



## Reframing the Debate

### VOICES CARRY

By Hilary Goldmann

*Hilary Goldmann, ISTE's director of government affairs, has 20 years of experience in public policy and advocacy, and serves as a volunteer columnist for L&L.*

**D**on Knezek, ISTE's CEO, recently spoke at a congressional briefing on Internet safety. The purpose of this briefing was to inform Senate staff about empowering parents and leveraging educational opportunities to keep kids safe online, and to highlight legislation recently introduced by Senators Daniel Inouye (D-HI) and Ted Stevens (R-AK), S. 1965, "The Protecting Children in the 21st Century Act." From my perspective, however, the focus of this briefing indicated the success ISTE and our community is having on changing the terms of the Internet safety debate from one of locking up the Web to one of education.

It was only last summer that the Deleting Online Predators Act (DOPA) zoomed to passage in the U.S. House of Representatives. The bill was introduced in May 2006, and in almost unheard of speed passed the House in August 2006. DOPA would require schools that participate in the E-Rate program to bar access by minors to commercial social networking Web sites or chat rooms unless used for an educational purpose with adult supervision. Voting against DOPA labeled a policymaker as soft on child Internet safety, and with the upcoming congressional election at the time policymakers could not afford to vote against DOPA. Fortunately, ISTE and others opposing DOPA were able to work with key U.S. senators, and this legislation never passed the Senate and did not become law.

As the new Congress convened in January 2007, the issue of Internet safety was still a priority, but this time the messages from the education, library, and industry community opposed

to DOPA had effectively guided policymakers' approach to this important policy issue. Members of Congress are now focusing legislative initiatives on educating students on how to stay safe online and to be responsible digital citizens rather than handcuffing access to social network sites at schools and libraries. It is evident that policymakers heard our concerns and tailored their legislative initiatives to limit as much as possible the federal intrusion and monitoring and reporting burdens on schools and libraries to comply with these pieces of legislation.

Under the Protecting Children in the 21st Century Act, school E-Rate recipients will be required to certify, as part of their Internet safety policies, that they are "educating minors about appropriate online behavior, including interacting with other individuals on social networking Web sites and in chat rooms as well as cyberbullying awareness and response.

Responding to a reporter's question about S. 1965, Knezek stated, "We now see a bill that asks schools to take their proper role in teaching safe and responsible use of the Internet, rather than trying to block emerging communication and social networking systems with great potential for positively engaging students and improving learning. One of a school's primary functions is to ensure safety and build responsible citizens, and trying to block every threatening activity that goes on in society is not a formula for effective education."

This legislation has not been passed by the Congress, but its mere introduction indicates our voices were heard. This is a first step in reframing the debate on how to keep kids safe online. ■