By Shari Friedel
Tribune Staff

Perkins County Schools staff and students as well as community members gathered in the high school gym Thursday, Aug. 30 where Attorney Karen Haase of Lincoln gave a presentation on digital citizenship.

She also addressed the Perkins County Middle School students in Madrid later in the morning.

Haase is an attorney with Harding & Shultz in Lincoln, and the mother of a teenager and 12-year-old, and through her experiences on the job and as a parent, is aware of the challenges facing parents and children with the use of electronics and social media.

According to a recent survey, 95 percent of all teens age 12-17 are online and 80 percent of those online teens are users of social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter and Tumblr.

Haase's presentation included three topics: Cyberbullying, "sexting" and Internet safety.

With humor and straightforward language, Haase provided statistics and cited examples of the consequences of the irresponsible use of electronics.

Cyberbullying is defined as "actions that use information and communication technologies to support deliberate, repeated, and hostile behavior by an individual or group, that is intended to harm another or others."

Haase said the as many as one in four teenagers report having been the victim of cyberbullying and 65 percent know someone who has been a victim.

Schools are required by law to take action if the bullying occurs during school hours, at a school event or on a school issued computer.

School related consequences can include the loss of extracurricular activities, detention, short or long term suspension, expulsion or assignment to an alternative school.

Additionally, more and more cases are being seen in court, resulting in fines, probation or even jail time.

Haase reminded the students to never post anything when angry, take a few moments to consider the consequences of an action.

“Sexting” is the sending and receiving of sexually explicit messages and photos electronically.

“If you possess it, it’s a felony,” said Haase, even if the recipient didn’t request the material. Images sent to one person can easily be passed to numerous recipients. What may have been perceived as harmless fun at first can easily snowball.

Haase mentioned extreme cases in which young people have resorted to suicide when their lives have become intolerable following sexting incidents that have gotten out of control.

Other young people involved in transferring sexually explicit photos have had to live with harsh consequences including registering as a sex offender for years after the incident, or for life.

Thirdly, Haase spoke about Internet safety.

Predators can manipulate their way into children’s lives by setting up false identities on the Internet.

In one example, a high school aged sex offender established a false page using a picture of a teenage girl, invited teenage boys to friend “her,” and convinced them to share explicit photos of themselves. He then used the photos to blackmail dozens of boys into engaging in sexual activity with him.

Haase offers five items to consider before pushing the “send” button:

1. Don’t assume it’s private. Once a message or photo is sent, there’s no getting it back. It can be forwarded to anyone.
2. Nothing on the Internet goes away. Parents, college recruiters, professional sports teams, potential employers as well as pedophiles are a few examples of who may be searching teens’ social pages.
3. If something makes you uncomfortable, DON’T do it.
4. Consider the recipient’s reaction.
5. Nothing online is truly anonymous.