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## 'Digital citizenship' will teach kids, parents about responsible use of data, social media

by [Laura Johnson](#)

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*Keyona McCallum works at her computer Monday during her technology class at Saks Elementary. Calhoun County's school system has begun a program called 'digital citizenship,' which aims to teach students how to use new technology responsibly. (Anniston Star photo by Bill Wilson)*

**OHATCHEE** — As students in classrooms become more connected to the world and to one another through social media, school administrators are trying to ensure those interactions reflect good choices and sound personal standards.

The concept they want to teach is “digital citizenship.”

It's a concept parents are having to get used to.

“This is the first time I'd heard the term,” Wendy Latham said Tuesday at a meeting in Ohatchee where parents learned how technology is being used in Calhoun County schools. “It's definitely new.”

Learning about the concept helped assuage some of her concerns about a new county program that allows each student to bring personal electronic devices into the classroom, Latham said.

In the meeting held in the Ohatchee High School cafeteria, Calhoun County school administrators told approximately two dozen parents and teachers that digital citizenship will be introduced to students over the next several months as the system begins the new technology program, known as Bring Your Own Device.

“The Internet is here to stay. We have to teach our children what is appropriate and what is not appropriate,” said Calhoun County Deputy Superintendent Karen Winn. “We ask that parents, also, have that conversation.”

Calhoun County Superintendent Joe Dyar spoke about BYOD and digital citizenship while video and slides were projected onto a portable screen behind him to display terms and definitions.

County schools leaders plan similar meetings in each school attendance zone this semester.

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Dyar told parents that students will be taught about overarching concepts like privacy, free speech and intellectual property rights. He said teachers will discuss social networking etiquette, cyber-bullying, how to properly reference online sources for class research and how to determine which websites provide credible information.

In essence, educators say, the conversation moves the concept of citizenship to a new level, from the real-world interactions of years past to virtual interactions through social media. In schools, it fits into the structure of character education.

“You have to adapt,” said Bobby Tittle, principal of Ohatchee High School.

He said at Ohatchee High School, students will consistently be reminded of how to use technology responsibly in society.

While Calhoun County Schools are using the term “digital citizenship” to describe how they’re teaching students to use technology responsibly, other area school systems are teaching the same concept without the phrase.

In Piedmont, which equips each student in grades 4-12 with a laptop, teachers try to help students learn how to use technology responsibly in several different ways, said Superintendent Matt Akin.

For example, Akin said, all Piedmont High School students start the day with an online class. If the students in grades 10-12 complete their work on time and keep a B average, they don’t have to come to school for the first class of the day.

“There are several reasons behind that but not the least of which is to train students to be good online class-takers,” Akin said. “You have to manage your time wisely.”

In Oxford, teachers tell students that each item they post online leaves a digital character trail, said Roy Bennett, a spokesman for the school system.

Jacksonville City Schools is on the cusp of establishing a program that will equip each student in grades 4-12 with a tablet computer. As educators in that system research the possibility of implementing that program — which must receive board approval to move forward — they are also discussing how they will teach students to use the devices responsibly.

Teaching digital responsibility can be tricky, some administrators say, because the rules evolve with technology.

“You will not be able to cover all the bases because technology is changing too rapidly for that,” said Anthony Kingston, director of technology for Jacksonville City Schools. “We’re learning on the fly.”

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