
Volume 3
Number 4
*Sex in the Library: Internet Access Issues in
Oregon (Winter 1998)*

July 2014

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Recommended Citation

Macy, R. (2014). Internet access issues in Oregon's public schools. *OLA Quarterly*, 3(4), 13+. <http://dx.doi.org/10.7710/1093-7374.1464>

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OLA Quarterly is an official publication of the Oregon Library Association | ISSN 1093-7374

Internet Access Issues in Oregon's Public Schools

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The Internet has greatly increased information sources for school libraries as it has for our library partners in public, academic and special libraries. Along with this tremendous resource has come the dilemma of access, censorship, and our role in providing high quality resources.

As Carol Truett said in *School Library Media Quarterly*, "Those of us in the school library media center know today's public school faces an awkward dilemma when we serve *in loco parentis* to young people. We have a responsibility to set high moral standards and ethical values for our students."

To gather information about Internet access policies in school districts statewide, I asked school librarians serving K-12 at the Oregon Educational Media Association conference about their use of filter programs, acceptable use agreements signed by students and parents and whether students use the Internet independently or with adult supervision. I received information from districts across the state, from LaGrande and Pleasant Hill, to Portland and Medford.

I received input from 18 public schools and one private school. Slightly more than 10% of the districts polled (2 of 18) use filtering programs. In the Roseburg district, the blocking software was mandated by the school board. They previewed many titles and chose BESS. Roseburg High School's Mary McClintock commented, "The big issue for me at the high school is that older students are being blocked from sites that aren't appropriate for elementary. There is no adaptation for levels."

Newberg School District Instructional Technology Trainer Patty Sorensen told me, "We tried a filter for a short time and found it not effective. We believe in teaching student responsibility and treating it as a choice much like appropriate behavior."

A common procedure in school districts is to have students and parents sign an Acceptable Use Agreement. When parents and students read the Acceptable Use Policy before signing the agreement, they learn the district's expectations for student use of technology.

All of the schools responding to my informal survey have an Acceptable Use Policy. Most schools (88%) ask students and parents to sign an Acceptable Use Agreement. The other schools have the Technology Use Rules as part of their discipline/behavior policy document which goes to all students. No signature is needed, but there are consequences for breaking the rules, as there are for all school rules.

A popular subscription for districts is the Electric Library which uses the speed and access of the Internet to find preselected current, full-text information and visuals. Some districts offer this resource without signed permission forms.

In the Centennial District in East Portland, middle and high school students receive training on district policies, navigating Netscape, and evaluating sites in order to receive a permit to use the Internet.

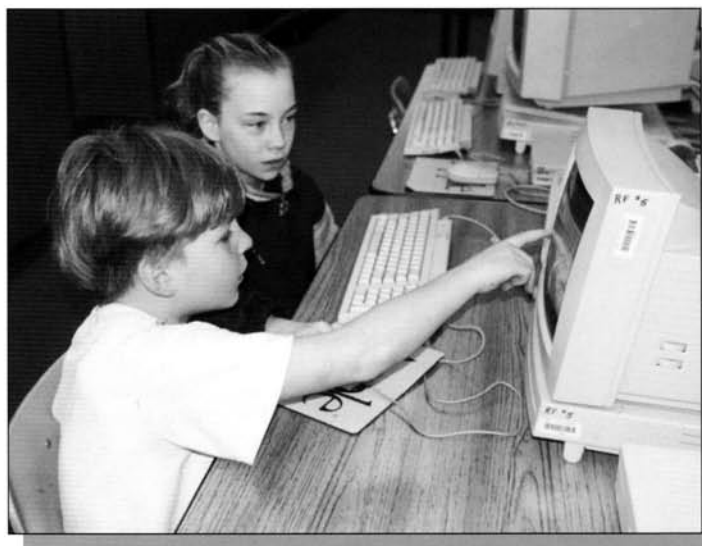
Adult supervision is required in most elementary schools, but older students access the Internet independently in most districts. In most cases, a signed Acceptable Use Agreement is on file; some schools issue a license or place a sticker on the student body card to prove the student has signed the agreement.

Unacceptable use of the Internet can result in the loss of Internet privileges or all computer access for the year, depending on the school.

Since many schools have computers and wiring in all classrooms, teachers as well as school librarians are supervising students who are using the Internet. This means that supervision ranges from one on one help from an adult to students searching completely on their own in a busy classroom or computer lab.

See Oregon Public Schools page 16

Children use the Internet at terminals such as this one at K-12 schools across the state.



Policies Update

(continued from page 7)

use of the Internet Computers and that I am responsible for any damage that may occur.

The other way age restrictions are defined is in rules that state that a child may only use the Internet in the company of a parent, as does the Arlington Heights (IL) Public Library:

"Children age 7 or younger must be supervised by an adult while using the Online Room."

Some libraries combine both policies for children of different ages, as does the Rockbridge (VA) Public Library:

Users Under 14: Children under 12 will be permitted to use an Internet computer only if

accompanied by an adult 18 years or older. Twelve- and thirteen-year-olds may use an Internet computer by themselves only if a parent or guardian has come to the library and signed a permission slip.

When the number of libraries practicing either policy is combined and duplications subtracted, the totals for policies written in 1995 are 25%. For policies written in 1997, it is a striking 39%.

What seems clear to me is that as the publicity and political battles regarding Internet pornography in public libraries has increased, public library Internet access policies have become more restrictive in response. **Q**

Jackson County

(continued from page 10)

What has been the patron and staff reaction to the filtered workstation? Almost none. Patrons seem to consider it obvious that the children's workstation would be filtered. The filter doesn't keep children from finding answers to their reference questions. One adult who was browsing music sites was blocked from accessing a rock musician's homepage, but it wasn't pertinent to her research and she didn't care.

Teenagers have been overheard saying "Let's go upstairs and use the one up there. It's more fun, it doesn't have SurfWatch." But one father, obviously unfamiliar with the Internet and leery of it, was reluctant to let his daughter use the workstation until he realized it was filtered. Then he seemed relieved and permitted her to get acquainted with this new information resource. **Q**

Oregon Public Schools

(continued from page 13)

School librarians continue to wrestle with the issues of providing access to information on the Internet and of how district policies can limit that access. It's such an exciting advancement in the areas of international connections and idea sharing.

I like Alan H. MacDonald's comment, "The nature of the telecommunications stream is such that it would take the equivalent of a national telecommunications lobotomy to fully control the flow." **Q**

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Editor's note: Rebecca Macy was recently named OEMA Media Specialist of the Year.