**Survey: Social Media Is Failing To Find Traction In The Classroom**

Social media is a main form of communication and connection used by today’s students.

Despite the expansion of EdTech tools as classroom resources, educators have not warmed to the idea of integrating social platforms as quickly as other types of classroom technology. A [*University of Phoenix®*College of Education](http://www.phoenix.edu/colleges_divisions/education.html) survey conducted online by Harris Poll in April among 1,002 U.S. K-12 teachers finds only 13 percent of today’s K-12 teachers have integrated social media into classroom learning, with an overwhelming majority (87 percent) reporting they have not embraced social platforms. Additionally, more teachers are citing a reluctance to incorporate social media into classroom learning than in 2013 (62 percent vs. 55 percent).

Although there is reluctance, opportunities exist for teachers to harness social media’s benefits to help students understand how to use digital platforms to promote learning. Less than half of K-12 educators seem to be aware of the opportunities, with 44 percent stating social media can enhance a student’s educational experience.

“We are living in a rapidly evolving world of digital and social media, and many students are totally immersed and well-versed in these platforms,” said Kathy Cook, dean of educational technology for University of Phoenix College of Education and former K-12 educator. “For teachers to stay current, keep students engaged and promote learning, it is important for teachers to acknowledge the influence of social media and understand how to use it to the benefit of their students.”

**Why the digital disconnect?**

A lack of tools and training top the list of educator concerns. Almost all (95 percent) of K-12 teachers say they have had some level of training related to integrating technology in the classroom; however, more than half (62 percent) have had minimal or no training in the area of interacting with students and parents through social media. Nearly half (48 percent) of K-12 teachers express the desire to learn more about integrating technology into the classroom.

K-12 teachers raise many concerns, with four-in-five (82 percent) worrying about conflicts that can occur from using social media with their students and/or parents, and more than half (59 percent) stating use of personal tech devices outside the classroom makes it more difficult for students to pay attention in a group setting in the classroom. Twenty percent have also felt intimidated by students’ knowledge/use of technology devices.

“Social media is here to stay, so it is critical to invest in our educators through expanded training,” said Cook. According to Cook, training extends beyond providing educators tools to integrate social media into the classroom. In addition to being prepared to use social media as a learning tool, teachers also need to be able to teach students to be responsible with their online behavior.

“Despite challenges, tremendous opportunities exist for teachers to play a leadership role in students’ digital lives, helping them learn how to use social media and understand its impact both in and outside the classroom,” added Cook. “It is essential to train teachers in digital citizenship so that they can educate students about preserving their online integrity. One misstep can have ramifications for years to come, including among future employers.”

**Tips for teachers in a digital world**

As the 2015-16 school year starts, Cook suggests the following additional tips for K-12 teachers to help them integrate social media into their classrooms to supplement school- or district-sponsored resources.

1. Create student social media guidelines**.**If your school or district has guidelines for social media use, make sure you and your students understand them completely and are following the guidelines. If your school or district does not currently have guidelines for social media use, consider developing some.
2. Try “closed” social media sites. [Edmodo](https://www.edmodo.com/), [TodaysMeet](https://todaysmeet.com/%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank) and other sites allow safe and secure social media experiences in a smaller school environment. You can also create private blogs or use sites such as [Kidblogs](http://kidblog.org/home/%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank) or [Edublogs](https://edublogs.org/%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank), which limit access and comment abilities.
3. Connect with other classrooms around the world. Projects such as [Global Read Aloud](http://theglobalreadaloud.com/) and[Skype in the Classroom](https://education.skype.com/) allow you to connect students in your classroom with other students worldwide
4. Connect with experts worldwide. Social media tools can help you bring a variety of experts into your classroom so students can learn directly from people in the field they are studying.  You can search and connect with experts on Twitter, Skype and other social media networks. Many authors and content experts may be willing to conduct a live tweet session with your students during which they can ask questions and get immediate responses.
5. Involve your class in a social service project. Explore projects online that your students can get involved in to help make the world a better place. [Choose2Matter](http://choose2matter.org/) is one global movement that may spark imagination about how social media can be used to help others.
6. Learn more about social media use in the classroom. Join Twitter or use other social media tools to connect with other teachers and learn about their creative uses of social media. You can also take a class to hone your own social media skills. University of Phoenix offers a two-credit Continuing Teacher Education course (TECH/508) titled [Social Media in the Classroom](http://www.phoenix.edu/courses/tech508.html)

This survey was conducted online within the United States by Harris Poll on behalf of University of Phoenix College of Education between April 14 and April 27, 2015, among 1,002 U.S. teachers aged 18 and older who work full time in education teaching grades K-12. In addition, oversamples of teachers from Arizona (n=101), California (n=207), Florida (n=103), and Colorado (n=100) were also included. A similar survey was conducted between October 7 and 21, 2013, among 1,005 U.S. teachers. This online survey is not based on a probability sample; therefore, no estimate of theoretical sampling error can be calculated. For complete survey methodology, including weighting variables, please contact Heather McLaughlin at heather.mclaughlin@apollo.edu.

# How Teachers Are Using Technology at Home and in Their Classrooms

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A survey of 2,462 Advanced Placement (AP) and National Writing Project (NWP) teachers finds that digital technologies have helped them in teaching their middle school and high school students in many ways. At the same time, the internet, mobile phones, and social media have brought new challenges to teachers.

In addition, they report that there are striking differences in the role of technology in wealthier school districts compared with poorer school districts and that there are clear generational differences among teachers when it comes to their comfort with technology and its use in their classrooms.

Asked about the impact of the internet and digital tools in their role as middle and high school educators, these teachers say the following about the overall impact on their teaching and their classroom work:

* 92% of these teachers say the internet has a “major impact” on their ability to access content, resources, and materials for their teaching
* 69% say the internet has a “major impact” on their ability to share ideas with other teachers
* 67% say the internet has a “major impact” on their ability to interact with parents and 57% say it has had such an impact on enabling their interaction with students

At the same time, 75% of AP and NWP teachers say the internet and other digital tools have added new demands to their lives, agreeing with the statement that these tools have a “major impact” by increasing the range of content and skills about which they must be knowledgeable.  And 41% report a “major impact” by requiring more work on their part to be an effective teacher.

#### AP and NWP teachers bring a wide variety of digital tools into the learning process, including mobile phones, tablets, and e-book readers

The survey reveals the degree to which the internet and digital technologies, particularly mobile phones, suffuse teaching activities.  Laptops and desktops are central, but they note mobile technology use has also become commonplace in the learning process:

* 73% of AP and NWP teachers say that they and/or their students use their mobile phones in the classroom or to complete assignments
* 45% report they or their students use e-readers and 43% use tablet computers in the classroom or to complete assignments

Teachers most commonly use digital tools to have students conduct research online, which was the focus of an earlier report based on these data.[1](https://www.pewinternet.org/2013/02/28/how-teachers-are-using-technology-at-home-and-in-their-classrooms/%22%20%5Cl%20%22footnote1) It is also common for these teachers to have students access (79%) and submit (76%) assignments online.

More interactive online learning activities, such as developing wikis, engaging in online discussions, and editing work using collaborative platforms such as GoogleDocs, are also employed by some of the teachers in the sample.

Overall, 62% of AP and NWP teachers feel their school does a “good job” supporting teachers’ efforts to bring digital tools into the learning process, and 68% say their school provides formal training in this area.  Still, 85% of these teachers seek out their own opportunities to learn new ways to effectively incorporate these tools into their teaching.

#### Teachers worry about digital divides, though they are split about the impact of digital tools on their students

These teachers see disparities in access to digital tools having at least some impact on their students. More than half (54%) say all or almost all of their students have sufficient access to digital tools *at school*, but only a fifth of these teachers (18%) say all or almost all of their students have access to the digital tools they need *at home*.



Teachers of the lowest income students are the least likely to say their students have sufficient access to the digital tools they need, both in school and at home. In terms of community type, teachers in urban areas are the least likely to say their students have sufficient access to digital tools IN SCHOOL, while rural teachers are the least likely to say their students have sufficient access AT HOME.

Overall, while many AP and NWP teachers express concern about growing disparities *across schools and school districts*, they are divided as to whether access to digital tools is leading to greater disparities *among their students*.  A large majority of these teachers (84%) agree to some extent with the statement that “Today’s digital technologies are leading to greater disparities between affluent and disadvantaged schools and school districts.”  However, asked whether today’s digital technologies are narrowing or widening the gap between the most and least academically successful students, 44% say technology is narrowing the gap and 56% say it is widening the gap.

#### Teachers of the lowest income students experience the impact of digital tools in the learning environment differently than teachers whose students are from more affluent households

AP and NWP teachers’ experiences with using digital tools in their teaching vary in some notable ways depending on the socioeconomic status of the students they teach.  Among these findings:

* 70% of teachers working in the highest income areas say their school does a “good job” providing teachers the resources and support they need to incorporate digital tools in the classroom, compared with 50% of teachers working in the lowest income areas
* 73% of teachers of high income students receive formal training in this area, compared with 60% of teachers of low income students
* 56% of teachers of students from higher income households say they or their students use tablet computers in the learning process, compared with 37% of teachers of the lowest income students
* 55% of teachers of higher income students say they or their students use e-readers in the classroom, compared with 41%  teaching in low income areas
* 52% of teachers of upper and upper-middle income students say their students use cell phones to look up information in class, compared with 35% of teachers of the lowest income students
* 39% of AP and NWP teachers of low income students say their school is “behind the curve” when it comes to effectively using digital tools in the learning process; just 15% of teachers of higher income students rate their schools poorly in this area
* 56% of teachers of the lowest income students say that a lack of resources among students to access digital technologies is a “major challenge” to incorporating more digital tools into their teaching; 21% of teachers of the highest income students report that problem
* 49% of teachers of students living in low income households say their school’s use of internet filters has a major impact on their teaching, compared with 24% of those who teach better off students who say that
* 33% of teachers of lower income students say their school’s rules about classroom cell phone use by students have a major impact on their teaching, compared with 15% of those who teach students from the highest income households

#### There are notable generational differences in how teachers experience the impact of digital technologies in their professional lives

As is the case among the full adult population, differences in technology use emerge between older and younger teachers.  Specifically:

* Teachers under age 35 are more likely than teachers age 55 and older to describe themselves as “very confident” when it comes to using new digital technologies (64% vs. 44%)
* Conversely, the oldest teachers (age 55 and older) are more than twice as likely as their colleagues under age 35 to say their students know more than they do about using the newest digital tools (59% vs. 23%)
* 45% of teachers under age 35 have their students develop or share work on a website, wiki or blog, compared with 34% of teachers ages 55 and older
* Younger teachers are also more likely than the oldest teachers to have students participate in online discussions (45% v. 32%) and use collaborative web-based tools such as GoogleDocs to edit their work (41% v. 34%)
* Younger teachers are more likely to “very often” draw on colleagues for ideas about how to use new technologies in the classroom (22% of teachers under age 35 do this), when compared with teachers age 35-54 (16%) and teachers age 55 and older (13%)

#### At times, teachers’ own use of digital tools can run counter to their concerns about and perceptions of student use

In an earlier report on these data, we found that teachers expressed some concerns about what they saw as students’ overreliance on search engines to find information and complete research projects.  In their words, their students increasingly “equate research with Googling,” and use search engines in lieu of more traditional sources without sufficient ability to judge the quality of information they find online.  Regarding students’ use of search engines, the survey found:

* 76% of AP and NWP teachers “strongly agree that “search engines have conditioned students to expect to be able to find information quickly and easily”
* 83% agree that “the amount of information available online today is overwhelming for most students”
* 71% agree that “today’s digital technologies discourage students from finding and using a wide range of sources for their research”
* 60% agree with the notion that “today’s digital technologies make it harder for students to find and use credible sources of information”

Yet, the survey also confirms that search engines, and Google in particular, are key resources for AP and NWP teachers.  Specifically:

* 99% of AP and NWP teachers use search engines to find information online
* 90% name Google as the search tool they use most often
* Virtually all AP and NWP teachers (99%) use the internet “to do work or research for their job”
* Almost three-quarters (73%) of AP and NWP teachers are “very confident” in their online search abilities

These results indicate that while these teachers are concerned about how their students use the internet in general—and search engines in particular—to find information, they are confident in their own ability to use these tools effectively.

In a similar vein, AP and NWP teachers use the online encyclopedia tool Wikipedia at much higher rates than U.S. adult internet users as a whole (87% vs. 53%).  Wikipedia relies on user-generated, crowd-sourced content, a process that sometimes calls into question the accuracy of its information.  In focus groups with teachers and students prior to the survey, Wikipedia was often noted as a tool teachers discourage or bar students from using because of concerns about the reliability of its content.

#### The internet and digital tools also play a key role in classroom preparation and professional networking

Digital tools are critical to AP and NWP teachers’ lesson preparation, networking and professionalization.  Among the key findings in this area:

* 80% of AP and NWP teachers report getting email alerts or updates at least weekly that allow them to follow developments in their field
* 84% report using the internet at least weekly to find content that will engage students
* 80% report using the internet at least weekly to help them create lesson plans

#### AP and NWP teachers outpace the general adult population in almost all measures of personal tech use, yet 42% feel their students know more than they do when it comes to using digital tools

AP and NWP teachers are well ahead of national benchmarks in almost all measures of personal technology use:

* 94% of AP and NWP teachers own a cell phone, slightly higher than the national figure of 88% for all U.S. adults
* 58% of these teachers (68% of teachers under age 35) have a smartphone, compared with 45% of all adults
* 93% of teachers own a laptop computer vs. 61% of all adults
* 87% own a desktop computer vs. 58% of all adults
* 39% own a tablet vs. 24% of all adults
* 47% own an e-book reader vs. 19% of all adults
* 78% use social networking sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn or Google+, compared with 69% of adult internet users and 59% of all adults
* 26% use Twitter vs. 16% of adult internet users and 14% of all adults

Despite their heavy tech use, 42% of AP and NWP teachers say their students usually know more than they do when it comes to using new digital technologies.  Just 18% feel they know more than their students.  This is despite the fact that over half of AP and NWP teachers (56%) are “very confident” when it comes to learning how to use the latest digital tools, and another 39% say they are “somewhat confident.”

#### About this Study

##### ***The basics of the survey***

These are among the main findings of an online survey of a non-probability sample of 2,462 middle and high school teachers currently teaching in the U.S., Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands, conducted between March 7 and April 23, 2012.  Some 1,750 of the teachers are drawn from a sample of advanced placement (AP) high school teachers, while the remaining 712 are from a sample of National Writing Project teachers.  Survey findings are complemented by insights from a series of online and in-person focus groups with middle and high school teachers and students in grades 9-12, conducted between November, 2011 and February, 2012.

This particular sample is quite diverse geographically, by subject matter taught, and by school size and community characteristics.  But it skews towards educators who teach some of the most academically successful students in the country. Thus, the findings reported here reflect the realities of their special place in American education, and are not necessarily representative of all teachers in all schools. At the same time, these findings are especially powerful given that these teachers’ observations and judgments emerge from some of the nation’s most advanced classrooms.

In addition to the survey, Pew Internet conducted a series of online and offline focus groups with middle and high school teachers and some of their students and their voices are included in this report.

The study was designed to explore teachers’ views of the ways today’s digital environment is shaping the research and writing habits of middle and high school students, as well as teachers’ own technology use and their efforts to incorporate new digital tools into their classrooms.

##### ***About the data collection***

Data collection was conducted in two phases.  In phase one, Pew Internet conductedtwo online and one in-person focus group with middle and high school teachers; focus group participants included Advanced Placement (AP) teachers, teachers who had participated in the National Writing Project’s Summer Institute (NWP), as well as teachers at a College Board school in the Northeast U.S.  Two in-person focus groups were also conducted with students in grades 9-12 from the same College Board school.   The goal of these discussions was to hear teachers and students talk about, in their own words, the different ways they feel digital technologies such as the internet, search engines, social media, and cell phones are shaping students’ research and writing habits and skills.  Teachers were asked to speak in depth about teaching research and writing to middle and high school students today, the challenges they encounter, and how they incorporate digital technologies into their classrooms and assignments.

Focus group discussions were instrumental in developing a 30-minute online survey, which was administered in phase two of the research to a national sample of middle and high school teachers.  The survey results reported here are based on a non-probability sample of 2,462 middle and high school teachers currently teaching in the U.S., Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.  Of these 2,462 teachers, 2,067 completed the entire survey; all percentages reported are based on those answering each question.  The sample is not a probability sample of all teachers because it was not practical to assemble a sampling frame of this population. Instead, two large lists of teachers were assembled: one included 42,879 AP teachers who had agreed to allow the College Board to contact them (about one-third of all AP teachers), while the other was a list of 5,869 teachers who participated in the National Writing Project’s Summer Institute during 2007-2011 and who were not already part of the AP sample. A stratified random sample of 16,721 AP teachers was drawn from the AP teacher list, based on subject taught, state, and grade level, while all members of the NWP list were included in the final sample.

The online survey was conducted from March 7–April 23, 2012.  More details on how the survey and focus groups were conducted are included in the Methodology section at the end of this report, along with focus group discussion guides and the survey instrument.

##### ***About the teachers who participated in the survey***

There are several important ways the teachers who participated in the survey are unique, which should be considered when interpreting the results reported here.  First, 95% of the teachers who participated in the survey teach in public schools, thus the findings reported here reflect that environment almost exclusively.  In addition, almost one-third of the sample (NWP Summer Institute teachers) has received extensive training in how to effectively teach writing in today’s digital environment.  The National Writing Project’s mission is to provide professional development, resources and support to teachers to improve the teaching of writing in today’s schools.   The NWP teachers included here are what the organization terms “teacher-consultants” who have attended the Summer Institute and provide local leadership to other teachers.  Research has shown significant gains in the writing performance of students who are taught by these teachers.[2](https://www.pewinternet.org/2013/02/28/how-teachers-are-using-technology-at-home-and-in-their-classrooms/#fn-78-2)

Moreover, the majority of teachers participating in the survey (56%) *currently* teach AP, honors, and/or accelerated courses, thus the population of middle and high school students they work with skews heavily toward the highest achievers.  These teachers and their students may have resources and support available to them—particularly in terms of specialized training and access to digital tools—that are not available in all educational settings.  Thus, the population of teachers participating in this research might best be considered “leading edge teachers” who are actively involved with the College Board and/or the National Writing Project and are therefore beneficiaries of resources and training not common to all teachers.  It is likely that teachers in this study are developing some of the more innovative pedagogical approaches to teaching research and writing in today’s digital environment, and are incorporating classroom technology in ways that are not typical of the entire population of middle and high school teachers in the U.S.  Survey findings represent the attitudes and behaviors of this particular group of teachers only, and are not representative of the entire population of U.S. middle and high school teachers.

Every effort was made to administer the survey to as broad a group of educators as possible from the sample files being used.  As a group, the 2,462 teachers participating in the survey comprise a wide range of subject areas, experience levels, geographic regions, school type and socioeconomic level, and community type (detailed sample characteristics are available in the Methodology section of this report).  The sample includes teachers from all 50 states, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.  All teachers who participated in the survey teach in physical schools and classrooms, as opposed to teaching online or virtual courses.

English/language arts teachers make up a significant portion of the sample (36%), reflecting the intentional design of the study, but history, social science, math, science, foreign language, art, and music teachers are also represented.  About one in ten teachers participating in the survey are middle school teachers, while 91% currently teach grades 9-12.  There is wide distribution across school size and students’ socioeconomic status, though half of the teachers participating in the survey report teaching in a small city or suburb.  There is also a wide distribution in the age and experience levels of participating teachers.  The survey sample is 71% female.