In two short years, Kristen Mattson was able to transform her high school library into a bustling 21st-century learning center, where students are collaborating, creating and doing as opposed to quietly consuming. Part of the transformation at Waubonsie Valley High focused on digital citizenship and ensuring all students and staff learn and demonstrate new skills and awareness related to that focus. Mattson recently shared her vision and goals for digital citizenship and the varied ways she helps teachers in her school weave those goals into everything they do.

A SCHOOL IN NEED OF DIGITAL LITERACY

While Kristen Mattson was at Waubonsie Valley High School for five years, she accomplished much toward her goal of taking her library into the 21st century and beyond. Mattson knew she must also overcome the same challenges faced by many school libraries today – how to stay relevant in an increasingly digital age and how to build digital citizenship into the core DNA of the school library model. She started with an audit of her library to see how she could best support her school’s needs. She concluded that students needed books that were curated just for them.
So Mattson and her team of assistants, students and parent volunteers strategically rearranged the remaining books. They genrefied and better showcased the fiction and nonfiction sections, and streamlined the reference books, because much of the information is now readily available online. She also rearranged the library space into a more welcoming, collaborative space. In the first year alone, she weeded 10,000 books from the collection. “Some of the books we culled had not been checked out for nearly 35 years,” Mattson explained.

Mattson forged ahead with a new web presence to include information on eBooks, instructional database video tutorials, an online calendar of library events, a list of available Makerspace materials, and a dedicated page for specific classroom projects. It had to be interactive, up-to-the minute and intuitive to drive usage.

“It was important to me that our website be attractive, organized, easily searchable, and up-to-date. This is the first way I can help ease patrons into opportunities for practicing their digital literacy skills by presenting a quality web presence that teachers and students want to keep coming back to as a source.” The process was intricate and time consuming, but Mattson knew it was the cornerstone to digital literacy efforts. Soon, the new website took shape, reflecting Mattson’s technology-enhanced library.

Due to packed schedules and the sheer size of the school, Mattson struggles on her journey to ensure that all 2,600+ of her students not only have digital access, but also have access to learning opportunities that will help them grow as future ready digital citizens. “My district initially started investigating prepackaged sets of digital citizenship lessons to help provide this access to learning opportunities,” she explained. But Mattson quickly realized these prepackaged curricula turned digital citizenship into a series of topics to squeeze into the already busy day instead of making digital literacy and citizenship a vital, integrated thread woven throughout the library experience and the entire school.

“If you ask most educators to define digital citizenship, they will likely give you a list of rules they want students to follow when they are online. My vision for digital citizenship goes beyond this level of personal responsibility – I see it as an opportunity to be a contributing member of a community. When we add the word digital into the mix, the definition of citizenship should expand, not narrow.”

KRISTEN MATTSON
Former Librarian
Waubonsie Valley High School
DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP HELPS DETERMINE NEW CURRICULUM

Mattson, as part of her doctoral research, considered the best ways to empower digital citizens, specifically high school students. She analyzed several popular digital citizenship curricula but was frustrated by the findings. In these lessons, high school students were frequently portrayed as ignorant, malicious, or digital crime victims. Adults were only characterized as protectors, predators, or punishers.

She believed in her students and decided to develop a course of leadership in which she emphasized possibilities over punishments and skills over scare tactics. “These kids are good citizens, and they want to be good digital citizens too,” Mattson said. “I believe if we focus on the good in them, and the possibilities digital citizenship brings, our students will be more prepared.”

With this in mind, Mattson set out to create opportunities in the library and in classrooms to “model, share, and teach digital citizenship in every interaction with students.” The students responded well and were eager to engage in discussions in health classes about the ways technology impacts their relationships. In government classes they discussed the role of outsiders in digital communities and how laws regarding free speech and security should or should not translate into digital spaces.

“I try to give students space to talk about who we are and how we impact others through technology, not just negatively, but positively as well,” Mattson said. Mattson gave her high school students the chance to make a positive impact by using Google Hangouts™ to read to elementary school classrooms around the district on World Read Aloud Day.

Mattson acknowledges that her journey is really only beginning. “While many librarians, myself included, have shifted our mindsets regarding the digital citizenship conversation, we now have to do the hard work of shifting the mindsets of teachers and parents alike.” This often boils down to educating one teacher at a time, coaching them to expand upon their curriculum and include opportunities for students to practice interacting in digital spaces and conversing about their experiences under the guidance of adult mentors.

Being future ready isn’t a static achievement to reach, but a state of continuous reflection, refinement, and improvement.

Adam Dyche, Social Studies Teacher and Department Chair at Mattson’s school, agrees. “A future ready school and culture supersedes ‘one-teacher classroom silos’ by fostering partnerships where teachers like Kristen and I are able to calibrate our performances to ensure a diverse and in-depth learning experience for our students,” said Dyche. “For me, being future ready is about surrounding yourself with many talented people like instructional coaches, tech liaisons, and LMC Directors.”

As part of her work with Project Connect, Mattson believes that to teach digital citizenship, librarians have to regularly reinvent and remix. So she is also:

- Working with her school’s English and social studies teachers on evaluating the reliability and credibility of the information found online and passing those skills onto students
- Helping teachers set up opportunities to be digital role models through the use of discussion boards, Google communities, and other online platforms like TodaysMeet and Padlet
- Leading a 16-hour professional development course titled “Digital Literacy for K-12 Educators,” which helped educators improve their own digital literacy and incorporate those lessons into the classroom
A FUTURE IN FUTURE READY

Mattson is happy with the progress, and her district’s focus on digital citizenship is growing and showing results. “I’m pleased more educators here are engaging students in online communities and so many are eager to learn from the librarians and incorporate digital lessons into the classroom.”

With her encouragement, teachers are adopting digital resources like MathXL and Gale Databases, which help classrooms become more student-centered and inherently help students practice digital literacy and digital citizenship skills.

“Our students are excited to have conversations about technology with the adults in our school,” said Mattson. “It’s a digital world, and the skills we reinforce through our lesson designs are essential. We’re determined to make digital citizenship a natural part of every teachable moment, and we’re on track to get there. It’s an exciting time to share with students.”