

The following document is from:

Safe and Responsible Use of the Internet: A Guide for Educators

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Part I. Comprehensive Approach

2. Educational Purpose and Use

Enhancing Student Learning

The foundation for the development of a comprehensive plan to address the safe and responsible use of the Internet is recognition of the reason for which Internet access is being provided in schools. When a district establishes Internet service, the purpose is not merely to provide students and employees with general purpose, personal access to the Internet. The district system has a very specific purpose: *to enhance student learning and support professional development.*

On a specific purpose system, some uses or activities are considered unacceptable not because they are bad activities, but because they are not appropriate on that particular system. Students have an obligation to use the district system in a manner that supports their education, self-

improvement, and career development. District employees have an obligation to use the district system in a manner specified by their employer and to not abuse the use of public resources.

There are several important reasons to be concerned about how students and staff approach the use of the Internet in school.

Tending a Rose

Two things cannot be on one place. Where you tend a rose, ... a thistle cannot grow.¹

This passage from the children's book *The Secret Garden* captures an essential reason for the importance on focusing on the educational purpose of the use of the district's Internet system. If the district's technology resources are being used by students who are engaged in exciting, enriching educational activities, there is limited opportunity for students to be engaged in inappropriate activities.

But if the primary use of the district's technology resources is for "Internet Recess," activities that are primarily for popular culture research or entertainment purposes, not only is the district wasting valuable resources, the district has established an environment where inappropriate activity and misuse is much more likely to occur.

Anytime that a school is having problems with "thistles," the first and most important question that must be asked is, "How is the school tending its roses?"

Prevention of the Displacement of Learning

Educators have precious little time to assist all students in achieving challenging academic standards. The primary use of the Internet should be directly related to achieving learning objectives.

Appropriate Use of Taxpayer Resources

Taxpayers are supporting the costs of technology in schools because of the promise that technology will assist students in achieving challenging academic standards. Many of the recent articles and reports criticizing increased investments in technology point to the fact that in many schools, technology resources are not being used for their greatest educational purpose.

Preparation for Workplace Use

The purpose of education is to prepare students for success in life and work in the 21st Century. When students enter the work force, they will likely be using their employer's electronic network that will also be a limited purpose network -- with greater limitations than an education system. Their use on such systems will also be heavily monitored.

An important work skill for students will be the ability to use self-restraint to use a system in accord with its purposes. Companies should not have to rely on Technology Protection Measures to ensure that their employees abide by use restrictions. Schools have a responsibility to help educate young people how to control their usage when they are using a limited purpose system.

¹ Burnett, F. H., (1911) *The Secret Garden*. Harper Collins: New York.

Prevention of Problems of Internet Addiction

There are growing concerns with online addiction -- people who spend hours and hours of time in essentially worthless online activities. When schools force their students to think about their online activities in the context of the value of that activity to their education and self-improvement, schools are assisting students in gaining critically-important self-monitoring skills that will likely assist in preventing addiction.

Personal Account Option

For all of these reasons, it is highly appropriate for districts exert control over the use of the district system and to establish that the system is for a limited educational purpose. If students or employees want greater freedom, they can obtain such freedom by acquiring their own personal account through a private provider.

Defining an Educational Purpose

Access to Web

The district or schools must describe what is considered to be "an educational purpose" and outline what activities are considered acceptable and unacceptable on this specific purpose system.

Class- and Instruction-Related

Activities that are clearly acceptable are class- or instruction-related activities, continuing education, and career development activities for students and professional development and communication activities for employees.

Commercial Use

Commercial uses should generally be considered unacceptable. This would include the purchasing or offering for sale personal products or services by students.

Lobbying

Most states place a restriction on the use of public resources for lobbying. Therefore, lobbying as defined by state statute would be an unacceptable use. But this limitation should not restrict students from using the system to communicate their opinions to elected representatives. In many states, however, the use of a district system by staff to communicate to elected officials may present concerns.

Independent Learning Explorations

Independent learning explorations may range from serious research to "Internet recess" kinds of activities. One approach a district could take would be to restrict student use to specific class- or instruction-related activities. But this would be equivalent to establishing a school library and then telling students that they can only use the library for class- or instruction-related activities. This approach defeats the purpose of seeking to assist students in learning to use the Internet for their own personal enrichment and learning. It is recommended that high quality, non-entertainment-related, personal research be included in the definition of educational purpose.

"Internet Recess"

What about "Internet recess" kinds of activities. It should be recognized that the vast majority of school libraries contain material related to popular culture, such as sports magazines and books about rock stars or movies, or entertainment materials, such as joke books or books about hobbies. The Internet also contains a vast amount of popular culture materials that have some, but limited, educational value. Innovative teachers may actually be able to make great educational use of such materials. Access to such non-educational or entertainment materials may be considered to be outside of "educational purpose" definition, but schools should allow the use of such materials for teacher-directed instructional purposes. Also many schools establish periods of "open access" where access to such materials is considered to be acceptable.

Priorities of Usage

If a districts or school does allow students to access the Internet for either entertainment purposes or personal research activities, it would be advisable to establish priorities of usage for computers that are available for multiple uses, such as those in the library or an open use computer lab. Students who require access for class- or instruction-related activities should have priority over other uses. A mechanism could be established so that students who are not using the computer for class-related activities could be "bumped" by any student requiring access for a class- or instruction-related purpose.

Information Gathering

As noted in "Transition to a Comprehensive Approach," schools should collect data on the manner in which the technology is being used in the multiple use areas. If schools are finding that an excess amount of the use is for "Internet Recess", this is a clear indication that insufficient attention is being paid professional development and other activities necessary to support the effective use of the Internet for educational purposes activities.

Electronic Communication

Even sticker questions emerge related to personal electronic communication. Can the principal send an e-mail to her husband asking him to pick up some milk for dinner? Can the science teacher subscribe to a gardening group discussion? Can a student communicate with a former classmate who recently moved? Can students communicate with each other for personal reasons?

Schools may use different approaches to address issues of electronic communication. One approach is to accept that a small amount of personal communication is to be expected but indicate to all users that overall electronic communication traffic should not be excessive. Any user who engages in excessive traffic that is not to be expected in light of their activities or position may be subject to review of their communication activities. Users should not be allowed to participate in online group discussions, such as mailing lists, unless there is a direct professional development or curriculum-related purpose.

All district users should be reminded that their electronic communications reflect on the district they should guide their activities accordingly. One way to emphasize this is to require district employees to establish an e-mail signature that identifies their position with the district and to require students have a signature that includes the name of the district.

Strategies to Promote Educational Use

Professional Development

The most essential step necessary to ensure that the district's Internet system is being used effectively to support enriching instructional activities is professional development of the teachers!

When teachers are prepared to lead students on exciting learning adventures on the Internet, virtually all problems in the use of the Internet disappear. Students become engaged and excited about what they are discovering. The demand for the available computers for completing the assignments will be so high, that "Internet Recess" use will simply not be acceptable. If students do not police themselves, their peers -- who are waiting to get access to complete an assignment - - will.

Unfortunately, every assessment of the degree to which schools are reinforcing quality educational use of the Internet and teachers feel prepared to integrate the use of technology into instruction demonstrates that far too many teachers are not yet adequately prepared to use technology and the Internet in an effective educational manner.

Two recent reports include the National School Board Association report *Are We There Yet?*² and the Pew Internet and American Life report *The Digital Disconnect: The widening gap between Internet-savvy students and their schools*³.

The NSBA survey found that lack of teacher preparation was a significant concern and made the following recommendations:

- Treat technology as an integral tool for instruction and administration — not as an add-on. Technology is not a frill, it's essential to effective instruction and school vitality.
- Use the Internet for core educational priorities that matter most to student achievement. School district leaders report strong interest in online opportunities that match federal, state and local pressures, including standards, assessments and test preparation. School decision-makers should be informed by these priorities as they make choices. At the same time, schools should understand that they can harness the power of the Internet to create and support diverse learning communities.
- Invest significantly in professional development for school leaders and teachers. A broad theme emerging from survey results is that teachers need help incorporating the Internet into regular classroom instruction. For new and veteran teachers alike, the Internet is a new frontier — and one that many have little time or training to explore. Teachers need technology training to be able to use the Internet as an effective,

² Grunwald Associates (2002) *Are We There Yet?* NSBA Foundation. URL: <http://www.nsb.org/thereyet/index.htm>

³ Levin, D. & Arafah, S. *The Digital Disconnect: The widening gap between Internet-savvy students and their schools*. Pew Internet and American Life. Report released August 14, 2002. The full report is available online at: URL: <http://www.pewinternet.org/reports/toc.asp?Report=67>.

interactive tool for teaching, learning communicating. Teachers also need to be prepared to guide and assess students in different ways.

The need for a focus on professional development was echoed by the Internet savvy teens were surveyed for the *Pew Report*, which noted:

While students relate examples of both engaging and poor instructional uses of the Internet assigned by their teachers, students say that the not-so-engaging uses are the more typical of their assignments. Students repeatedly told us that the quality of their Internet-based assignments was poor and uninspiring. They want to be assigned more—and more engaging—Internet activities that are relevant to their lives. Indeed, many students assert that this would significantly improve their attitude toward school and learning⁴.

The Summary of Findings of the *Pew Report* are set forth in Part V. All readers are encouraged to read the full report, which is available online.

There are many excellent resources for information related to professional development. The International Society for Technology in Education has developed recommended standards for professional development for teachers and administrators⁵, the National Educational technology Standards for Teachers (NET*T) and the Technology Standards for School Administrators (TSSA, also now called the National Educational Technology Standards for Administrators or NET*A). These standards provide an excellent overview of the necessary knowledge and skills for all teachers and administrators.

Curriculum Development

Teachers who are early adopters of technology tend to take great delight in the independent development of innovative lesson plans using the Internet. Unfortunately, these early adopters tend to also be the most actively involved in district or school technology coordination and unfortunately sometimes do not recognize that the vast majority of teachers do not have the time, skills, or inclination to develop their own Internet-based learning activities and curriculum. Second stage adopters also tend to have a basic discomfort because of the probably accurate perception that their students are much more comfortable using the Internet than they are. Second stage adopters do not like to take risks.

To move beyond early stage adoption of the use of the Internet for educational activities requires a shift from approaches that support intuitive early adopters, who like to explore and take risks, to approaches that support more pragmatic second stage teachers, who tend to want to manage any risks that might be present when they and their students step onto the Internet. Second stage adopters can be very effective and successful in their use of the Internet if they have access to lesson plans that have already been developed and tested and to the support of other teachers.

The best way to engage second stage technology adopters is to:

⁴ Levin, supra. Summary of Findings.

⁵ URL: <http://cnets.iste.org>.

- Provide easy access to risk-free, easy to implement Internet-related lesson plans and activities that are directly related to district curriculum objectives. This can be accomplished through a district, state, or regional web site or through links from the district site to such resources.
- Establish subject and grade oriented mailing lists where teachers can be encouraged to discuss curriculum issues or share lesson plans and where the second stage adopters can rapidly receive support.
- Enlist the aid of first stage adopters to serve as mentors and provide pre-developed Internet curriculum.

Educational Web Site/Portal

The initial access point for teachers and students should be a district instructional web page that immediately directs students to pre-reviewed, high-quality educational resources.

The U.S. federal government, state departments of education, school districts, public libraries, and companies have been undertaking the responsibility of identifying and reviewing web sites for use in educational settings. Unfortunately, many of these activities are being duplicated, rather than coordinated. Districts can take advantage of many of these existing web development efforts. If the district is providing access to a comprehensive educationally oriented web site that directs students to appropriate resources, there is a much reduced probability that students will be inclined to wander off to other places on the Internet.

Educational Purpose and Reliance on Filtering

The decision to install filtering software may lead to complacency with respect to maintaining a strong focus on educational uses of technology. This may result in the use of taxpayer-supported technology resources primarily for "Internet recess."

In many schools, filtering has become the substitute for professional development and appropriate supervision that are necessary to ensure that tax-payer resources are being used for effective educational purposes. A study published by N2H2, a filtering software company, demonstrates this concern. N2H2 analyzed data relating to student use through their system⁶. The report presents disturbing implications related to the degree to which the Internet is being used in schools for actual instructional related purposes.

N2H2 studied the top 300 sites visited by students by number of page views. According to N2H2, these 300 sites accounted for "roughly half" of the total page views. N2H2 considered their data to present a "representative picture of use." N2H2 indicated that an analysis of data by average per-page viewing time presented the best approach to analyzing how students were using the Internet. N2H2 provided the data in terms of categories and average viewing time (columns #1 and #2). Additional calculations of percentage of viewing time (column #3) were added by the author of this document.

⁶ This report is no longer on the N2H2 web site. Please contact for author for more information.

1. Instructional, Reference & Computing	60 seconds	16.7%
2. News & Sports	58 seconds	16.2%
3. Business & Finance	52 seconds	14.5%
4. Commerce & E-Services	51 seconds	14.2%
5. Music, Games & Fun	48 seconds	13.4%
6. Portals & Search	46 seconds	12.8%
7. Communities	44 seconds	12.3%

Here are N2H2's definitions of the categories, followed by analysis and comment:

Instructional, Reference, & Computing. Sites that could be use for specific instructional purposes by teachers or students, general research and reference resources, and computer network resources.

One may ask why computer network resource sites were included in this category, since such sites are clearly not instructional purpose sites. If computing sites, which tend to be very popular, were eliminated from this category, this would reduce the percentage of time spent on instructional sites below the already abysmally low 16.7 %.

News & Sports. Online versions of national news, sports magazines, local news.

Some of this access may be directly class-related, other access would be considered appropriate within an educational purpose as appropriate independent study.

Business & Finance. Financial news sites and online brokerage firms.

Some instructional activities may involve access to business news and finance sites. It is hard to interpret usage in this category. One might query whether N2H2 was also collecting staff usage data.

Commerce & E-Services. Commercial sites offering products or online services.

Unless used for a specific educational purpose under the guidance of a teacher, these are "Internet Recess" sites. It can be assumed that most of this access was *not* for instructional related purposes.

Portals & Search. Sites that attempt to branch out and connect users with content.

The amount of time that such portals and search sites were used for instructional related purposes is probably roughly equivalent to the overall use levels.

Music, Games, & Fun. Sites geared towards entertainment and leisure.

Unless used for a specific educational purpose under the guidance of a teacher, these are "Internet Recess" sites. It can be assumed that most of this access was *not* for instructional related purposes.

Communities. Sites providing content targeted to specific demographic groups and typically containing a large amount of user generated content such as chat and message boards.

It is also likely that much of this activity was *not* for instructional related purposes.

N2H2 was only able to classify the data by its descriptive criteria. N2H2 had no data on how such sites were actually being used. It is true that innovative teachers can make effective use of entertainment or commerce sites for instructional activities, but based on anecdotal reports of how the Internet is being used in many schools that have not places a strong focus on professional development, it is not likely that much of all of the reported use in the non-educational categories was for teacher-directed, educational activities.

What we can reasonably conclude, based on this limited data, is less than 16.7% of student use was on sites that were clearly instructional related. It is also highly probably that a good portion of the 54.4 % of student use in the Business and Finance, Commerce and E-services, Music, Fun & Games, and Communities categories was not for instructional related purposes, rather were "Internet Recess" activities.

Unfortunately, as there are no research funds available to investigate these issues further, this assessment and analysis cannot be considered definitive. It is unknown what the usage patterns are in schools without filtering. But at the very least, it is not accurate to conclude that the use of filtering software is reinforcing effective *educational use* of the Internet.