

MANAGEMENT OF THE TAKE THE CHALLENGE UNIT

The intent of this unit is to change student behavior. The lessons are standards-based and employ best practice teaching strategies, but the main intent is to change screen use habits. The more engaging the unit, the more likely students are to rethink the way they use screens.

The unit can be engaging at many levels: school, home, and community. Following are some suggestions, based on feedback from many pilot schools, to optimize your Take the Challenge Unit.

School

These are some things to consider for the classroom academic portion of the unit.

- You may wish to designate a leader at each grade level to help ensure the flow of the unit. The principal could be the leader or should be kept informed about the unit.
- Early in the unit, agree on the guidelines for the Screen-Free Challenge week and be ready to communicate these clearly to students and parents. For example - are computers okay for homework, even if that includes Internet research? What about text messaging? Should you be screen free in the classroom during that week?
- During the Screen-Free Challenge week, students turn in participation slips daily. During the three budget weeks, students turn in slips weekly. These slips are tallied and analyzed in math class. Having labeled boxes where these can be turned in before school starts saves class time.
- The How Much Screen Time? survey, a cornerstone of the unit, is conducted by 6th grade Social Studies students. The data is analyzed by 8th grade Mathematics students, then passed back to the 6th grade students to write conclusions. These teachers need to connect with each other and possibly pair up across grade levels. It is important for the flow of this unit for these things to be passed on in a timely manner.
- At the 7th grade level, Social Studies, and Science classes use local maps and aerial photographs to inventory and create plans for local open and natural spaces. The experience of studying the local environment is invaluable for students, and having local resources is essential. Four weeks before the unit begins, contact agencies listed in 7th grade Science Lesson 1 to get these maps. They are usually free of charge.
- The three budget weeks are essential. Too often this part is left out. The Challenge week raises awareness, but changing habits on a more permanent basis requires an emphasis on the budget weeks. Budget Success slips are handled in Mathematics classes, but this can be switched to other content areas.
- Teachers need to find a time to meet by grade level and as a staff before the unit begins and briefly during the unit to troubleshoot and plan for this as a complete experience for students. Every school is different and will have its own need to organize the unit.

These are some things to consider to make the academic experience more complete for students.

- Have a kick-off event for each grade level, based on the theme at that grade level. Sixth graders should have an event based around physical activity and healthy snacks. Seventh graders should go to a natural area for a treasure hunt or a picnic, or to pair up with elementary students to explore nature. Eighth graders should watch the film *Virus of Violence* as a group, in a setting other than the classroom, to set the stage for their studies.
- Hold an opening ceremony for the Screen-Free Challenge week for the whole school. This could include skits about being tempted to watch TV or play videogames during the week. Procedures for the week should be clearly explained. The principal should be a key part of this event.
- Use prizes to encourage participation. During the Challenge week, have daily drawings for prizes using the Success Slips turned in for Mathematics class. Draw for larger prizes for students who participate all seven days. Have weekly prize drawings during the budget weeks as well.
- At the beginning of Screen-Free Challenge week, give students things to do. A book (have two or three choices), a deck of cards, a journal, and art supplies are possibilities.
- Present student products in various ways. The 6th graders make What to do? Posters that should be in the hallways and PowerPoint essays about the experience of participating that should be broadcast in some way. The 7th graders create maps and plans for local open/natural space that should be presented to local boards and in the hallways. The 8th graders produce electronic presentations about the impacts of media (usually violence) that the whole school should see.
- In addition to the student work in the preceding bullet point being viewed by the whole school, a closing event for families, held in the evening, is very powerful. This can be a staged event followed by a reception where students and families can view and discuss student products. Offer healthy snacks. Have interactive displays, where families can make a plan or a pledge to scrutinize screens habits and commit to other activities.

Families

- Because screen use occurs primarily at home, it is essential that you communicate to the parents through letters, newsletters, and school events.
- In some cases, parents could assist with lesson preparation. Match the need to the parent volunteer's skill. For example, at 7th grade, a parent could help procure and laminate the maps and aerial photographs needed for the Social Studies and Science lessons. At the 6th grade level, parents could help with healthy snacks if the teacher wishes to augment the Science/Health lesson with healthy snacks.
- Many of the lessons include an opportunity to connect with parents and families, from responding to the How Much Screens? survey in 6th grade to summarizing notes in 7th grade English. Do not delete these school-to-family connections, as screen habits are formed in the home.
- Hold an end-of-campaign open house to share student products. These events are well attended and well worth the extra effort. If students know about this at the beginning of the unit, and know their work will have an audience, the quality will be higher.



Community

Build community support for the Take the Challenge campaign. Following are some suggestions for businesses and organizations to get involved:

- Contact the YMCA and ask for family day passes to be used during the Screen-Free Challenge week.
- Contact local businesses for donations to support the campaign. For example, a bookstore could offer a free book if a student plus parent come in to claim it. A sporting goods store could offer a free jump rope, a grocery store could offer a healthy snack, or a general store could offer a game, a deck of cards, or art and craft supplies. A decal for the door could show that the business supports schools and families.
- Utilize the local media – newspaper and radio – to publicize the event.
- Approach the city government about passing a resolution to support the Turnoff week. (Anticipate that this may be a sensitive issue, especially for television stations and some parents.) Ask the city recreation department to get involved by holding special events and promotions during the Screen-Free Challenge week.
- Contact local organizations – hiking clubs, the Audubon Society, Boy Scouts, astronomy club, model railway club – to ask them to hold an event during the Screen Turnoff week for families. Try to coordinate this so that there is something different every day. Communicate with parents about the opportunities.