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

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Part II. Safe and Responsible Internet Use Plan

5. Unauthorized Access and Other Unlawful or Inappropriate Activities

CIPA Requirements

The CIPA Internet Safety Plan requirement to address unlawful activities is:

- (I) IN GENERAL.-- In carrying out its responsibilities under subsection (h), each school ... shall--
 - (A) adopt and implement an Internet safety policy that addresses--
...

- (iii) unauthorized access, including so-called hacking, and other unlawful activities by minors online. [¹

Computer Crime

Unfortunately, young people are using the Internet to engage in a wide range of unlawful activities. Some young people do not know or do not think that some of these activities are or should be considered unlawful. The best information source for information on the range of activities that are considered on computer crime is the U.S. Department of Justice's (US DOJ) web site on computer crime.²

Computer as the Target of an Offense

When the computer is the target of the offense, the computer's confidentiality, integrity, or availability is attacked. Services or information are being stolen or victim's computers themselves are being damaged. The denial of service attacks that were experienced by numerous Internet sites and the proliferation of the "I Love You" virus and its variants are but a few examples of this type of computer crime. Penetrating the computer's security system to obtain access to the confidential data stored on the system is another variant of this type of crime.

These activities are unlawful under both federal and state statutes. Unfortunately, many technically proficient teenagers are among the participants in such activities. Teenagers who become part of "hacker tribes" can rationalize that they are not engaging in activity that is wrong. In fact, they can unfortunately point to many former "hackers" who are leaders in the industry today.

Districts must address the issue of criminal use of the district's Internet system in the Internet Use Policy. It is also advisable to include a study of computer crime issues in computer classes. The US DOJ site provides a weekly update of computer crime events, including convictions. In most communities, it would also be possible to bring in a guest speaker from the local law enforcement community to provide some "real world" information on the consequences of engaging in such behavior.

Engaging technically proficient high school students in activities where they can use their advanced skills in socially beneficial ways, such as assisting with system administration, is an effective approach to help these students avoid becoming entangled with "hacker tribes." Many states have initiated student technology programs, often with industry assistance. Students coming out of these programs are highly welcomed in the computer science and information technology programs in institutions of higher education and in industry.

Computer as a Tool for Committing Criminal Behavior

This category includes those crimes that also occur in the "real world" but are now being seen with increasing frequency on the Internet. These crimes include transmission of obscene materials or child pornography, fraud, intellectual property violations, and the sale of illegal substances and goods, including drugs, online. Various illegal communication activities may also

¹ 47 U.S.C. 254 (I)(1)(A)(iii).

² URL: <http://www.cybercrime.gov>

occur, including harassment, threatening the life or safety of another, stalking, and threatening the life of the President (just about every district has had to deal with this activity).

Some of these kinds of activities may reach the level of criminal conduct. Other activities, such as harassment, may be considered inappropriate in school but may not reach the level of severity of criminal conduct. These issues should also be addressed in the policy, however, it is probable that the district already has policies related to criminal activities. The inclusion of this material in the Internet Use Policy reinforces the understanding that crimes committed on the Internet are still crimes.

Additional Inappropriate Activities

In addition to unlawful activities, the District Internet Use Policy should address other inappropriate activities. These include inappropriate language, plagiarism, and copyright infringement.

Inappropriate Language

Restrictions against inappropriate language should apply to all speech communicated through the district Internet system, including but not limited to public messages, private messages, and material posted on web pages. Discussion regarding the free speech implications of such restrictions is included in the "Student Speech" chapter. Restrictions can include the following:

- Users will not use obscene, profane, lewd, vulgar, rude, inflammatory, threatening, or disrespectful language.
- Users will not post information that, if acted upon, could cause damage or a danger of disruption.
- Users will not engage in personal attacks, including prejudicial or discriminatory attacks.
- Users will not harass another person. Harassment is persistently acting in a manner that distresses or annoys another person. If a user is told by a person to stop sending them messages, they must stop.
- Users will not knowingly or recklessly post false or defamatory information about a person or organization.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism has always been considered unacceptable in school but computers and the Internet are making it easier for students to "cut and paste" ideas and writings of other people into their own document. It is also possible to find research papers for sale or provided at no charge on web sites. Educators should be concerned about two kinds of plagiarism -- intentional and inadvertent. Teachers can most effectively handle issues of plagiarism by the manner in which they structure learning activities.

There are two ways that students use the Internet as a tool to intentionally plagiarize. The first is to find a paper on a site that sells or provides research papers specifically for students to copy

and submit as their own. The second is to find a paper that some other student has written and posted on their personal student web site.

Teachers should be aware of this kind of plagiarism, discuss the issue with students, and look closely at the papers they receive for evidence of intentional plagiarism. If a teacher has concerns about the source of a paper, conducting a search on a particularly distinctive phrase contained in the document will frequently lead to the original paper. A search on the most popular search engine using the keywords describing the subject matter will often reveal such papers within the first several pages of search results. There are also new services available that will conduct such analysis. On those occasions when plagiarized papers are discovered through the use of such search techniques present excellent "teachable moments" to raise the awareness of all of the students in the school about how teachers can easily identify such plagiarism.

Inadvertent plagiarism is more accidental. Students sometimes inadvertently plagiarize because they do not understand how to incorporate the ideas of others into their paper and provide appropriate citation. They may also lose track of their sources as they are conducting their research, especially as they "surf" the web. They may think that "copying and pasting" what others have said is perfectly acceptable practice.

If teachers assign students to write papers that involve merely the recitation of facts, they are laying the groundwork for a greater amount of either intentional or inadvertent plagiarism. Students can easily copy major portions of material from other authors or find whole papers on a particular subject. It is not as easy to plagiarize when assignments call for creativity and integration of ideas.

Ensuring that students have the skills to paraphrase and summarize the ideas of others into their own words, engage in effective note-taking, keep a bibliographic record, and understand proper citation formats will reduce inadvertent plagiarism. Requiring students to turn in their work-in-progress on the term paper during the term -- research notes, outline, first draft, etc. -- will also help to prevent intentional plagiarism as most of these materials are not available online.

Teachers should fully describe to the students how they will evaluate papers to determine evidence of intentional or inadvertent plagiarism, especially if they are using a commercial service for such analysis. The purpose for the use of such analysis methods should be to prevent the occurrence of plagiarism through notice. Playing the "gotcha" game after-the-fact is not a respectful educational strategy.

Copyright Infringement

Copyright infringement would also be considered an unauthorized use. Chapter III-9 addresses basic information and guidelines related to copyright.