What’s in this issue...

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Students have many opportunities for online learning — within and outside of their home district. These flexible and accessible courses have many benefits, and districts should share them to maximize enrollment and communicate about these programs.

Plan first, save the fun part for last!
It is easy to confuse communication tactics with a communication plan. Before you discuss tools like videos and publications, be sure to build a strategic foundation that includes when, why and how those tactics will support your goals.

Developing back-to-school learning opportunities for parents
When students head back to school, districts can create learning opportunities for parents that can help them better understand and navigate the school system. Parent classes can increase parent involvement, which improves student success.

Two-way communications with your local reporter
Scheduling a regular check-in with your local reporter is good practice for sharing news and building relationships with local media. A monthly phone or in-person meeting will help reporters share your news and ensure that they have the details they need.

Maximizing your website’s potential as a communications tool
The website often creates the first impression parents have of your school and district. Do an inventory and make improvements before school starts. Read tips on design and key content.

Insights for Parents: Understanding Your Screenager
Most teens rely on digital devices. Tech-addicted teens have inspired the term, “Screenagers.” Read about the impact of technology on today’s kids and teens and find tips for balancing technology and treating internet addiction.
Communicating about online learning opportunities for students

Students around the country have more educational opportunities thanks to a growing number of courses that are delivered online. A report by the National Center for Education Statistics found that 55 percent of districts had students enrolled in online programs. [https://bit.ly/2OMn185](https://bit.ly/2OMn185)

Each year, distance education programs have been added or expanded at schools around the country. Barriers based on technology or technology fears have come down, and access to digital tools has gone up to allow distance learning programs to fill an important gap for students who want to accelerate their studies or remediate required courses.

By now, districts with online programs often treat their distance learning program like their other schools. They communicate regularly with parents and host information nights for families.

New programs or those that are separate and different from other schools in the same district may want to consider the following tips for sharing information about this convenient alternative program. Remember to include information specific to your school board, community, parent and student audiences.

**Identify and reach your target audiences with messages tailored to them**

Your key messages should include the mission and goals of your online program. Is it mostly aimed at enrichment for high-performers? Is it for credit-deficient students at risk of dropping out? Are there offerings for both? You may serve a variety of students, but your program likely has a particular goal that will help you craft your messages and identify your target audience.

The tactics you use to reach that audience can include direct communication between high school staff and parents they come in contact with. High school staff should be armed with brochures for meetings with credit-deficient students and their parents.

**For credit-deficient students:** All pertinent information should be on a one-pager that can be left with the families of students who are considering dropping out or who have already dropped. Online courses may be the approach they need to succeed after they have struggled in the traditional high school setting. In these materials, stress the services and supports available to students and the benefits of gaining credits with a flexible schedule.

**For high-performing students:** Create publications and web-based communications that highlight advanced and expanded curricula. High achieving students want to see the benefits of sharing educational resources and interacting with students and teachers around the world.
Use best-practice communications

The same best practices for communications apply regardless of the type of student you are targeting. Effective communications will help potential students and their parents overcome reluctance or apprehension about your digital learning program.

Be sure to always keep the focus on the students and teachers instead of the technology. This will help you attract students and their parents, and it will help you retain students in your own district who have distance education opportunities wherever you choose.

It will also help you gain support from your school board and the community at large, who may not be familiar with your online programs. Be sure to educate them on the delivery of these classes that use technology to connect an actual teacher with her students in a more accessible way by breaking down barriers of time and place.

Avoid jargon. When spreading the word about your online courses, do not focus on the names of products, technologies and software packages. Unfamiliar names can distract your customers from the real value in your courses — learning.

Key message: Online learning is high school

Avoid the temptation to boast about “new, different, and innovative” online. Distance education is no longer new or innovative — it is a standard practice and, most likely, an expectation among your parents. Present your Internet courses as an integrated part of your high school program. Include them in your list of options for students who need to earn credits toward graduation.

Rigor and great teachers: To the unfamiliar, these courses may seem to be “made up,” by computer geeks instead of teachers. Emphasize that they are subject to the same level of rigor and oversight as traditional courses. List all accreditations that apply.

Promote the quality of your teachers. Include photos and quotes from teachers that emphasize real adults who care about kids are using computers to interact with students. Use photos of parents meeting and interacting with students in person in your materials and on your website because that is a key part of online learning.

Interactive courses: Many adults imagine that online courses are like the computerized tests at the DMV. They envision a student sitting alone, clicking through screen after screen as his mind wanders. Describe how the course is delivered interactively with guidance from the teacher and input from other students. Clarify that the computer doesn’t teach. A teacher does.

Technology and academic supports: Parents and students may fear a lack of support — both academic and technical. Be sure to show how students are supported in their coursework: discussion groups, phone conversations with the teacher and face-to-face meetings with students. Dedicate a phone line for technical support and promote it online and in your publications.

Key message: Not just for TAG kids or kids at-risk of dropping out

Flexibility and accessibility are primary goals of distance education. Although some courses may be tailored for TAG students — or students who need remediation — it is important to let students and
parents know that most courses are not. The goal of most programs is to provide credit opportunities for students who may benefit from a more flexible online schedule.

**Key message: Cheating is not more common than in school-based classes**

Potential students and parents may believe that online courses are easier to pass and easier to cheat on. Be sure to communicate the rigor and supervision that are involved in your accredited online program. Like classes in school buildings, the teacher monitors attendance, attitude, citizenship and quality of work. It may be helpful to share quotes from teachers about how they monitor classes and encourage students to do their own work.

Let your audience know that courses are structured to minimize opportunities for cheating, which is no more prevalent than in classrooms.

The computer will never replace the teacher. Your students, parents and community need to be reassured that online technology is an opportunity to enhance learning for students. Online courses break down barriers of time and place to help meet the needs of all students.

*Contributed by Marcia Latta, communications consultant*

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**Plan first, save the fun part for last!**

Let’s face it, the fun part of communications is the creative aspect — making a video, taking a picture or just brainstorming about all of the innovative tactics you could use in your information campaign. But too often, the fun, creative part gets in the way of building a firm foundation. Discussing tactics should come last, not first. The first thing you need is a plan on paper.

A communications plan does contain tactics at the end, but not the beginning. The first part of your plan is a series of statements that show what you want to accomplish and how you are going to do it in broad terms — goals and strategies. The last part of your plan is the creative work of choosing tactics, also known as “the part that everyone always wants to start with.”
One of the problems with jumping straight to tactics is that it takes focus away from your goals and strategies. Once you are working on the logistics of writing your script and setting up for your video shoot, you become very busy — too busy to plan out the rest of your campaign.

Another major problem with jumping right to tactics is that you fail to bring all of your staff and partners up to speed in the meantime. So when your beautiful web page or video hits, your most important allies are scratching their heads along with the general audience.

So, you should put the creative work on the back burner long enough to list your goals, strategies and timelines in a brief plan.

GOALS

What are you trying to accomplish? Goals are statements that help your team remain focused on outcomes rather than outputs. Of course, you are informing someone of something, but who are you informing and why? Goal statements help you agree on these foundational questions.

Sample goal statement: “To increase parental acceptance of school security measures to ease transition to new protocols.”

So this goal statement would not only tell you that you are focused on parents, but also what you are trying to communicate about with them and why. This will help prevent your tactics (the fun part) from going astray and watering down the impact of our communications effort.

You may have several goal statements, addressing different objectives. The main things to avoid are having too many (probably should be four or less) and avoid having conflicting goals.

Imagine how an informational tactic (video, brochure, web page, etc.) could become a random assortment of messages if there were no goal statement at all. Or imagine how different it would be if the goal were to reach district staff instead of parents—two very different objectives.

STRATEGIES

Once your communication goals are established, it is time to determine your strategies. At this point, you are getting a little more detailed about planning but you are still not at the “fun” part of brainstorming tactics. Strategy statements establish your approach—the “how.” As with goals, you should have a manageable number of strategic statements (again, probably a maximum of three or four).

Using the example above, strategy statements might look something like this: Alleviate parental concerns by illustrating the benefits of the new system compared to old protocols.

This strategy would help you organize your thoughts a little more than the goal statements. Contrast the strategy above with other possible strategies to achieve our sample goal statement above. You could choose a strategy more reliant on regulations and compliance. And in an emergency situation, you might need to. If that were the case, think about how the communications efforts would vary.

TIMELINES
There are several timelines to consider in your planning. First are the hard deadlines associated with whatever you are communicating about. You need to work backwards from the hard deadlines such as the implementation date of a new program, to ensure you have time to communicate. If you have a compressed timeline, you better not plan a bunch of fancy, time-consuming communications tactics. So get out the calendar right away.

The second type of timelines are production timelines. How long would it take you to produce a brochure, website or video. Establish these before choosing which tactics to pursue.

Perhaps the most important and most often overlooked timelines are those related to internal or cascading messaging. You simply need to build in time to bring internal audiences and partner organizations up to speed before your high profile communications hit. Staff and partners are going to be sense-makers for the rest of your community, so build in time to communicate with them first.

A WORD ABOUT MONEY

Budgets may or may not be a factor, depending on your situation. In many school districts, there is very little money for anything beyond keeping teachers in the classroom with students. But there are times when a few dollars could make a major impact on a communications campaign. Sometimes paid advertising or professional design/production can amp up your results. But there is no sense wasting time brainstorming about expensive products if there is no budget to work with.

FINALLY, THE FUN PART

Once you have established goals, strategies, timelines and budget, you can start having fun. You now have enough structure in place for meaningful brainstorming and evaluation of various different tactics and products.

But remember, videos and brochures don’t produce themselves. A list of tactics is not worth the paper or screen it is written on without a few more details about who and how.

For each tactic, there must be a project lead, team members and timelines to build a work plan on. You never want the boss to say “I thought we agreed on doing a town-hall meeting? How come that never happened?” Or if that does happen, you want to have a much better answer than “We never really decided who was in charge of making it happen.”

Communications can be fun and creative. In fact, it should be. But it should also be effective. And planning is the best way to ensure that it is. Lay the foundation first and then you will end up having fun and being effective at the same time.

*Contributed by Jay Remy, communications consultant*
Developing back-to-school learning opportunities for parents

As students head back to school this fall, districts might be wise to also offer learning opportunities for parents.

Parent classes are a popular option in many districts. They help parents better understand and navigate the school system and discover tools and resources for meaningful involvement in their children’s education. Other benefits include:

- Helping parents gain a clearer understanding of education terms and jargon, so they better understand programs and policies.
- Connecting parents to a variety of resources, such as who to contact if they believe their child has a learning disability or where to go to sign up for youth sports or other activities.
- Providing parents with an opportunity to develop relationships with staff, so they can have more meaningful conversations about the needs of their child.

Some districts hold monthly parent classes in the evenings. Others sponsor a one-day parent academy on a Saturday, where parents can take a variety of classes over the course of the day.

Parents who have attended parent classes say they’ve learned valuable information, such as how to understand their child’s report card or how to help with math homework. A benefit cited by teachers and principals is that the classes have had a positive impact on parent participation and communication between parents and school.

Topics for Parent Classes

The success of parent classes depends on offering classes that interest parents. While there is usually an emphasis on academic topics, some of the most popular classes are hands-on classes on topics such as how to prepare healthy, inexpensive meals for your family. The focus is to help equip families with the tools and information they need to help their children be ready to learn and be successful in school.

Some possible topics are:
• Tips on effective parent-school communication. Help parents understand the chain of command and how to maximize their interactions with school staff.
• How to help your English Language Learner
• What to do if your child is being bullied
• Leadership opportunities for your child
• Great tools to learn mathematics at home
• Special Ed Parent 101, to help parents understand their role in their child's special education program
• Paying for college — learn about the cost of college and the resources available to finance it
• Love and Logic tips that can help parents neutralize their child's arguing, set limits, prevent power struggles, etc.
• What is STEAM (Science-Technology-Engineering-Applied Arts-Mathematics) education?
• How to complete the FAFSA to apply for college financial aid
• Homework survival guide for parents
• Transitioning from middle school to high school
• State tests – consider having parents take some of the assessments that students are required to take, so they can experience first-hand the level of rigor that is required.

How to get started

Funding is always a consideration when starting new programs, but it doesn't take an oversized budget to offer parent classes. If teachers are asked to teach classes, then districts typically pay them an hourly rate to prepare for and teach the class. Some community presenters are happy to donate their time to teach classes that they feel are important. It's important to provide child care. Usually the only other expense is refreshments.

Districts that have successfully offered parent classes say the rewards – better informed and better-connected parents – far outweigh the expense.

Here are steps to begin organizing a series of parent classes:

• Form a planning committee that includes parents and staff. Parents are your best source for knowing the kinds of questions and topics that other parents would find most helpful.
• Make it easy for parents to attend by offering free child care.
• Feed them! Provide coffee and cookies or other small snacks.
• Recruit some of your staff "stars" to teach classes and showcase some of the new ways teachers are teaching and students are learning.
• Invite the media and local civic leaders to attend, so they can learn more about the higher expectations for students and staff.
• If your district has a large minority enrollment, consider conducting some of the classes in another language.
• Hand out evaluation forms and not only ask for feedback on the sessions but also suggestions for future topics.

Contributed by Connie Potter, communications consultant
Two-way communications with your local reporter

Reporters traditionally were taught to check in regularly with their news sources. This was to gather tidbits of news, get tips about upcoming developments, and build relationships.

Checking-in goes both ways. It’s become even more important as news media staffs have thinned, journalists have more to cover, and they have directed more of their energy toward social media. School communicators can serve their districts by recognizing journalists’ time constraints, proactively maintaining contact with them without being pests, and helping journalists meet their production needs.

As a reporter and later as an editorial page editor, I met monthly or so with our local school superintendent and/or communications director. The sessions were invaluable. The informal discussions provided news tips but also gave me context and background. (One of the flaws of journalism is that it’s possible to have all the facts right but still get the context wrong.)

I benefitted from knowing the school district’s news calendar, such as when enrollment numbers, state test results, principal reassignments and draft budgets would be announced.

The school district benefitted from understanding the newspaper’s weekly, monthly and annual news cycles. For example, the holiday season is when reporters particularly look for “evergreen” stories – ones not tied to a specific date, and which reporters can produce quickly before enjoying the holidays. On the other hand, election season can be a lousy time to pitch feature stories, because reporters are immersed in political coverage.

To be worthwhile, check-in meetings must be mutually effective. Reporters’ time is limited; so is yours. Journalists are reluctant to spend time on “get-to-know-you” sessions, regardless of whether over coffee or at a meeting of the newspaper editorial board. They want to get something immediately useful from each encounter.

As in any job, reporters must meet management’s expectations, while also trying to fulfill their own aspirations. In newsrooms, reporters traditionally were expected to “feed the beast,” that is, produce stories to fill that day’s news pages, along with writing longer pieces for weekend editions. Though modern managers typically have shelved the “feed the beast” terminology, the mentality persists. Today’s expectations often include posting on social media, shooting video as well as reporting, and working on daily, Sunday-edition and long-term stories.
Tips for monthly check-in meetings

Social Media: Prepare for these informal meetings with useable content. Have it in writing and available by email. Think not only of big news but smaller items. Even if not fully developed, it could be useful for the journalist’s planning and social media postings. Depending on the size and scope of the newspaper and of the school district, examples include:

- Hunky Dory School District is seeking three new members for its budget committee. Applications will be posted early next week on the district website.
- Jeanine Dow announced this week that she is retiring Dec. 31 as director of secondary education. Dow has worked in education for 42 years, including the last 27 for Hunky Dory Schools. Look for Superintendent Person’s Name to announce later this fall how the district will fill the vacancy.
- Mr. Ramirez’s fourth-grade class at Thelma Washington Elementary will launch and track a weather balloon on Friday. Last year’s balloon reached Lancaster. Follow along at the class website, www.ThisIsTheWebsite.HunkyDorySchools.edu.
- 27 Hunky Dory schools got new principals for this year. Next year’s new assignments are expected to be announced in late June.
- Student class lists for elementary schools will be posted Aug. 20.
- The North City High School girls’ soccer team is having a car wash from 8 a.m. to noon Saturday at Tina’s Texaco, 1234 56th St. N.

Each of the above would need a few more details for the journalist to pursue as a possible story, but the above wording might be used for tweets or other social media posts.

Photography: Viewers want action. Think of an auto race. The race draws interest, not drivers standing afterward chatting or showing off their cars. Thus, journalists need to shoot photos and videos when students and/or teachers are doing hands-on activities. They want to cover the start and continuation of a project, not just the ending. It drove me crazy that I often heard from teachers and school communicators after an interesting project finished.

Photos of a science fair generally are boring. In contrast, a video could be captivating if it showed a student testing musical instruments to mimic whales’ vocalizations and included interviews with the student as the project progressed.

As an editor, one of my favorite education stories was about first-graders writing “books.” The books were three or four sentences at the most. But the reporter was there for the entire process; she included such details as how the authors dealt with writer’s block (chewing on the pencil eraser).

Good journalists are storytellers, and that reporter told the story beautifully, probably in fewer than 350 words. It was a great read, giving readers insight into first grade while fulfilling the reporter’s daily production expectation.

Stories: Tell reporters what’s coming up, letting them decide what’s a story. It’s fine to explain why you find something interesting but don’t go overboard. You’re a source, not a lobbyist.

For example, the school district’s work on a new policy statement might not be newsworthy unless there was a tangible, measurable link to how it would affect classroom sizes or another issue of public concern.
Opinionators: As editorial page editor and a columnist, I sought to come out of these informal meetings with ideas for editorials and/or columns. Occasionally, the meetings provided all the reporting I needed. More often, they provided the context, background and potential sources that I needed to produce a well-researched, well-written piece.

Equally important, the meetings got future school district developments on my mental agenda, so I wouldn’t brush them off amid all the other things I had to do during a given day or week.

Here is my suggested checklist for check-in meetings:

• Arrange them according to the journalist’s schedule. Science tells us mornings generally are better for engagement and comprehension; 3 p.m. is the worst. Fridays often are awful for journalists because they’re on deadline for the weekend. Set a time frame, such as 30-45 minutes.

• Cover your main points but let the journalist’s interests guide the meeting. A good place to start is, “How can I be most helpful to you today?”

• Provide information but let the journalist decide how to publish it. I find it condescending when a source says, “Here’s something for you to post on social media,” as opposed to, “You might find this interesting.”

We all have egos, for better or worse, and don’t like someone telling us how to do our jobs.

• Agree whether the discussions are on-the-record, you may be quoted and/or paraphrased; on background, the information can be used but not attributed to you (this is useful for opinion writers but rarely for reporters); off-the-record, the information from you cannot be used, although the journalist may use similar information if obtained on-the-record elsewhere; or embargoed, the information cannot be published until an agreed-upon time.

In these conversations, it’s common for discussions to start off-the-record, and then the journalist and source may agree that certain information is publishable. As a journalist, I then would re-ask the relevant questions so my notes were clear as to what was on-the-record.

• Meet in a convenient, neutral place, such as a coffee shop that is not excessively noisy. Offer to buy but don’t be offended if the journalist says it’s against her/his organization’s ethics guidelines.

Side note: All things being equal, meet where parking is free. That saves everyone money, and the journalist doesn’t have to file an expense report. Journalists often forget to do so or figure it’s too much trouble.

• Remember you are acquaintances, not buddies. Some personal conversation is fine; it develops rapport. Asking about the reporter’s kids or pets or new car is appropriate; dissing your employer or the journalist’s organization is not.

• Never complain during these meetings. If you have a beef with a story, you should already have brought it up – politely and graciously – and resolved it with the journalist. No one wants to meet with a whiner.
• Say thanks. Hardly anyone does. Don’t go overboard praising a story or editorial; that comes across as self-serving. Try instead, “Thanks for digging into the district class sizes. The story and charts really showed the issue we’re facing.” Or, “We appreciate your publishing mini-profiles of the school board candidates. That is good information for voters.” Or, “You captured exactly what I was trying to say. Thank you.”

A brief handwritten note can do wonders for a person’s psyche. Journalists, like many others, often keep a file of “appreciations” to re-read when they’re having a bad day.

Contributed by Dick Hughes, a communications consultant. Contact him at TheHughesisms@Gmail.com.

Maximizing your website’s potential as a communications tool

As we head into a new school year, new students and families will be walking through your doors. But generally, this will not be the first impression they have of your school or district. For many families, your website will be their first stop. Their online experience will help to shape their opinion of your district. What type of message are you sending? What can you do to improve the user experience and enhance your website’s effectiveness as a communications tool?

A little bit of perspective

We all know that the importance of websites has grown in recent years. But what does this really look like?

• The world’s first website was published in August of 1991 — a mere 27 years ago. Today there are over 1.8 billion websites worldwide.
• The average American spends 24 hours a week online.
• Once your page loads, users form an opinion in .5 seconds.
• About a quarter of U.S. adults say they are ‘almost constantly’ online and over two-thirds are online multiple times a day.
• Mobile devices are projected to reach 79 percent of global internet use by the end of this year.
• Nearly 8 in 10 customers would stop engaging with content that doesn’t display well on their device.
• According to research from Stanford University, 75 percent of users admit to making judgments about an organization’s credibility based on their website’s design.

Being responsive

Yes, we need to respond to the needs and demands of our families and communities. But when it comes to your website, I’m not talking about response times and engagement. A website with a responsive design means that it automatically reformats its layout based on the device it is viewed on. In a world where our web content is increasingly viewed via smartphone, this is no longer a luxury. Making sure your website is mobile (and tablet) friendly will go a long way to improving user experience.

Design

Steve Jobs said, “Design is not just what it looks like and feels like. Design is how it works.” A strong school or district website should do both — look great and work well. But what makes a well-designed website? Here are a few basic rules of thumb:

Easy to use: People don’t usually come to our websites just to look around. Generally, they are there because they need some piece of information. And they expect to find it quickly and easily. Strategies to increase ease of use include: limiting the number of links on any one page, creating a logical organizational structure, creating audience-specific portals to ease navigation, and placing popular or frequently requested information front and center.

Clean, attractive layout: Less is often more with design. Pick a simple color palate. Don’t crowd too much onto a page. Avoid amateurish looking images or graphics.

Up to date: Websites can easily get out-of-date. And that can lead to confusion and frustration as parents try to sort out what information is current and what isn’t. Create a regular review schedule to take down out-of-date information. Put systems in place to regularly post new content. Any important document or resource put out by your district should be made available electronically as quickly as possible.

Focus on needed improvements: Provide opportunities for people to share feedback and then address areas of common frustration or confusion. However, steer away from unnecessary organizational overhauls. People learn how and where to find information on your site. Changes to layout or design (that are not prompted by genuine usability concerns) can lead to significant user frustration.

Creating a communications hub: If done right, your school or district website can be the central hub of your communications efforts. Whatever your other communications methods are (e-newsletter, notices sent home to parents, school and community events, alerts, social media posts) your website can support and enhance them.

Your website, your brand

Your brand is not just your mission and vision. It is also the experience of the students, parents, teachers, and community members you serve. Make sure your website is an extension of that brand.
Does your website reflect and mirror back your mission, vision and key priorities? Are students front and center on your website? Does your online experience mirror the educational experience you are providing in your schools? Ways to support a strong brand include: clearly featuring your mission and vision statements online; including a high-quality “About Us” section that articulates your values; featuring videos or photo slideshows of students; and providing opportunities for users to provide feedback, ask questions, or engage further.

A high-quality website can engender trust in your district and build positive associations with your schools. With the huge amount of time people spend online, where else are you going to have such frequent opportunities to engage and communicate? Being intentional about integrating your website into your communications strategy can both improve your users’ online experience and help advance district goals and communications priorities.

Resources:

**Why school website design is important:**
www.campussuite.com/school-website-design-important/

**5 tips for great school website design**
www.campussuite.com/5-tips-for-a-great-school-website-design/

**The essential school website design planning checklist**
www.campussuite.com/the-essential-school-website-design-checklist/

**Using Your School Website to Communicate with Your Community**
https://campuspress.com/blog/using-your-school-website-to-communicate-with-your-community/

*Contributed by Crystal Greene, communications*
Insights

Most teens are glued to their devices, and many spend more time online than at school. Having a phone and connecting with friends — even when currently with them — is as essential as breathing. This is why obsession with devices and access to technology, apps and the internet are becoming a new category of addiction.

Teenagers = Screenagers

Tech-addicted teens have inspired the name Screenagers, “techno-savvy young people, reared on television and computers.” The term was coined in 1997 by author Douglas Rushkoff who argued that young people who grow up with technology will have advantages in processing information. In other words, technology will change the way we think.

The term has more recently been used to title a documentary studying the effects of screen time on young people. Screenagers: Growing up in the Digital Age, is a study of screen use among kids and its effect on attention — and the way we think. As we learn more, the advantages of technology as a means of improving thinking are in doubt.

Screenagers is an effort to understand the impact of technology on kids. “Physician and filmmaker Delaney Ruston saw her own kids and learned that the average kid spends 6.5 hours a day looking at screens. She wondered about the impact of all this time and about the friction occurring in homes and schools around negotiating screen time — friction she knew all too well”

“SCREENAGERS reveals how tech time impacts kids’ development and offers solutions on how adults can empower kids to best navigate the digital world and find balance.”

www.screenagersmovie.com/

The impact of technology on kids and teens

Research into the effects of technology on kids’ brain development is a relatively new field, and researchers are measuring the effects as use of and exposure to devices increases. According to Delaney, studies have shown that “excessive use of screens could harm the physical development of young people’s brains. Studies show a correlation between too much screen time and worse attention spans, as well as negative effects on learning. https://nyti.ms/2hZo7ld
Overuse of the internet is also inked with sleep disorders, depression and anxiety, drug/alcohol use, poor academic performance, and poor social adjustment. Internet use that interferes with social, educational or work responsibilities is a red flag to set and enforce strong clear limits.

How much is too much screen time?

Parents, and teens themselves, know that screen limits are important, but they are hard to set and harder to follow. “Teens struggle with self-control, just like adults, and they know that playing Call of Duty or watching Netflix for eight hours straight is a less productive use of their time than practicing the piano or writing an essay.”

According to Delaney, simply taking a phone away is not a good strategy. Teens need to understand why they need to limit screen time. “Part of developing self-control is understanding and believing in a goal,” she said. “Once they are sold on the idea of limiting screen time, create boundaries with their input, so the rules don’t seem arbitrary and unfair. Draw up a contract so that kids understand what is expected of them.”

Identifying and treating internet addiction

Teens who won’t self-police or follow family screen time rules may be addicted to their phones. Internet addiction is not officially a clinical diagnosis — it hasn’t yet been recognized by the American Association of Psychiatry, which defines addiction based on the following characteristics:

Negative consequences: problems with relationships, work, school, and more
Tolerance: wanting to engage more and more to get the same affect
Withdrawal: anxiousness, physical symptoms and more when away from it
Unable to stop: Serious difficulties with trying to cut down or stop

There are, treatment programs related to internet obsession and excessive use. And helpful online resources for parents and teens.

Start with the Questionnaire for Problematic Use that is posted on the Screenagers film site. Written for video game addiction, it could also apply to general internet or social media addiction:
www.screenagersmovie.com/internet-addiction/

Tips and resources for teens and their parents

Think your kid (or you) could be a screen zombie? Take the ‘Screenagers’ test

Learning how to exert self-control

Compulsive Texting Associated with Poorer School Performance Among Girls

Compulsive Texting Takes Toll on Teenagers
https://well.blogs.nytimes.com/2015/10/12/compulsive-texting-takes-toll-on-teenagers/?mtrref=undefined

Teaching Self-Control Tips
www.parentingscience.com/teaching-self-control.html