

READING EAGLE

December 2, 2008

Survey: Those who use Internet the most get lower grades

By Tessa Speicher
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Without the Internet, my life would be devoid of Alex and Roi. Alex and Roi are two dancing, lip-singing goobers that are hilarious. With their 2,900,000 viewer count for their video "Best Friends," I cannot be the only one watching these videos.

I am part of the generation born with a mouse in one hand, so I cannot help but find it a tad obvious that the Horatio Alger Association of Distinguished Americans Inc. *State of Our Nation's Youth* (2008-2009) survey shows teenagers use the Internet more than ever.

The survey found that 49 percent of all teenagers use the Internet more than six hours a week.

The question is: Is this a good thing? I say of course, but not everything about the Internet is wonderful.

Students spend more time using the Internet than watching television, talking on their cell phones, or doing homework. Fifteen percent of all students surveyed spend more than 20 hours a week online. There is also a connection between time spent on the internet and the grades students get. A and B students spend only 10.2 hours while C and lower students spend 12.6 hours.

Teens spend the majority of their time on the Internet for entertainment and social networking purposes. A total of 13.3 hours every week is spent browsing sites such as Facebook and playing computer games. While fun, these activities are not exactly productive. I spend most of my time online instant messaging, finding new bands and watching videos, which does not help anyone. Lower achieving teenagers spend more time on the computer at social networking sites than straight A students, spending their time socializing instead of getting tutored or just doing their homework.

Myspace, Facebook, and other social networking sites are mostly responsible for these high numbers. Almost half of high school students have a Facebook, and teens spend 6.2 hours browsing these sites every week. I am one of the unfortunate teenagers who does not. My parents are worried about online predators. However, I still sneak on my friends' and look at peer's photographs. Most use Facebook to keep in touch with friends, make new friends, plan social gatherings and learn about new movies and music. A small percentage use Facebook for homework help.

With social networking sites comes the growing worry of online predators. How safe are teens on Facebook? Online predators are a serious risk that most teenagers do not bother to worry about. Most teenagers dismiss the threat because they cannot imagine it happening to them. Teenagers like to think that because their site is private, these people cannot harm them, but privacy on the Internet is really a joke. First, putting information online means anyone can view it. Second, most teenagers accept every friend request without even looking at it. It has become a contest to see who has the most friends on these sites, so I doubt teens are going to turn down many people.

Another growing threat to teens is online bullying. According to Wikipedia, online bullying, also called cyber bullying, consists of "threats, sexual remarks, derogatory labels, making victims the subject of ridicule in forums, and posting false statements and gossip aimed at humiliation". Online bullying can occur on instant messaging, email, Youtube or cell phones. It is a concern among parents as it has led to suicide in a few cases. However, there is always the option of reporting, blocking or ignoring the person.

Sixteen percent of all teens admitted someone had intentionally posted something to humiliate them, while 30 percent said it was a bigger problem than bullying at school. Boys, who spend 0.7 more hours a week online than girls, said bullying online was less of a threat than girls. Boys do not get in as many fights with their friends and have less of a tendency to post mean things about their friends. Nonetheless, cyber bullying is another problem created by the Internet.

The Internet is far from perfect; however it allows teenagers to have fun. If there was no Internet, there would be no Alex and Roi. That makes the Internet my best friend.

(Tessa Speicher is a freshman at Wilson Southern Junior High School.)

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