traumatized and a severe punishment is the last thing they need. Also, teach them about what they should do better, like avoiding dating people online. On another note, make sure that your kids are keeping their social media accounts private and make sure that they don’t post anything inappropriate or any personal information, as the “bad people” could be stalking their accounts and finding out where they are, and that could lead to danger. “Make sure that whatever they’re posting is something they’d want the rest of the world to see,” Detective Granit said.

Even if it’s the school’s responsibility to educate your kids, YOU still have to take responsibility for your kids. You have to protect your kids and prepare them for the future. A message to parents around the world: It’s your turn to protect the next generation.

CAUTION