4-2004

Internet Research and Appropriate Content: Keeping Students Safe on the Internet

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INTERNET RESEARCH AND APPROPRIATE CONTENT: KEEPING STUDENTS SAFE ON THE INTERNET

By

Robert James Genetski

MASTER'S THESIS
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the School of Education At Grand Valley State University
In partial fulfillment of the Degree of Master of Education

Grand Valley State University
April, 2004
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Upon the completion of this thesis, I am greatly indebted to my parents, Robert and Maureen Genetski, for their patience, generosity, love and their continuous encouragement of my education. I also gratefully acknowledge my advisor, Dr. Sean Lancaster for his direction. Without Lancaster’s patience, understanding and encouragement, my struggle with how to formulate the ideas and research behind this effort may never have seen completion. Dr. Lancaster’s unique sense of humor also provided some much-needed relief in times of despair. Dr. Andrew Topper, also of Grand Valley State University’s Department of Technology in Education, helped my direction as well.

I also acknowledge my employer, Grandville Public Schools, for the district’s commitment to higher education. If not for Grandville’s very generous tuition reimbursement program, paying for my master’s degree would have been a lot more difficult than it already was.

I must also thank my friend Chad Bassett for allowing my access to the library at the University of Notre Dame. I would never have found all the research materials I did without his help and the UND libraries.

Though I am thankful to many, I accept full responsibility for the assertions forwarded through this thesis.

Robert James Genetski
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DATA FORM
ABSTRACT

Since the advent of the Internet, educators have struggled with the problem of utilizing its research potential while protecting students from viewing inappropriate content such as pornography, illegal substances and hate-oriented websites. Schools need to face this challenge with a plan for how to best protect children from offensive material while allowing quality research opportunities.

This study uses research from experts in the field and a survey of 156 teachers to determine the best way to maximize Internet research and protect children from offensive material online. This study is the first to survey teachers for their opinions on Acceptable Use Policies (AUPs), Internet filters and local control of Internet technology. Most of the teachers surveyed are overall pleased with their school’s current efforts to protect kids from inappropriate material on the Internet. AUPs alone are not good deterrents to searching for offensive material. Internet filters, while controversial, do offer a wall of protection from this material. Teachers overall would like their schools to have more control over the filtering devices. The hope is that this information can be used to help school districts implement or alter policy to better protect kids while offering quality research opportunities.
Chapter One: The Problem/The Trade Off

Problem Statement

Since the advent of the Internet, educators have struggled with the problem of utilizing its research potential while protecting students from viewing inappropriate content such as pornography, illegal substances and hate-oriented websites. The Internet is unlike any educational tool before it in that it can take the place of textbooks, filmstrips, movies, and worksheets. The Internet offers broad and open-ended research potential for school students. This potential is a great educational advance. With it, students can hone research skills seeking more information on more topics from more sources than their parents could ever find in the encyclopedias in a school’s library. However, with the research potential of the Internet come potential problems. Previous educational tools allowed the teacher, librarian or school to more easily regulate what kids saw and read in the classroom and library. Teachers cannot necessarily control what appears on a computer screen as a result of an Internet search as pornography, violent images, and inappropriate language could appear from a legitimate search or typo of a legitimate web address. And while there are policies and devices aimed at keeping inappropriate content off school computers, their effectiveness and legality are under constant scrutiny by government and by activist groups. So, the issue how to protect kids from inappropriate online content is not only an educational but a political, financial, moral, legal, technological, social and cultural problem, which teachers still have to deal with in the classroom every day.
Importance and Rational of this Study

The issue of how to best protect kids from inappropriate content on the Internet is key to providing a safe educational environment for children. This section will address the size of the Internet and how that impacts the classroom because of the reliance society has on the Internet. This section also addresses the curious nature of children.

The Nature of the Net. The Internet is a tool few teachers, students or schools can go without today. In 1999, Schrader indicated estimates of the size of the World Wide Web at the time to be 320 million web pages that the casual browser could access with a growth estimate of 1,000 percent in the subsequent years. He further cited estimates of 3,000 new sites a day in the United States alone. Another estimate had the number at 10,000 a day (Smith, 1999). This demonstrates the Internet to be a big money saver in the classroom. While some may laugh at the idea of upgrading technology as a money saver, trying to buy enough books to equal the beneficial information in the 320 million plus pages and fit them in a classroom would cost much more than the alternative. Furthermore, the time it would take kids to sift through that paper for the information they might need would waste weeks or months. Since the Internet saves teachers and classrooms countless hours and big amounts of money, it is unlike any other educational tool before it. Because the Net is not just a tool but a source of entertainment for many, there are many sites that are not appropriate for school children to view.
Technology’s use in the classroom has become incredibly widespread. Smith (1999) indicates its use is not simply “commonplace, but expected”. Other theorists insinuate that the Internet is changing the way students learn about the world by doing what Sesame Street did years ago—distributing knowledge teachers once held (Scarcella & Gonzales, 2001). These experts state that students of the new century will be entirely in control of the environment in which they learn. Some experts measure how important the Internet is in schools by how fast it has grown. They indicate that in less than a decade school media centers with Internet connections went from zero to 75% (Eaton, Adams, Curran-Ball, Flagg, Fontaine, Sisson, and Wardle, 2001). Scarcella and Gonzales (2001) indicate why the Internet is such a great learning tool and appeals so much to students. They list its benefits as being accessible around the clock, “self-paced and interactive,” “fun,” easy to use, all while developing computer literacy and nurturing “students’ imagination, creativity, and willingness to explore”. With this description, the Internet seems like the ideal education tool. Every new educational invention, device and trend wants to be able to boast “self-paced”, “interactive” and “fun”.

The Internet is now such an important part of classroom life that the question of its use being a student’s right or a privilege creates serious legal difficulties. This is an issue as many Acceptable Use Policies (AUPs), forms that students sign to acknowledge their responsibilities while using school technology, indicate that violations will result in the student losing use privileges (Flowers & Rakes, 2000). Reilly echoes this in criticizing some AUPs (2000). He writes, “Courts have held that
the difference between a ‘right’ and a ‘privilege’ is a hollow distinction and rarely exists. But the ‘it’s a privilege’ position can work until Internet/Web resources becomes an integral part of the school curriculum, then taking the Internet or computer access away from a student under the guise of ‘it’s a privilege’ becomes severely problematic”. One thing working in schools’ favor is that the law treats kids differently from adults under the Constitution with regards to their First Amendment rights (Lau, 2002). However, if it is a student’s right (rather than privilege) to use an educational resource of such a vast and broad scope as the Internet, educators definitely need to understand how to provide opportunities while limiting negative ones. Most legal battles involving the Internet cite grounds within the First Amendment. Others may use the Amendment ending discrimination in education. Students in Iowa, when denied full access to the Internet, studied using the Fourteenth Amendment to sue their school district under the belief that their school was “separate but equal” to others with full access (Malcolm, 2000). If unfettered access to the Internet is a potential given through the Constitution, teachers, who are on the frontline of kids working with the technology, must help to determine the best way to protect students while online.

The Internet has over 550 million users worldwide and continues to grow annually (http://www.thestandard.com/article.php?story=20031121162230464, 3.4.04). The popular Search Engine, Google, reports that it currently searches 4,285,199,774 unique web pages (http://www.google.com, 3.4.04). The size of the Internet and the fact that it so closely reflects society dictates that schools should not
take lightly the responsibility of protecting children while on the Internet. Minkel (2000b) quotes a *New York Times* article that calls the Internet “a neutral, free, open and unregulated technology... a democracy, but with no constitution.” So, the Internet could prove to be the wild west of the 21st Century. This unregulated freedom in cyberspace leads to a lot of opportunity for deviance. According to Sarcella and Gonzales (2001) noted there were almost 11,000 cases of Internet fraud in the year 2000. Law enforcement officials can do little about many of the deviances. For example, child pornography is illegal both in the U.S. and Canada. As much as three-quarters of all the child pornography sites can be traced to Russian servers with no way for U.S. authorities to stop them from doing business (Minkel, 2000b). In the past, a teacher or school district could avoid using a textbook that had sensitive content; the Internet is not so easily avoided or regulated. When determining the best ways to protect students from inappropriate content online the size and scope of the Internet must be considered. The Internet is such a great teaching tool because of its size and scope.

The very nature of kids dictates why it is important to find the best way of protecting kids using the Internet from offensive material. Caruso (1999) equates asking young people to avoid objectionable Internet sites to asking children not to search for Christmas presents in the house when they learn there is no Santa Claus. Caruso also explains that searching for inappropriate sites does not make kids bad; it just means they are curious. Another expert divulged that when his school district created their technology plan allowing graduated Internet access by grade-level, the
district took into account that young people are naturally curious and will with enough time and freedom explore on their own (Sortore, 2001).

While quality and professional research on students’ use or misuse of the Internet is lacking, by piecing together the research that exists, a lot is exposed. One study of youth Internet use in Rhode Island revealed some concerns. According to the study, 62 percent of youth Internet use at library media centers was for personal interest or recreation (Eaton et al, 2001). The problem is that students are in the library media center, on school time, under school supervision, on taxpayer dollars, with the expectation of doing something pertaining to education. The reality is that students are not always on task. When librarians in the same study (including public libraries and school media centers) were asked about concerns with children using the Internet, the majority noted at least one worry with many having more than one.

One Canadian study showed how parents think their kids are using the Internet and how their kids really are using it (Taylor, 2002). The results reveal quite a bit about perceptions versus reality. The results of a survey indicate many discrepancies between what parents think they know about their children’s Internet use and what they really know. For example, approximately 25% of elementary students and 50% of high school students indicated their parents do not know about every e-mail account the student uses. Schools are not supposed to be a place where parental authority is undermined, yet the Internet requires schools to act on the parent’s behalf in many instances. The Canadian study also reveals that chat rooms and instant messenger applications are used by 60 percent of kids, one third of whom
use adult chat rooms while nearly half use instant messaging to chat with people they
do not know (Taylor, 2002). Children make choices that may endanger them.

Children do not always need to seek out harmful or inappropriate content to
encounter it. Taylor (2002) reveals that nearly a quarter of the students surveyed have
received pornography from someone online while nearly half of the high school
students have received unwanted sexual comments; still more worrisome is that 25%
have been asked by someone from online to meet face-to-face. This might not seem
like a concern. However, throughout the survey, kids continually show that they keep
things from their parents. For instance, close to 15% of the kids who were asked by a
stranger to meet them followed through and met the person. Only six percent of those
asked a parent to go with them, and almost one-hundred-and-thirty went by
themselves. Taylor (2002) concludes that unless there is a major change in how kids
are monitored while using the Internet, risky and negative behavior will increase.
This, backed up by the fact that only 4-20 percent told an adult when they received or
found a disturbing image, gives a more clear picture how kids might use the learning
tool that almost every school has, a tool that might be a right not a privilege for
students to use. Secrets are not limited to Canadian kids. Minkel (2002) notes that
America Online found that of the 56% of kids who have more than one e-mail or
instant messaging account, nearly one quarter of those keep the second a secret from
others. The same survey has also shown that many kids have either pretended to be
someone else or given out fake information about themselves. Devices that make it
easier to keep potentially dangerous secrets make teachers jobs more difficult in the 21st Century.

Some deceitful safety exists in the Internet. In her article, Taylor (2002) states the police are finding with a lot of kids they are investigating with Internet concerns, they are kids who are good students, who have not been in trouble before at school or with the law. So, when one wonders why Internet safety for school kids is a concern, he or she needs to realize it could be the instrument for a new group of kids to experiment with. The added protection of anonymity means more young people are engaging in risky behavior on the Internet without fear of being caught.

Sometimes children are curious, others mischievous. Jones (2000) states that some kids see classroom computers as a toy. She notes a K-8 school in Connecticut where students “began accessing the hard drives and changing key functions on the... computers. [They] began altering computer wallpaper options, screen savers and clogging hard drives...” and throwing icons in the trash (Jones, 2000, p. 1). While these activities will not put children into danger, it stands to reason that if they are mischievous with the machines themselves, they may also be with the Internet. Some mischief leads to much worse than trashing icons. One can imagine the concern of the teacher who returned to class after a conference to find that one of his students had printed an 80-page paper (Smith, 1999). The concern, Smith indicates, was not the 80 pages printed out on the laser printer but the content. The student had printed a bomb-making manual and was trying to sell it around school.
The Internet played a part in the Columbine murders (Pearle, 2001). Though not as serious as murder, one student and school learned a lesson in interstate commerce fraud with the help of the Internet. The student ordered golf clubs with a bogus credit card number and had them shipped to the district office (Smith, 1999). The law arrived in the district office shortly after. Some of these Internet misuses examples may seem extreme. However, due to the nature of the Internet and the innate curiosity and mischievousness of young people, there are many risks to them searching for or just finding inappropriate content on the Internet. The risks involved in using the Internet are so different from any other education tool that Flowers and Rakes (2000) believe educators should set up precautions for student on the net as they would a field trip. What students see, read and hear on the Internet closely resembles leaving the school while under the care of the school. The particulars of how to best protect students from risks and dangers online must be determined using the same care taken to ensure field trips are safe.

Background of the Study

Trying to protect kids from inappropriate content on the Internet dates back to shortly after the Internet starting entering schools. At first, Internet risks may have caught teachers and schools off guard. And as usual, response efforts from school districts and state and federal government have meant that what may seem as an education and technology issue is also a social, moral, legal, cultural, and political issue. Some teachers remember the innocent introduction of computers to the classroom. Reilly (2000) notes that at the time, “Computers were little more than a
drill-and-practice mechanism—they were not consequential enough to spawn material for the six o’clock news.” Reilly cites the mid-1990s as the time when schools took notice. Teachers went from worrying about how to share one computer among an entire class and whom to call for maintenance to larger concerns.

The evolution of computers and the Internet from harmless research aid to potentially dangerous tool did not take long. Taylor (2002) remarks that in 1995 when media specialists first learned to use the World Wide Web, they saw it as the ideal tool for teaching and conveying information to students. She goes on to state that it was not long before educators and media specialists saw the Internet as something to be closely regarded and better understood. As students and teachers alike began to familiarize themselves with the Internet, situations occurred that put both teachers and students in uncomfortable positions. Even as recently as March of 2001, one study showed 53% of young people using the Internet had accidentally arrived at pornographic website (Taylor, 2002).

Schools and school districts responded to potential risks early on with Acceptable Use Policies (AUPs). By the year 2000, one survey indicated that 96% of respondents (schools) employed AUPs (Curry & Haycock, 2001). The policies were a good effort at keeping kids from inappropriate content, but early AUP forms were much different than current forms. Many of the early forms were ineffective (Reilly, 2000). These forms represented an indication that the potential of the Internet had not yet been understood. The policies did a poor job of specifically defining what conduct was considered inappropriate. They also “tended to focus on mechanical/logistical
concerns” such as “change your password every six months, back up your files”. In the late 1990’s, major changes began to occur in both - who was using the Internet and the nature of what was on it. This lead to changes in how AUPs were being crafted and by whom.

Guidelines for quality AUPs grew to consider forwarding distasteful e-mail and hate mail, accessing inappropriate sites, and penalties for violating the rules (Merrill & King, 1998). Some states, such as California, required school districts to have an Acceptable Use Policy in place as early as 1997 (Smith, 1999). The AUPs have evolved as Internet use has. Districts have become more careful and more thorough. Today many AUPs are very detailed; some of them are pages long and require a parent to sign it as well as the student. In one district in Salt Lake City, the AUP has been translated into nine different languages (Borja, 2002). So, school districts tried to set policy and issued the Acceptable Use Policy forms to: let students know what the policy was and have them agree to abide by it.

If the Internet were not so dynamic, the AUPs alone would probably have worked well. They may have prevented young people from searching for inappropriate content. But when kids signed the forms and agreed not to go to inappropriate sites, it didn’t always keep their eyes and ears from objectionable content. A lot of the sites dealing with inappropriate content were hiding at the end of innocent searches. Haycock noted in 1998 that each day several hundred new web sites are added to the World Wide Web and many sites change daily. He went on to note that at the time, a recommended site for “Bears” changed from big furry animals...
to a site of large, homosexual, hairy men. The same ambiguous language that produces slang, puns and other quirks of English led the Internet to be a dicey place even when searching seemingly "innocuous terms such as girl, mature, doll, boy, and breast" (Young, 2002). These innocent searches turning out naughty occur in part because of the aggressive nature of pornographic web sites. Many of them put common search terms that kids might use for in school in their descriptors (Lininger, 2001). This means that a term like "rain forest" might lead a student to a porn site while nothing in the name of the web site would indicate it is bad until a student is viewing it. Often web addresses are innocently confused. For instance, a student could quite easily forget the site for the President's residence is www.whitehouse.gov and go to www.whitehouse.com, the latter of which is a pornographic site. At that point, for an impressionable youth, the damage is done.

In an effort to protect students from objectionable content, the Clinton administration and the Federal Communications Commission began work on efforts, which according to Vice President Gore would, "ensure that children aren't surfing into dangerous waters when they surf the Web" (McConnell, 1999). Congress was making efforts as well; their efforts focused on filters, "kid-friendly Web browsers" and other devices that could block inappropriate content (Jones, 2000). The perception was that even if Acceptable Use Policies worked and kids were not seeking out inappropriate content, sexual predators and objectionable sites were becoming too aggressive.
Up until the point of being mandated by the government, filters and other blocking devices had been installed in some schools and not in others. When the individual districts chose to use this technology on their own, there seemed to be relatively little response on a national scale. However, when it appeared as if Internet filters would become federally mandated, Free Speech activists, like the ACLU and The American Library Association (ALA), fought back. Federal legislation efforts began in February 1998 when Senator John McCain introduced what was known as the Internet School Filtering Act (Chapin, 1999). The legislation may have been proactive. It may also have been responsive as parents weighed in through a poll from a University of Pennsylvania that indicated 78% with the Internet in their homes feared their child might view pornography or give out personal information online (McConnell, 1999).

The bills passed both the House and Senate. ALA members wrote numerous articles denouncing filters. Their primary arguments were:

- Filters do not work— they either under-block and let too many bad sites through or they over-block and will not let kids reach legitimate sites. In some cases filters were used to block certain sites for political reasons. Because of this they violate free-speech (Dority, 2000).

- Filters take responsibility away from young people. Whereas the Acceptable Use Policies focus on the responsibilities of the student user, filters take away the opportunity to make a decision (Lau, 2002).
• Filters can greatly reduce the classic “Teachable Moment” opportunities in a classroom (Pearle, 2001). A teachable moment occurs when something unexpected occurs in the classroom which serves as an immediate catalyst for the teacher and students to study and learn from the situation.

• Filters take power away from the teacher or librarian to decide what a student can view in the library. Thus, they give up local control. The decision for what a student might locate on the Internet could be made by a “reviewer” (a person who works for the company that created the filter, who reviews sites to decide if they are acceptable). One of the biggest complaints of filters is that no one can see the list of sites they block (St. Lifer, 2003).

Their arguments represent a different side of protecting students from inappropriate content. The idea is the access to information is valued at the same level if not more than that of kids avoiding profanity and sex online.

The arguments of the ALA and other groups were not successful. In fact, their free-speech stance took on attacks from many fronts. One of those, Minkel (2000a) stated, was an editorial in the Wall Street Journal, which accused the association of failing to state a position against children and adults viewing pornography at the library. The attack forced the ALA to revisit its free-speech stance. The association also then made an effort to include school librarians in 2000 council ballot where there had previously been none.
President Clinton signed the Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA) in 2000 (Lau, 2002). The signing of the CIPA meant that every school had to install filter-type equipment or software. Because the law states the federal government will withhold money from schools that do not comply, most schools installed some form of a filter (Borja, 2002). Since the law has been enacted, its implementation has been dictated and defined by many legal challenges with most pertaining to Internet use at public libraries (Lau, 2002). So, with the CIPA and many filters firmly in place, much of the efforts of ALA members have been to inform the public of updated or new technology. The new devices still meet the requirements of the CIPA yet let more information through than some more rigid filters. Other recent free-speech efforts are aimed having people lower their filter’s settings (Minkel, 2003b).

The history of how to protect children from inappropriate content on the Internet is a brief one, yet not a simple one. It is relatively short, but has been mirrored in controversy. The excitement of implementing a wonderful new research tool wore off with the realization that kids can find or be found by danger while on the Internet. Legal battles may try to define expectations, but teachers are working in classrooms with children and the Internet and teachers have the greatest chance to make a positive impact on a daily basis.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this thesis is to determine how teachers perceive solutions to balancing the protection of kids from inappropriate content on the Internet while
allowing them quality research opportunities. The results will be achieved through both historical and descriptive means.

The evolution and effectiveness of Acceptable Use Policies (AUPs) and Internet filters as dictated by experts in the field of technology and education will offer the historical research. The descriptive research will be the results of a survey taken by teachers at all grade levels in several midwestern school districts.

Objectives of this Study

This study has one overall objective and three supporting objectives. The overall objective is to determine most effective way to protect students online while allowing quality research opportunities.

The supporting objectives are:

- To ascertain the components of the best possible AUP.
- To determine teachers’ knowledge and comfort level with Internet filters and AUPs their districts.
- To understand what effect local control of Internet filters might have on the research opportunities for students while protecting them from objectionable content.
- To ascertain whether or not teachers are overall pleased with their schools’ efforts to protect children from inappropriate content on the Internet.

Ascertaining qualities for the best possible AUPs is important because AUPs lack much controversy, which is a contrast to the filters issue. The only controversy over AUPs in the literature is the legality of parents’ signatures and semantics. By

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analyzing the results of the expert analysis of Acceptable Use Policies, the best possible AUP is developed. The experts agree on a lot, and infuse other ideas that coincide with the disagreements over filters. So, Acceptable Use Policies will be one part of the attaining the best possible means for protecting children on the Internet while offering quality research opportunities.

The objective of attaining teachers’ knowledge of and comfort with filters and AUPs is important because it has not been done before. In fact, research that includes teachers’ opinions on technology is rare in the literature.

Another reason for surveying teachers is to ascertain teacher feedback on an issue that has largely ignored their participation. Teachers are very under represented in the debate over how to best protect young people on the Internet. They need to have a say in the policies and the equipment that they monitor kids using every day as the teachers are the direct link to the students.

One of objectives regards placing control of the Internet filter at school district level. This study is an effort to learn if “local control” over an Internet filter will expand research opportunities for kids while still maintaining a level of protection. The answer is derived from both the historical information and the descriptive data. The historical information reveals that many librarians and other writers, after the CIPA became law, began to advocate for some form of local control over the filters. Many of their articles, which do not deal with court rulings since the signing of the CIPA, pertain to the Internet security systems that allow some form of onsite control over the filters. They advocate for teachers and librarians to have the ability to bypass
the filters so that students can access information on pages that should not have been blocked. This idea is gaining support. The descriptive data shows if teachers feel the same way and to what degree. This study provides a recommendation that can be formed regarding local control over filters and the possible enhancement of research opportunities while avoiding inappropriate content.

The objective of ascertaining whether or not teachers are overall pleased with their schools’ efforts to protect kids online is very important. An answer to this question will provide a blueprint for school districts to follow in future technology policy. The answer will be obtained through descriptive data. Currently, most schools employ an Acceptable Use Policy and an Internet filter. By breaking down the data from teachers’ surveys, correlations between discontent in (or approval of) a district plan will help reveal the effectiveness of AUPs and Internet filters. This information will offer a conclusion attained with input from those who have to implement policy and work directly with kids and the Internet. The conclusion will identify the best way to protect children from inappropriate content on the Internet while offering positive research opportunities.
Chapter 2: The Solution

Introduction

There are few complex problems with easy solutions. The problem of how to protect kids at school from inappropriate content on the Internet, like many issues in education, is not simply an education concern. It involves many aspects of government and society. Moral and economic concerns are not far behind. Yet, in the end, schools are entrusted to educate children, and the Internet is a great tool for doing so. So, schools and teachers need the most effective way to use the Internet while protecting young people from inappropriate content. The solution is one that takes this into account. The solution must also take into account the many different opinions expressed by the experts - many of whom themselves disagree.

These concepts lead to a three-pronged solution containing ideas from several different camps. The best way to protect school kids from inappropriate content on the Internet means implementing: a quality Acceptable Use Policy, Internet filters, and choosing a filter that allows for local control. These tasks alone are not enough to both protect kids and ensure effective research opportunities. Each step must be taken with a wide range of input from the many different groups involved.

Step 1 - Acceptable Use Policies.

The best possible Acceptable Use Policy is developed when a concerted effort is made to find the best development team representing all constituents. The team can write an effective AUP when the group takes the time to consider the various options for inclusion in an AUP.
Why AUPs?—An ounce of prevention. Scarcella and Gonzales (2001) stated, “as with any other organized level of activity, rules become the method by which processes function” (3). In brief, an Acceptable Use Policy is a list of rules. Some question the effectiveness of an AUP, and in their 1999 study of AUPs nationwide, Flowers and Rakes indicated that it was too early to tell if the AUPs were working. However, Acceptable Use Policies are the least controversial of the solution to keeping kids safe on the Internet. None of the teachers, media specialists, technology coordinators, or administrators cited opposes the concept of AUPs. As well, educators have become better at writing them since 1999.

Acceptable Use Policies should be considered a deterrent. Reilly (2000) indicated the need for AUPs was understood shortly after the Internet reached the classroom. He stated, “administrators and computer savvy-teachers were quick to realize student use of computers and computer networks needed to have a written use policy so that students and teachers understood the ‘ground rules’—limits need to be defined, and appropriate use needed to be understood” (Reilly, 2000, 1). Flowers and Rakes (2000) concluded that since technology is dynamic in nature, it has greatly changed education. They noted that these changes dictate that those who write policy must be proactive in ensuring that rights and responsibilities of school districts and their students are protected (Flowers & Rakes). Smith (1999) stated the idea more to the point when he wrote that, “safe schools are characterized as having clearly understood and enforced rules and policies for students and staff”(1) and noted those policies extend to computer use. In 1999, Caruso agreed indicating the most effective
way to prevent young people from looking for inappropriate things on the Net is to have a well-written AUP and supervised classrooms. One expert noted that Acceptable Use Policies bring the idea of rights and responsibilities beyond students and school officials (Schrader, 1999). He felt that AUPs educated parents as to acceptable behavior when using the Internet as well. Smith (1999) indicated the bedrock for quality Internet and computer use is formed in a well-written and well-understood Acceptable Use Policy. This policy is what an administrator must have as a foundation when he or she needs to discipline a student for misusing the computer (Smith, 1999). Others concurred that school staff (with an AUP) could use the policy as its point of reference when disciplinary action is needed (Chapin, 1999).

The AUP allows students to assume responsibility to use the Internet as expected or risk losing their privileges. This is a major argument of those who favor the policies. They feel that AUPs spell out the rules and kids need to decide how to mitigate them; that process gives and exemplifies responsibility for children (Chapin, 1999). One expert indicated that students know rules for appropriate classroom behavior and consequences for inappropriate behavior so if students are aware of the rules governing online behavior at school and can recite consequences for breaking the rules, the responsibility belongs to whom it should- with the students (Caruso, 1999).

Smith added one final reason why AUPs were a good idea for his district when he noted that in 1999, it was bound by his state law to do so.
In summation, AUPs are necessary to protect children from inappropriate content on the Internet. The AUP gives a list of written rules that should be understood by everyone involved in the education process. The policies offer a starting point for understanding of how computers can be used by a student, and they offer an end point should disciplinary action to be taken when violations occur. Much as every school district has rules for the playground and hallway, each should have rules for their onramps to the information highway.

*Developing a quality AUP.* When the AUP is developed by a single entity in the school district, many perspectives may be missed. The final document may be well written; yet, it may heavily represent one opinion over another. Reilly (2000) argued that, “those who craft policy must realize that the network is not just a mechanical entity but it is a forum where proper use in an educational setting must be defined.” In the end, the AUP will most represent the ideas of those who developed it. The best way to ensure a quality document is to have many people involved in crafting of an AUP (Merrill & King, 1998). This is not an entirely new concept. In their national study of Acceptable Use Policies, Flowers and Rakes (2000) reported that close to 80% of respondents used some type of committee to develop the AUP. Yet, that left one fifth of schools with an AUP lacking input from many parties. This could create headaches for those districts.

Teachers must be involved in writing the AUP if it is going to be effective especially considering that teachers have responsibility in the classroom and could be considered liable for what occurs in the classroom. Classroom teachers ranked
number one in a survey asking who supervises children during their Internet access (Flowers & Rakes, 2000). Teachers showed up 17 more times than librarian. Given that teachers are responsible, they should be able to have a say in how the policies get generated. Merrill and King (1998) felt that teachers should have a major role in the AUPs development because of both the advantages and risks in Internet access and their relationship of both to their classrooms.

Librarians’ (media specialists) involvement in crafting an Acceptable Use Policy is necessary for two reasons: their natural appreciation for the process of searching for information and territorial rights. Librarians will come to the drafting table with a lot of experience in the research process and a strong understanding of how it works. Creating an AUP that allows for the use of Internet as an effective research tool requires that media specialists be included in the process. Many schools place computers in the classrooms, but many computers (and in cases, even computer labs) are housed in the library/media center. The librarian is in charge of equipment in his or her media center just as a teacher is in charge of his or her classroom. So, to place computers in the media center, and not ask for the library/media specialist’s input on the Acceptable Use Policy is unwise. The inaction might lead to a resentment of the policy that they are expected to enforce. This was evident in the survey of Rhode Island librarians (Eaton et al., 2001).

Superintendents, principals, vice principals and deans of students might all be considered for participation in the development of the Acceptable Use Policy. Administrators bring budgetary and disciplinary perspectives to the table. The level of
administration is important. Flowers and Rakes (2000) indicated that in most cases, those who administer the policy are school level administrators.

Students and parents benefit the AUP development process as well. Parental input is important because parents are often required to sign the document. Involving parents can have a ripple effect because "parents become informed decision makers, concerning granting their child access to the Internet" (Merrill & King, 1998). Involving students can ascertain what they already know about the Internet and student perceptions of its use. Their involvement also empowers them to have a stake concerning issues that will affect their education (Merrill & King, 1998).

The technology department should also be included in the development. They tend to have familiarity with the hardware, software, and trends in the field. In addition, often they know better than anyone else what students can do and are doing to the machines. Technology staff should also know the history of computers in the district, the history of policy, and why decisions were made in the past.

So, one important key to creating a quality Acceptable Use Policy is to involve a broad range of people. This is important because of the knowledge and perspective each member brings. A diverse committee can also prevent resentment. Furthermore, a policy in which people feel some ownership is more likely to be implemented effectively.

The contents of a quality AUP. Acceptable Use Policies appear in all shapes and sizes. A study in 1999 revealed the average length of an AUP to be slightly less than four pages long- some being as long as ten pages long (Flowers and Rakes).
While there may have been an average length, there does not seem to have been an average perception of the document's contents. In 2000, Reilly noted, "generally people who have been in the educational system for more than a few years know what a computer AUP consists of; they just don’t know that they know." In addition to not knowing what was contained on the policies, their effectiveness was a concern as well. Flowers and Rakes (1999) concurred that at that time most AUPs did not properly address many issues.

Though no policy is perfect, the research of many experts does offer a lot of parallels for designing an effective policy and one key aspect of an Acceptable Use Policy is that it must be written clearly (Chapin, 1999; Reilly, 2000; Wolinsky, 2001). A clearly understood set of rules for the Internet represents an important progression. Reilly (2000) noted that early AUP forms were often too vague to be enforceable. So, clearly written rules are important. Without clarity, a school district may end up with an unenforceable policy. The best way to achieve this is through the previous step in developing the AUP— involving many people. By involving students, teachers, and administrators in the development process, the different perspectives of each can be applied and put into writing.

After committing to writing the Acceptable Use Policy clearly, school districts should take care not to forget "to set policy so that the ‘things’ out there on the Web... are supportive of a school’s educational goals [so that they] are identified and utilized to their maximum" (Reilly, 2000, 1). So, an Acceptable Use Policy should state that the technology is there to support school learning and education.
Beyond the writing style and the generalizations, the effective AUP spells out the limits a student must abide by while using the Internet. Merrill and King (1998) studied different AUPs and listed some limits listed on them as:

- Illegal activities
- Commercial uses
- Political lobbying or product advertising
- Antisocial behavior such as hate mail or harassment
- Unapproved participation in a chat-line
- Access to or transfer of sexually explicit material.

Flowers and Rakes (1999) provide a similar list. None of these rules for online behavior are unreasonable or unexpected. They would similarly be enforced in the hallway or classroom. However, noticeably absent from the complete list is an understanding of what constitutes proper use. Reilly (2000) indicated this is missing from a lot of AUPs as students need to also be told what is expected of them when they are online.

Proper use of the Internet can be explained in two parts. The first part of proper use, as stated by Reilly (2000), must be spelled out as use that supports classroom learning or education. Reilly stated that when the network is not used for schoolwork, the chances increase that it is not being used appropriately. The second aspect of proper use is “the need for users…to abide by generally accepted rules for polite behavior on the network” (Flowers & Rakes, 1999). This is commonly referred to as netiquette. This online etiquette is very important for kids to comprehend (Borja,
2002; Eaton et al., 2001; Flowers & Rakes, 1999; Johnson, 1998) because it helps to ensure Internet users are respectful of one another. Proper use is one aspect of an AUP that that is often missing or neglected. So, in effect, kids are told what they cannot do but not what they should do. So, setting limits and describing proper use should be included for a quality Acceptable Use Policy.

The parameters being defined, those crafting the AUP should keep in mind their audience. In defining proper behavior, they should do so just as is done in the student handbook (Reilly, 2000). This ensures the rules are consistent and this ensures that students are aware that their Internet use is governed with the same understanding as is their school behavior. Many AUPs are in fact included in student handbooks (Flowers & Rakes, 1999). In promoting understanding, Reilly noted AUPs could, “offer some reasons for policy statements that may not be understood by the students” (2). Students may not like a rule, but understanding a rule will help to make rules acceptable.

Every school needs effective rules. Acceptable Use Policies serve as the backbone of protecting kids from inappropriate content on the Internet. Good policies spell out what the goals of the school are in having kids use technology. The AUPs also clearly and effectively let students know what the expectations are of them- both what they should not do and what they should. Administrators and teachers rely on these documents as their footing when administering discipline. The importance of the rules dictates that many people of different perspectives be involved in creating them. Finally, the Acceptable Use Policy should be written as rules and appear in the
student handbook, and in some situations, students should be provided with the rationale for why certain policies are necessary.

Step 2-Internet Filters.

Concerning whether to filter or not, Johnson (1999) asked, “do I care if my students see [sexually explicit material] and it sets off the hormonal fountain of youth in my room for fifteen minutes?” Mr. Johnson is an exception. Trying to keep kids on task is difficult. The number of distractions in a classroom is already too many. Distractions of a sexually explicit nature may not only distract kids, it can embarrass them and lead to parent phone calls to voice their displeasure.

Internet filters are an important aspect of keeping children safe from inappropriate content on the Internet. Although many anti-censorship advocates oppose them (Haycock, 1998; Minkel 2000b), filters do accomplish the task of protecting children much of the time even when adults are not present. Teachers may have different standards of what is inappropriate content and what is not; the filter provides the same level of standard. The Taylor (2000) study shows parents want filters in schools. Furthermore, filters spare people who would prefer not to view inappropriate content from having to make the “tap on the shoulder.”

Why filter? Filters are necessary because they are effective at sifting out “bad hits” on Internet searches. They do not filter out all the bad, and they do filter out some of the good. However, they serve as a protective measure to kids while on the Net, and “Global environments, such as the web, invite undirected exposure to many of life’s poorest examples as well as to a wealth of intellectual prodding. A safety net
builds a degree of protection into the system” (Scarcella & Gonzales, 2001, p. 3). By bringing “global environments” on a computer screen immediately in front of children, schools are obligated to error on the side of safety. For this reason, Smith (1999) listed Internet filters as part of his three pronged technology policy recommendations for schools.

School districts do not have the resources to buy tools that do not work. Even opponents of Internet filters agree that the devices do block some inappropriate content. In 2003, Minkel cited a study by the Kaiser Family Foundation when he wrote, “software set to highly restrictive levels block 91 percent of the online pornography” (a, 1). A lot of educators and parents will want this filter (on the highest settings) in elementary school classrooms. Minkel’s concern was the 24 percent of Web sites that were related to health issues that were blocked. Lininger (2001) referred to this as “over-filtering”. However, the fact that some health related sites are blocked does not mean that the information they hold is permanently out of reach for kids. Lininger noted that at his school a student researching cancer found that some sites involving breast cancer had been blocked because of nudity or partial nudity. However, “those that weren’t blocked provided all of the desired information and more. In fact, the student didn’t even use all of the available sites to get the information” (Lininger, 2001, 1). Filters, Lininger noted, also protect children from simple keyboarding or Web address mistakes, like requesting whitehouse.com instead of whitehouse.gov- the former takes one to a porn site, the latter to the official Whitehouse website. Minkel (2002) recognizes the benefits and effectiveness of
filters when he wrote that personal e-mail is not a necessary tool for kids to access at school. He noted that school districts were using filters to block access to personal e-mail and chat rooms because they were a distraction and posed the potential that students might use them for inappropriate reasons even though they were very popular with the kids.

One argument opposed to Internet filters is that the devices under-block with some inappropriate content failing to be filtered (Lininger, 2001). Lininger (2001) likened the contention to window screens when he stated, “I have screens on windows, but sometimes a fly or mosquito comes in anyway. Should I throw away the screens, or should I try to look for and fix the hole?” Filters are not perfect. However, they do protect kids from inappropriate content on the Internet.

In addition to being effective, filters are able to monitor even when a teacher cannot. However, some people who oppose filters note that adult supervision is more effective than any filter. In an article opposing filters, Wolinsky (2001) argued that schools are not doing their jobs by failing to supervise Internet access [while] failing to provide lessons that engage students using quality web resources. Any teachers who are not providing good lessons make filters are all the more important. Kids who get bored might be more likely to search for inappropriate content and a filter can help to prevent this behavior. Not only are the mechanisms important, but they are much more practical than the expert’s idea to reconfigure the computer workstations so they can be easily monitored by a teacher. This would present a major architectural overhaul for most schools. A good filter would be a lot less expensive. Pearle (2001)
concurred with Wolinsky when she indicated that the best situation was for a child to research on the Internet with an adult nearby, so the adult can help him or her and discuss any questionable material with the student. Guided research with a trained adult close by will benefit a student a lot. However, the statement confirms (as the article does) Pearle to be a librarian (who helps search for information) instead of a classroom teacher—watching over, protecting, and assuming liability for a large classroom of kids. Adult supervision is important for kids working on the Internet, but the filter is always there, even when the teacher is across the room. One administrator disagreed with Pearle and Wolinsky when he wrote, “Most classroom situations are safe. In a classroom, teachers are right there to supervise student computer use. However in the library, the librarian cannot supervise all computer use as easily. This is a prime area in a school where filtering software makes a difference” (Sullivan, 2002, p. 1). Goodman (2003) went as far as saying most school administrators find filters necessary. In their survey of librarians regarding filters, Curry and Haycock (2001) found many librarians thankful for the filters because they did not have the resources to monitor student use all the time. Lininger (2001) noted that although he advocates filters at school, he does not have one at his home for his children because there is always constant supervision while his kids are on the Internet. If the teacher could be at a student’s side throughout any Internet research, filters might not be necessary.; unfortunately, large class sizes and shrinking budgets lead to the conclusion that the teacher-to-student ratio is not likely to change soon. Hence, the necessity to filter will not change either. In his three-pronged
recommendation for Internet safety Smith (1999) cited the importance of adult supervision as prong three. Filters were prong two. So, filters are important because they can protect kids at times when teachers cannot be there.

Another positive aspect of filters is that they are consistent. While teachers or librarians might be inconsistent in their ideas of what is appropriate and what is not, filters are. In a survey regarding technology policies, one respondent was concerned about these inconsistencies in the classroom. The respondent wrote, “...we have a huge technology school operating with no standards. Each teacher ends up being responsible for running their classroom however they choose. Some are lax...some are more strict and try to monitor closely what is done on the Internet” (Flowers & Rakes, 2000, 4). This situation might exist for a long time. However, a school district is more likely to change if the threat of a lawsuit because of lax teachers is known.

Another good reason to have Internet filters to protect kids from inappropriate content at school is because parents favor filters at school. This is evident in a poll in which Taylor (2002) reported that 78 percent of parents favor filters at schools. In most school districts, parents dictate policy, so if 78 percent of parents favor a policy or policy change, the move takes place.

One final reason why filters are an important aspect of a policy to keep offensive content from school computers pertains to privacy and the rights of those other than the computer user. In 2001, Curry & Haycock noted that 86 percent of school libraries that did not filter, used the “tap on the shoulder method” of dealing with users who have inappropriate content on their monitors (p. 1). The “tap on the
shoulder method” means that Internet users in libraries receive a tap on the shoulder (perhaps followed by a request to stop) from librarians when they are looking at offensive content. Minkel (2000) feared that this method was a violation of privacy while having librarians on patrol behind users. The U.S. Government agreed and challenged a lower court’s ruling against filters (Oder, 2003). The appeal argued, “that the lower court was wrong when it said that closely monitoring Internet users would be a less restrictive alternative than filtering software…the argument continues, such a ‘tap on the shoulder’ tactic ‘would deeply intrude on the patron privacy and needlessly expose librarians to pornography’” (Oder, 2003, p.1). So, the second most popular tool beyond filters “the tap” is a violation of privacy and can needlessly expose others to offensive material.

Preparation to filter. The importance of including people from throughout a school district into the filtering decision is tantamount to its success or the degree to which the filter is part of a successful plan to protect kids from inappropriate content on the Internet. A lot of animosity surrounds many situations in which filters were implemented without input. For example, in one well-publicized case in an Iowa school district, filters were implemented over the summer, and when students came back to school in the fall, they protested the new blocking devices (Caudle, 2000; Malcolm, 2000). In that district, the faculty was tacitly informed (without fully understanding the ramifications) that filters would be installed. The protests, lead by a high school journalism class, achieved some form of success (Caudle, 2000; Malcolm, 2000). The decision to implement a filter with very little input from those
who were affected by it had two major effects. The (Caudle, 2000; Malcolm, 2000) effects:

- Faculty and students were annoyed and suspect of the district that they were not consulted about the decision. This lead to petitions, protests, letters and phone calls to the school board. School boards do not like this.
- The decision created more work for the district in that the technology department had to go back and undo some of the aspects of the filter they had initially installed.

In the end, the school district could have prevented a lot of bad publicity, wasted time, and extra work by seeking input in their initial decision to filter and how to implement.

Pearle (2001) found it concerning that filters were implemented by technology departments in numerous cases without consulting librarians. By not consulting the librarians, many of them seemed to have felt disrespected and their talents unappreciated. It is often difficult for people who feel as such to support a system. Therefore, it is very important to seek input in implementing a filtering system.

While implementing a filtering system is no small task, there are some patterns in the research as to how school districts might do so to meet their unique situations. The two major areas of concern are where along the network to filter the offensive material and how to block the material.

Several experts indicated that for reasons of expense and network management, their districts chose to control the network (Sortore, 2001; Smith, 1999;
Sullivan, 2002). The network can be compared to, “a virtual pathway on and off campus” (Smith, 1999, p. 2). So, by filtering at the point of entry to a school district, inappropriate content can be stopped at the door. The other option, filtering at the individual workstations, is too expensive and expansive for larger districts (Sortore, 2001; Sullivan, 2002). One theorist likened the network-based filters to proxies when she wrote, “under the proxy server system, individual classroom computers do not connect directly with the Internet...they connect with a centralized server...and then the Internet” (Jones, 2000, p. 1). So, depending on the size of districts’ computer networks and their number of computers, a filtering system implemented at the network level could be the best way to protect kids from inappropriate content on the Internet.

Filtering systems block content by several different means. For school districts setting out to filter, there are two major concerns. The first is to be as effective as possible in blocking inappropriate content. The second concern is to block as little as possible of the good sites. Goodman (2003) noted that most often Internet filters work by checking a computer user’s request against a database of Web addresses. If the Web address shows up in the database, the page requested will not show up, and the individual who requested it is notified that the content is not appropriate. The process appears to be simple; however, pornographic Websites are constantly changing addresses and names. So, blocking them with lists of addresses does not work all the time. Sortore (2001) indicated this about black-list filters writing that, “a black-list filter is one that screens out inappropriate content sites
based on a variety of criteria while a white-list filtering system only allows access to a list of approved web sites. The black-list filter has its drawbacks in that there are so many new sites being put up daily, it is impossible to catch and screen out every offensive site” (Sortore, 2001, p. 2). Young (2002) informed that quality filters should analyze each and every Web page summoned for display as close to real-time as is possible. Young believed that if schools’ filters search only the Web addresses, there will be a lot of under-blocking and over-blocking. The most effective means for a high success rate is a system that considers that content of each page on a site individually (Young, 2002). Finally, making sure that whatever filter a school district uses, the company in charge of the filter (vendor) updates the lists of blocked (or usable) websites frequently is important (Goodman, 2003; Smith, 1999; Sortore, 2001; Sullivan, 2002; Young, 2002).

A filtering system is an important part of the solution to protecting children from inappropriate content while maximizing research opportunities. The size and scope of school district computer systems dictates that the filter be network-based. Also, school districts should implement a filter that reviews sites on a page-by-page basis. Districts will also want to purchase a filter from a vendor that updates their lists.

*Step 3- Local Control.*

The third step to creating a safe and positive Internet research environment for school children is local control. Local control of the Internet filtering system is important for two reasons. The first reason deals with perception and publicity of
those affected by the filter. The second reason is because each community and school
district is different. Local control of the Internet filter will improve attitudes over
adopting a filter and increase research opportunities.

In many cases when hard feelings occur over filtering devices being
implemented, but much of the debate could be avoided if control over what the
children cannot access is not entirely in the hands of strangers. Most companies that
sell filters create their lists through the use of “reviewers”, people who review sites to
determine whether their content is appropriate or not (St. Lifer, 2003). Concerned
about this, one writer noted that:

“when blocking and rating decisions are made by unknown third parties with
unknown qualifications and unknown ideological agendas, the danger to
public debate is palpable. With a broad sweep, these products indict all
representations of violence, sex, hatred and other targets as equally bad, and
as especially bad for young people” (Schrader, 1999, p. 2).

Curry and Haycock’s (2001) research reported that of school librarians,
depending on whether the filtering system blocked based on keywords or Websites,
between 35 and 44 percent do not know who supplied the list to be blocked. In many
cases, the vendor would not give the librarians the list of blocked sites (or keywords).
St. Lifer (2003) quoted one network manager on the importance of local control who
indicated that an unknown individual should not be deciding what is blocked in her
district’s community. Sullivan (2002) indicated that local control of the filter is
important because some sites need to be blocked in more conservative communities
while not so in others. If teachers and librarians feel as if they have some control over
the Internet filter, they feel less disrespected.

St. Lifer (2003) argued that local control of the filter is the key to ensuring
access to a lot of research information. The power to block and unblock sites is very
important. In their article of 2001, Curry and Haycock divulged that twenty five
percent of librarians had a list of Websites they wanted blocked that they gave to their
vendor. While having a list for the vendor is good and shows the school has been
thinking about what they need to do, in the long run, having control to block and
unblock onsite is necessary.

One of the major issues that lead to rallies and protests from high school
students in Davenport, Iowa against the filters was the fact that the filters
incorporated the same restrictions on lower elementary students as on high school
students (Caudle, 2000; Malcolm, 2000). High school students have different rights,
privileges, protections, and maturity levels than elementary school students.
Therefore, utilizing age-appropriate filter settings is more appropriate. Goodman
(2003) noted that the Children’s Internet Protection Act does allow for different filter
settings. A lot of the animosity in the Davenport School District subsided when the
filter settings were changed (Caudle, 2000; Malcolm, 2000). Specifically, “the
restrictions on 10 of the 29 categories that originally were filtered were lifted”
(Caudle, 2000, p. 2). In addition, students can ask to have specific sites or pages
unblocked. This happens by appealing to a review committee on which students sit.
The committee turns around requests to unblock or block within 48 hours (Caudle,
This process is good as it empowers teachers and students. It gives them both a stake in the process and the feeling that they have some power over the technology they work with. Borja (2002) wrote that in Clark, County Nevada, a similar procedure allows students to do the same. These procedures respect the judgment of the student and classroom teacher by allowing a committee to review the online material and potentially overrule the Internet filter. The procedure ensures that responsibility of what is appropriate is in human hands.

In conclusion, local control over a network filtering system is an important key to its success. Local control allows a wider expanse of research possibilities while still providing protection from inappropriate content for students. Local control gives those upon which the filter has effect some feeling of freedom. It also gives teachers and students power over some technology and a respect for their judgment.

Summary

The most effective plan for keeping children safe from inappropriate content on the Internet while allowing them quality research opportunities is a plan that includes: a thorough Acceptable Use Policy, an effective Internet filter placed at the network level, and local control over the Internet filter. While no system is perfect by combining these tools and policies, a district can put forth the effort to protect and respect its students and faculty. The AUP ensures that the district has a quality policy in place to explain good Internet behavior and inform of the procedure for dealing with poor choices. The filter is an effective screen to sift out as much inappropriate content; it supplements but does not supercede the district policy. Local control
allows those who feel blocked out by the Internet filter to feel more in control and less subservient to a machine. It reaffirms the self-respect of the teacher and student's judgment. At each step of the plan, input from as many groups involved will lead to a better transition and overall, a more effective implementation.

Conclusion

The literature regarding Acceptable Use Policies shows that many favor them over filters. However, the literature fails to show how effective filters are at preventing inappropriate uses of computer networks by students. In addition, nearly all of the literature details the opinions of media specialists (or librarians) and technology coordinators. The opinions of teachers are thus far unknown and teachers assume the most liability and contact time with the students.
Chapter Three

Introduction

The purpose of this thesis is to determine the best way to protect students from inappropriate content on the Internet while allowing them quality research opportunities.

The solution to the problem is for schools district to implement: an effective Acceptable Use Policy and an effective Internet filter, and to allow for some local control of the filter, and seek input from all those affected along the way. Toward this endeavor, the historical research is demonstrated through the importance and effectiveness of Acceptable Use Policies and Internet filters as arrived at by experts in the field of technology and education (Reilly, 2000; Sullivan, 2002). Professionals also stated the need for local control of Internet filters.

The results of a survey of teachers regarding AUPs, Internet filters, and local control demonstrate the real world application (or need for) each. The respondents were teachers, which makes this the first study of its kind. A copy of the survey appears at Appendix A, 1-3.

This chapter describes the subjects, the design of the study, the results, and the conclusion of the research.

Subjects

The subjects of the survey were public school teachers who teach kindergarten through grade twelve in seven school districts in west Michigan. Participation was voluntary. The surveys were distributed to 400 teachers. Of those teachers, 156
surveys were returned resulting in a response rate of 39%, which is considered a very good response rate for this type of research.

Design of Study

Procedures. The first step in performing this study was to secure permission to study human subjects from Grand Valley State University’s Human Research Review Committee (The letter of permission appears at Appendix D-1).

Once this permission was granted, eight superintendents from school districts in west Michigan were chosen randomly and contacted via e-mail. The purpose of the contact was to obtain permission for conducting the study in the selected districts. Seven superintendents granted permission; one did not respond (An example of the e-mail sent to the superintendents appears at Appendix B-1).

After securing permission from each superintendent, individual building principals in each district were contacted and permission to survey their staffs was requested (An example of this letter appears at Appendix C-1). With the permission of each principal, surveys were taken to each school and placed in the teacher’s mailboxes. Attached to the survey was a letter of introduction and explanation of the survey. For a copy of the letter, see Appendix E-1. Surveys were returned to a large envelope near the teacher mailboxes in each building- except in three cases. In those (two elementary schools, one high school) cases, the large envelope was left with a secretary and surveys returned to her. This procedure was done at the request of the three schools. In each case, recipients were given a week to return the survey to the
envelope before each was retrieved. The process took place between the dates of February 1\textsuperscript{st} and March 30\textsuperscript{th}, 2004.

\textit{Instrumentation.} The survey is comprised of fourteen questions. The first thirteen are 5-point Likert-type items ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. The final question, #14 is an open-ended question on which teachers could write their own comments. The questions on this survey elicit teacher's knowledge and perceptions of the methods schools use to protect kids from inappropriate content while using the Internet.

\textit{Data Collection.} The data were collected by recording the responses from each question on the 156 surveys. Responses were registered numerically, 1 for an answer of Strongly Agree, 2 for Agree, 3 for Neutral, 4 for Disagree and 5 for Strongly Disagree. Responses were entered onto an Excel spreadsheet and exported to SPSS for further analysis.

\textit{Data Analysis.} The data taken from the surveys were processed with descriptive statistics. The results are presented in Table 1. Table 1 lists each survey item, the number of respondents, mean, for that item, and the standard deviation for each item.

Table 1 shows that of the 156 surveys returned, participants responded to questions 1 and 12 the most (154 responses). Item 1 asked respondents if they were overall pleased with their schools' efforts at Internet protection. Item 12 asked if additional measures should be taken to protect kids from offensive content on the
Table 1

Descriptive Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Overall, I am pleased with the system in place to protect my students from inappropriate content on the Internet.</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>2.40</td>
<td>.881</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. My school’s AUP is effective in preventing students from searching for inappropriate content online.</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>2.91</td>
<td>.954</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. My students take their responsibilities dictated by the AUP seriously.</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>3.12</td>
<td>.981</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. My school district takes violations of the AUP seriously.</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>2.31</td>
<td>.953</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I am familiar with how my school’s AUP was developed and by whom.</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>1.028</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. My school’s Internet filter is effective at keeping out inappropriate content.</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>2.42</td>
<td>.885</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. My school’s filter blocks legitimate content that students should be allowed to view.</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>2.21</td>
<td>.857</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Overall, I am pleased with my school’s Internet filter.</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>2.53</td>
<td>.903</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. I am familiar with the process the Internet filter uses to determine which sites to block.</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>3.27</td>
<td>.986</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. I am familiar with how the school’s Internet filter was chosen and by whom.</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>3.54</td>
<td>.933</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Additional measures for protecting students from inappropriate content on the Internet should be added.</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>3.23</td>
<td>.925</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Measures allowing for more thorough Internet searches without sites being blocked should be taken.</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>2.69</td>
<td>1.008</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Items 2 and 14 were not included in Table 1 because their responses could not be plotted from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Item 2 asks what type of measures schools have in place while Item 14 is an open ended question on which respondents wrote what they would like to see changed regarding Internet searches and student usage. N = the number of respondents to the item.
Internet. The question least responded to was Item 3 regarding the effectiveness of Acceptable Use Policies at school.

The information extrapolated from Table 1 indicates that few participants had extreme feelings on the issues of AUPs or filters. In general, most respondents agreed, were neutral, or disagreed with the statements on the survey. Very few had "strong" agreements or disagreements with the statements. Thus, teachers are generally either somewhat pleased or somewhat displeased with the systems in place at their schools that include: Acceptable Use Policies and Internet filters, but most of which lack local control.

Based on the information from Table 1, making assertions regarding teachers' beliefs of the best way to protect kids from inappropriate content on the Internet is difficult. As they are, the responses did not show a clear pattern of effectiveness for AUPs, filters, or feelings about local control. The responses needed to be categorized for further study.

Results. Based on analysis of the survey data, two groups of respondents were created. The groups were created by breaking down responses to Item 1- which asked if overall, participants were pleased with their schools' efforts to protect kids on the Internet. Group 1 is comprised of those who responded either Strongly Agree or Agree to Item 1 and thus were satisfied with the system in place.

Table 2 shows the results of compilation of data from Group 1.
**Table 2 Descriptive Statistics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3. My school’s AUP is effective in preventing students from searching for inappropriate content online.</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>2.79</td>
<td>.896</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. My students take their responsibilities dictated by the AUP seriously.</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>2.91</td>
<td>.928</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. My school district takes violations of the AUP seriously.</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>2.26</td>
<td>.920</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I am familiar with how my school’s AUP was developed and by whom.</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>1.023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. My school’s Internet filter is effective at keeping out inappropriate content.</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>2.11</td>
<td>.640</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. My school’s filter blocks legitimate content that students should be allowed to view.</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>2.28</td>
<td>.784</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Overall, I am pleased with my school’s Internet filter.</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>2.14</td>
<td>.609</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. I am familiar with the process the Internet filter uses to determine which sites to block.</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>3.20</td>
<td>.963</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. I am familiar with how the school’s Internet filter was chosen and by whom.</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>3.49</td>
<td>.888</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Additional measures for protecting students from inappropriate content on the Internet should be added.</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>3.32</td>
<td>.826</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Measures allowing for more thorough Internet searches without sites being blocked should be taken.</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>2.89</td>
<td>.944</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 shows results for those respondents that are considered to be satisfied with their schools' current system for protecting kids on the Internet. Those who circled “Neutral” were neither considered to be satisfied or unsatisfied.
Group 2 is comprised of those who responded “Disagree” or “Strongly Disagree” to Item 1, meaning they were overall dissatisfied with the system in place. Table 3 presents the results of Group 2 respondents to the survey.

In order to decipher why the two groups differ in their opinions of the systems overall, Group 1 and Group 2 were compared using a Mann-Whitney test. The results of this test are presented in Table 4. When the data were compiled in this manner, survey items were scrutinized for those responses, which represented a significant difference on survey responses between the two groups. By doing this, one can narrow down which aspects of the schools’ efforts made the difference in why teachers were satisfied with their schools’ efforts or not.

By comparing the data between the group that is generally satisfied (Group 1) with their schools’ efforts to those that were generally dissatisfied (Group 2) through a Mann-Whitney test, some patterns are established. In Table 4, a significant difference between the two groups is observed among those items that show a reading of < .05 (p<.05). Thus, results indicate that responses of those who were satisfied with their school’s efforts and those who were dissatisfied differed significantly on items: 3, 4, 7, 8, 9 & 13 of the survey. Three of these items for which no significant difference was found asked respondents about their familiarity of a processes as opposed to whether or not they are pleased with something. So, a lack of a correlation is not surprising.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3. My school’s AUP is effective in preventing students from searching for inappropriate content online.</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3.63</td>
<td>1.065</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. My students take their responsibilities dictated by the AUP seriously.</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3.84</td>
<td>1.015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. My school district takes violations of the AUP seriously.</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2.63</td>
<td>1.116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I am familiar with how my school’s AUP was developed and by whom.</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3.47</td>
<td>1.172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. My school’s Internet filter is effective at keeping out inappropriate content.</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>3.24</td>
<td>1.044</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. My school’s filter blocks legitimate content that students should be allowed to view.</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>1.90</td>
<td>1.091</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Overall, I am pleased with my school’s Internet filter.</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>3.86</td>
<td>.793</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. I am familiar with the process the Internet filter uses to determine which sites to block.</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>3.19</td>
<td>1.123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. I am familiar with how the school’s Internet filter was chosen and by whom.</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>1.065</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Additional measures for protecting students from inappropriate content on the Internet should be added.</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>3.10</td>
<td>1.221</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Measures allowing for more thorough Internet searches without sites being blocked should be taken.</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>2.10</td>
<td>1.261</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This table gives the results of group 2—the group that was overall dissatisfied with their schools’ measures to protect kids from offensive content online. Those that circled “Neutral” were not placed in either group.
Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Asymp. Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3. My school’s AUP is effective in preventing students from searching for inappropriate content online.</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. My students take their responsibilities dictated by the AUP seriously.</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. My school district takes violations of the AUP seriously.</td>
<td>.181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I am familiar with how my school’s AUP was developed and by whom.</td>
<td>.479</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. My school’s Internet filter is effective at keeping out inappropriate content.</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. My school’s filter blocks legitimate content that students should be allowed to view.</td>
<td>.027</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Overall, I am pleased with my school’s Internet filter.</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. I am familiar with the process the Internet filter uses to determine which sites to block.</td>
<td>.852</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. I am familiar with how the school’s Internet filter was chosen and by whom.</td>
<td>.395</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Additional measures for protecting students from inappropriate content on the Internet should be added.</td>
<td>.352</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Measures for allowing for more thorough Internet searches without sites being blocked should be taken.</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Asymp. Sig.=significant difference.
By breaking down the survey items that had significant differences between Groups 1 & 2, a pattern of satisfaction (or lack thereof) can be established. For example, the difference in responses for the two groups on Item 3, "My school’s AUP is effective in preventing students from searching for inappropriate content," was found to be significant (p≤.001). Thus, respondents from the two groups disagree on whether or not the AUP is effective. Responses to Item 4, "My students take their responsibilities dictated by the AUP seriously," showed a very similar degree of significance at p≤.001. Again, Group 1 and 2 differ in their opinions of how seriously students take the AUPs.

The three questions regarding the Internet filter were also helpful in establishing a pattern as the filter is often the lightening rod for a school’s Internet protection plan. Responses to Item 7, “My school’s Internet filter is effective at keeping out inappropriate content,” were found to be significant at .000 (p≤.001). This significant difference demonstrates that Groups 1 & 2 disagreed heavily on the effectiveness of Internet filters. The results of the Mann-Whitney test showed responses to Item 8, “My school’s filter blocks legitimate content that students should be allowed to view,” to be significantly different as well (.027 (p≤.027)). Responses to the last question pertaining specifically to filters, Item 9, “Overall, I am pleased with my school’s Internet filter,” were found to be significant at .000 (p≤.001). This level of significance shows that again, the two groups have very different opinions on filters overall.
Responses to Item 13, “Measures allowing for more thorough Internet searches without sites being blocked should be taken,” showed a significant difference between the two groups at .001 (p<.001). This question is different from the others in that it asks respondents to evaluate a change from their current policy. The change would add some form (“Measures”) of local control to allow students to search the Internet without being restricted as strictly by the filter. Groups 1 and 2 were firmly divided on this issue as well.

Conclusions

The best way to protect students from offensive material on the Internet and allow effective research opportunities is not without controversy. The AUP, though the favorite preventive measure of many media specialists, is not found to be very effective by all teachers. Though the data showed a significant difference between those who are satisfied with their schools’ Internet safety efforts and those who are dissatisfied, the mean for those who are satisfied is 2.79, which is close to Neutral. How seriously students take their AUP responsibilities (Item 4) also proved to show a significant difference between Groups 1 and 2, but the item only produced a mean of 2.91 amongst those who were overall satisfied with their schools’ efforts. Again, this mean score is very close to Neutral.

Given the results of the survey, developing conclusions regarding AUPs is complex. The guidelines associated with an AUP are necessary in that they dictate the rules of Internet use and provide a blueprint or rule for teachers and administration to follow when a violation occurs. However, according to teacher responses, AUPs are
perceived as not very effective as a preventive measure to protect students from inappropriate content online. Thus, a well-written AUP is the foundation for any student Internet-use policy. Based on the literature, AUPs should define proper Internet use as well as violations (Reilly, 2000). In addition, those who monitor students on the Internet should have input in creating the policy. However in the end, based on teachers surveyed, an AUP alone is not the best way to protect children from inappropriate content online.

The second component of an effective plan to keep students safe on the Internet while offering quality research opportunities is a good Internet filter. Professional journals note that while many librarians do not advocate Internet filters and while the devices are not perfect, they do keep a reasonable amount of content away from young eyes. Teachers have a vested interest in this issue. They are the ones who assume liability in the classroom, and most often, try to navigate the Internet with students. While teachers are not unanimous on the filter issue, the survey data shows (1= Strongly Agree, 5= Strongly Disagree) that among those teachers who were satisfied overall with their schools’ Internet safety plans (Group 1), the mean was a 2.14 when asked if they were overall pleased with the Internet filter (Item 9). The results reveal that most teachers feel the Internet filter is generally a good thing. The mean for all 156 surveys on Item 7, which asked if teachers felt filters were effective at keeping out inappropriate content, was 2.42. This result is important regarding the effectiveness of filters because it shows that most teachers agree with filters’ ability to keep out harmful content.
Filters appear to be an important component of a plan to keep students safe on the Internet while offering quality research opportunities. Results of this survey appear to support the literature. The data shows teachers in general, though not overwhelmingly, agree that the devices keep out inappropriate content, and most are pleased overall with their filters.

The last aspect of a quality effort to protect school children from inappropriate content online while offering quality research opportunities is some form of local control of the filter. Local control would allow for a process whereby websites that are blocked could be unblocked by someone at the local (within the school district) level. The necessity for local control is derived both from professional journals (Caudle, 2000; Malcolm, 2000) and the statistical data from the teacher surveys in this study. By referring to results from the Mann-Whitney test, the comparison of Groups 1 and 2 shows Item 9 to be among those that are significant in differentiating the two groups. Item 9 asked how pleased teachers were overall with their filters. For Group 1, the mean was 2.14. The same question posed to those who are overall dissatisfied (Group 2) with their schools' efforts yields a mean of 3.86, showing an overall dissatisfaction with the Internet filter. Results of survey items 8 and 13 reveal why. When asked if the Internet filter blocks legitimate content (Item 8), Group 2 responded with its highest mean on the survey of 1.90. This means that they agreed with this more strongly than any other item on the survey. As a group, those who are dissatisfied felt that the Internet filter blocks too much content that is not harmful to children and could be used for educational purposes. This fact helps to make a case
for local control. Item 13 bolsters the case. It asks how strongly teachers feel about measures being taken to allow for more broad Internet searches with fewer filtering restrictions. The mean for Group 2 on Item 13 was 2.10, the second most emphatic message on the survey delivered by Group 2. Those who are dissatisfied with the Internet filter feel it blocks too much beneficial content, and feel the screening process should be adjustable to allow more beneficial content in. While no Internet use policy is perfect or agreeable to everyone, one assumption that can be made based on the strength of Group 2’s responses to Items 8, 9, and 13, is that if control of the Internet filters were closer to teachers, more of them would be satisfied overall with their schools efforts to protect students from inappropriate content on the Internet while offering quality research opportunities.

Limitations of this Study

This study, though providing some conclusions as to teacher perceptions of the best way to protect kids from inappropriate content on the Internet, has some limitations. While the limitations do not negate the results of the study, they do offer a more broad perspective of the study. The limitations can be broken down into three categories: the geography of the study, the mentality of the participants, and language (as it pertains to the instrument and the participants).

A few of the limitations of this study deal with the geography of the study. It was conducted in a predominantly, politically and religiously conservative area of the country. This could lead to more conservative responses than if the study were conducted in a more politically liberal or more urban area of the United States. In
addition, more conservative school districts are more likely to implement more stringent measures to protect kids from offensive content online. Though the conservative nature of the communities may play a role in the policies and responses, teachers nationwide tend to describe themselves as more liberal than conservative. This may or may not affect responses on the survey, but it is a possible limitation.

The motivation and/or interest of the participants may be a limitation of this survey. Of the 400 surveys sent out, only 156 were returned. While some of the unreturned surveys may have been lost or misplaced by the participants or the participating schools, many may not have been returned because the teachers were not motivated to do so. The teachers may have been too busy, or did not use the Internet enough with their classes, or had so few problems with their schools’ computer networks, they had no motivation to implement change or did not believe change possible. In one case, an entire elementary building of teachers neglected to return the survey. The secretary indicated that the building is closing at the end of this school year. The attitude of the teachers at this building may have deemed the study unimportant versus finding a job, or the teachers may have perceived the survey an effort to benefit that individual district and not wished to help.

Thus, those teachers who were motivated to return the survey may have held strong views on their school district’s Internet filter exists and may affect the results of the study. Upon delivery of the surveys, one teacher grabbed hers out of her mailbox and exclaimed how mad she was that the Internet filter blocked her ability to receive e-mail from a school musical band organization. Sometimes filters block
symbols used in music composition. For example, the tilde (~) is often blocked because many personal homepages on the Web include the tilde in their addresses. The music teacher enthusiastically began filling out the survey immediately; she was very motivated. Surveys are similar to elections in that those who are more motivated are more likely to participate. Most often those who are more angry about an issue than others will respond more readily; however, whether or not “angry respondents” will greatly dilute the effect of those who responded out a duty or concern for education is very difficult to measure.

Another limitation might be found in the attitude of the respondents, which may have been influenced by the “teachers’ lounge effect.” This means that sometimes teachers with no opinion or uncertainty about their opinion can be influenced by others who have strong opinions and are very vocal in expressing them. The method of the survey is partially to blame for this. The surveys may have been discovered in the teachers’ mailboxes by groups of teachers, and the possibility exists that groups filled them out together. In this case, the opinions of group members may have been influenced by others in the “teachers’ lounge.” While the occurrence of the “teachers’ lounge effect” cannot be confirmed, the possibility was noted after a spot check of several surveys in succession contained the exact same responses. The number of responses affected are most likely very few; yet, there did seem to be some surveys that were sequential and contained the exact same answers.

Interpretation of language could also represent a limitation of this study. Each participant might interpret the words “inappropriate content” differently. The survey
did not specifically indicate what “inappropriate content” meant, so it was up to individual interpretation. Language differences might also be to blame for the fact that some surveys from the same buildings were returned with different answers to question #2, which asked what methods the school employed to protect kids from inappropriate content. For example, some checked “Acceptable Use Policy” while others from the same building did not.

Despite these limitations, the size of the sample and number of responses do allow for cautious interpretation of the best way to protect kids from inappropriate content on the Internet.

**Plans for Dissemination**

Upon being contacted regarding this study, a superintendent of a district in west Michigan agreed with the hypothesis and asked that he be contacted with the results. In addition, the results of this study will be disseminated through a professional journal of education (upon acceptance by one). The study and results will be condensed to a four page article and submitted to several journals including *Education Leadership*. 

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Reference List


Appendix A

The Survey
For the following questions, please circle only one response that best reflects your thoughts.

1) Overall, I am pleased with the system in place to protect my students from inappropriate content on the Internet.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

2) What measures does your school employ to protect kids from inappropriate content on the Internet? (Please place a check by each that apply)

- [ ] Acceptable Use Policy [please answer items 3 - 6]
- [ ] Internet Filter [please answer items 7 - 11]
- [ ] Student Account Monitoring
- [ ] Student Self-reporting
- [ ] Other (please list below)

Everyone should answer items 12 - 14 as well.

Questions #3-6 should only be answered if your school employs an Acceptable Use Policy (AUP).

Please circle one response that most accurately reflects your thoughts.

3) My school’s AUP is effective in preventing students from searching for inappropriate content online.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

4) My students take their responsibilities dictated by the AUP seriously.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

5) My school district takes violations of the AUP seriously.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
6) I am familiar with how my school’s AUP was developed and by whom.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Questions #7-11 are geared towards schools that use Internet filters. Please circle one.

7) My school’s Internet filter is effective at keeping out inappropriate content.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

8) My school’s filter blocks legitimate content that students should be allowed to view.
   (example= a search on breast cancer is blocked due to the word breast)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

9) Overall, I am pleased with my school’s Internet filter.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

10) I am familiar with the process the Internet filter uses to determine which sites to block.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

11) I am familiar with how the school’s Internet filter was chosen and by whom.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Genetski thesis study  February 19, 2004 2

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Questions #12-14 are for all respondents.

12) Additional measures for protecting students from inappropriate content on the Internet should be added.

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Agree Disagree

13) Measures allowing for more thorough Internet searches without sites being blocked should be taken.

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Agree Disagree

14) What specific changes would you like your school to make regarding Internet searches and student usage?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
Appendix B

Letter to superintendents
My name is Bob Genetski, and I am a Saugatuck resident as well as a teacher in Grandville. I am currently working on my master's thesis through Grand Valley State University in technology in education.

My thesis is an effort to figure out the most effective way of protecting kids from inappropriate content on the Internet while maximizing research potential. In researching my topic, I am surveying teachers for their opinions on how effective their Internet filters and Acceptable Use Policies are. My expectation is that (as opposed to most librarians) most teachers will feel their filters to be very effective and their AUP's to be good documents but will not really know how either was chosen or by whom.

I have attached a copy of the survey.

If you have any questions or concerns, please call me.

Sincerely,

Bob Genetski
616 254-6729
Appendix C

Letter to Principals
February 4, 2004

Mrs. XXXXX Principal
XXXXX Elementary School
Grandville, MI

Dear Mrs. __________:

I am currently enrolled in the Grand Valley State University (GVSU), Advanced Studies in Education Program, and I am writing a thesis for the completion of my Master’s in Education. My thesis is entitled “Internet Research and Appropriate Content: Keeping Kids Safe on the Internet”

For my research I would like to conduct a voluntary survey of teachers in your building regarding their perceptions of the best way to keep students safe from inappropriate content while on school computers. I will not mention any of the teachers or schools by name in my thesis, and the survey will only take about two minutes. A copy of the survey form is enclosed

If you have any questions or concerns regarding my research or granting permission, please call me at (616) 638-0987 or (616) 254-6729. If I have your permission, please return the attached form.

Sincerely,

Bob Genetski
P.O. Box 475
Saugatuck, MI 49453

Approved at Grand Valley State University by: 

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Appendix D

Letter from Human Research Review Committee
March 15, 2004

Bob Genetski
P.O. Box 475
Saugatuck, MI 49453

RE: Proposal #04-149-H

Dear Bob:

Your proposed project entitled Internet Research and Appropriate Content: Keeping Kids Safe on the Internet has been reviewed. It has been approved as exempt from the regulations by section 46.101 of the Federal Register 46(16):8336, January 26, 1981.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Paul Huizenga, Chair
Human Research Review Committee
Bob Genetski  
Language Arts Teacher  
Orion Alternative High School  
4900 Canal SW  
Grandville, MI 49418

February 22, 2004,

Dear Colleague,

I am currently performing a study for my master’s thesis at Grand Valley State. My study concerns protecting kids from inappropriate content on the Internet. If you could please fill out the attached survey, it would very much benefit my research. It is brief and should take you less than two minutes.

Participation in the study is voluntary and much appreciated. No teachers, school names or districts will be directly identified. If you have any questions regarding participation, you may contact the Chair of Grand Valley’s Human Research Review Committee, Paul Heizenga at 616-895-2472

Thank you very much for your help.

Sincerely,

Bob Genetski  
616-254-6729

P.S. Please place surveys in the large envelope with the words “GENETSKI SURVEY” on it that is in the mailroom.
Name: Robert Genetski

Major:
- [X] Ed Tech
- Elem Ed
- Elem LD
- Ed Leadership
- G/T Ed
- Sec LD
- Read/Lang Arts
- Sec/Adult
- Early Child
- SpEd PP

Title: Internet Research and Appropriate Content: Keeping Kids Safe on the Internet

Paper Type: [X] Thesis

SEM/YR Completed: Winter 2004

Using the ERIC thesaurus, choose as many descriptors (5 - 7 minimum) to describe the contents of your paper.

1. Internet filters
2. Acceptable Use Policy
3. Local control schools
4. School safety
5. Technology plan
6. Online safety
7. Teacher's technology survey
8. Inappropriate content online
9. AUP

Abstract: Two to three sentences that describe the contents of your paper.

This thesis demonstrates how children are at risk of finding inappropriate content while using the Internet and how to limit it from occurring. It contains a survey of what teachers in the classroom feel is the best way to limit offensive online material from reaching kids.