



Should We Establish National Web Filtering Guidelines?

Yes

One of the things that shocks me about how some people focus the problem of whether there should be Web filtering guidelines is how information is often conceived as something that is not really that dangerous. We often hear or read opinions advocating for better teaching and parenting, and arguments on how we should teach minors to properly choose what to view. Although these arguments may have some strong points, they are underestimating the type of information available today on the Internet, as well as how dangerous it can be. We teach our kids not to use guns, but we also expect weapons to be



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unavailable. We should, in the same way, promote parenting and teaching regarding Internet use, but also expect some parts of the Internet will be unavailable.

The Internet has had a continuous growth since its early days, and it has become home for all kinds of information. There are hundreds of thousands of excellent on-

No

The knowledge of the world is only to be acquired in the world, and not in a closet.

—Lord Chesterfield

The primary purpose for filtering is generally agreed to be to keep students from accessing inappropriate material. While I agree that protecting our children is critical, I do not believe we are serving them well by simply trying to cut off access to this material. Instead we need to be teaching them the 21st-century skills they need to safely and ethically access information throughout their lives.

We all agree that the Internet can be a wild and uncontrolled environment where people constantly display behavior that they generally would not want their mothers to know about. However, as detailed in many articles in *L&L*, the Internet is an excellent source of primary resources and a way for students to form meaningful social



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line resources that can be used for all kinds of research. At the same time, the Internet is filled with hate pages, Web sites promoting anorexia, pages used by illegal organizations to collect funds by passing themselves off as charitable organizations, and more. All of these Web sites are there, ready to be found by just making a few clicks, and many of them are being actively visited by minors. Of course it should be a priority for both parents and teachers to teach Internet safety to kids, and it is fairly obvious that being able to determine what to look at should be a skill we should seek to develop in our kids. But if we take into account the potential for harm that this type of information has, we should definitely start thinking about blocking it.

Just how hurtful or dangerous can this information be? According to journalist Anastasia Goodstein, the

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last attempt by experts to count pro-anorexia sites was done five years ago, and at that point they counted 500. It is fairly obvious we should expect that number to have increased by now. Besides that, Goodstein says that a study conducted by Stanford University and the Lucile Packard Children's Hospital found that 40% of eating-disorder patients visit these types of sites, and that these sites make it harder for them to recover. Should something that has been proven to be affecting minors in a negative way be so freely available for all kinds of viewers?

It is clear that blocking or filtering sites based on political, religious, or racial grounds should definitely not be considered. But if a particular piece

of information has been proven to be detrimental to the health of minors, or can, by any means, be considered to place kids' integrity at risk, it should be treated at least in the same way as alcohol and pornography. When someone is going to buy alcohol, we expect the clerk to ask the person for an ID, and to check that ID. If the person fails to produce one, we expect alcohol to be "filtered," made unavailable to the customer. Why is it then, that we allow all sorts of content to be freely available to all viewers?

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connections with friends and experts around the world.

Therefore, we do not need guidelines for filtering student access to materials. Instead, we need a nationwide educational policy that calls for the preparation of teaching professionals who understand the intricacies and responsibilities of being a digital citizen and their roles in leading our students to become good digital citizens. We must also call for curricular reform that teaches students how to "advocate and practice safe, legal, and responsible use of information and technology," a call that is being made through the NETS•S.

To prepare our students to thrive in a digital world, we must teach them how to use information in a safe way. The basic foundation of the NETS•S and NETS•T provide a framework for these abilities. We must teach students what to do when they find material that is questionable or objectionable.

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We know that we impact only a small part of our students' online lives and, given the constantly expanding Internet, it makes much more sense to teach them how to intelligently use these resources themselves than to try and block students from access.

However, we must be practical in implementing such a change. We must acknowledge that teachers often do not have an understanding of the potential for danger and how to safely navigate it. Therefore, we must create initial teacher preparation and professional development that provides instruction in how to model safe use of the Internet. We must also work with parents to help them locate resources to expand these lessons to the home. Finally, we need to develop a

scaffolded approach that teaches students how to be good digital citizens; starting with protected environments in the early grades and then develop a phased approach in which students increasingly demonstrate that they understand how to keep themselves safe in this rich, but potentially dangerous environment. By providing our students with the necessary 21st-century skills to be good digital citizens, we give students the skills to protect themselves far beyond the closeted walls of our schools.

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